



# FINAL PAPER: MOSES AND ZIPPORAH DELAY OF CIRCUMSISING THEIR SON

**OT504: The Hebrew Bible  
& the Eastern  
Mediterranean World: OB**

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The biblical text I have selected for my final paper is Exodus 4, centering around verses 24-26 discussing the interaction with Moses and his wife Zipporah, concerning the delay of circumcising their son(s). The two quotes that stood out to me was “God met Moses” and “bridegroom of blood.” The comparative ANE text I have chosen is “The Papyrus Ipuwer and The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage,” in which I have found several instances that support the book of Exodus. In this paper I will present research from ancient eastern texts, scholarly research, and resources to gain clearer insights to answer three questions: Did Moses procrastinate in circumcising his son(s), because of the urgency to go to Egypt? Did Moses intentionally delay the circumcising because it reminded him of Egyptian circumcising practices, and he had put all Egyptian practices behind him? Was Moses’ delay of circumcising his son a sign of him not fully identifying with the Abrahamic covenant relationship with his people? In answering these three questions I would like to discover who had sinned /was at fault for not fulfilling the covenant circumcision ritual that angered God to the point that he wanted to kill Moses. Moses delayed the circumcision of his son because he was not ready to face the past and go forward into the role of Moses the Deliver. He had to put his own house in order first, so he procrastinated. Moses’ action put both his life and his son at risk.

In answering the question whether Moses delayed the circumcising of his son because of his procrastination, is evident. He found a lodge for his family instead of setting up a tent. Moses said to God on several occasions while God gave him His divine order, to send someone else because he did not think he was capable of fulfilling these duties. He used several defeatist characteristics such as I cannot speak well (stammered), they do not know me and will say I am

lying, and lastly “Pardon you servant Lord please send someone else.” Even when he went to ask if he could leave his father-in-law, he said he wanted to go home and check on people God had already told him were dead.

In the “The Papyrus Ipuwer and The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage.” it spoke of people not accepting their fate, even after Moses and Aaron had completed the assignment that God sent them on. In this story, God did everything He said He was going to do. ” I have separated him and his household slaves, and men will say when they hear it: "Cakes are lacking for most children; there is no food [ . . . ]. What is the taste of it like today?"<sup>1</sup> The text was different from what was mentioned in Exodus in that it tried to imply that certain actions taken were not the cause of the prophecy/warning of Moses, but because of the Egyptian people not speaking up, they blamed Pharaoh and their gods. This resource stated that the dates might not have been the same, and even the Pharaoh named in Exodus was not the Pharaoh Moses dealt with. Although the times were different, and the Pharaoh was not identified through the comparative material, several other sources verified the interaction between Moses and Pharaoh did occur.

Moses could have delayed the circumcising of his son because he had left behind all Egyptian practices. We know that the Israelites and the Egyptians had differing surgical procedures for circumcision: the Israelites amputated the foreskin whereas the Egyptians made a It was a rite of passage for adolescent male participated in to prove their vitality, Since coming to the desert Moses had let go of everything in Egypt, even his role of being the Deliver for his people. Moses was experiencing an identity crisis, because he was not fulfilling the mission for which he was called. After speaking with God, he had been reminded of who he was. For the last

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<sup>1</sup> (KAPLAN 1981), p, 72.

forty years he had followed Jethro, priest of Midian, and even married his daughter Zipporah. God was now demanding for him to take up his rightful place. Moses job as the moment was a shepherd looking after the sheep, practicing the arts of the herdsman, it was comfortable. Everyone one job in the village was important for the survival of the village.

Moses and Zipporah delayed the circumcision of their son because neither was identified with the Abrahamic circumcision covenant that was expressed within Israel's culture and religion. Zipporah was the daughter of a Priest, so she was familiar with the circumcision practice that her father performed. Moses had been raised in Pharaoh palace, while they had circumcising practice, it was not for the same purpose as being identified as one of God's people, it was a rite of passage. 'The function of Zipporah's act of circumcision, then, as the redactor understands it, is to dispell the deadly confusion, the demonic gloom and restore the previously existing religious order, reinstate once again the distinction between righteous and wicked, between human oppressor and divine savior.'<sup>2</sup> Zipporah's declaration of "bridegroom of blood," when she cast the foreskin at his feet, stated that she knew it would save her husband's life. Zipporah blame God, she blamed Moses for not performing this act, which might have caused the life of her son and Moses. Zipporah doing the act in the place of Moses, broke the contractual agreement with her father Jethro. She was angry with God, but she thanked him for the life of her husband. There are many twist and turns in the story, however, having the resources to compare the scripture, reveals these discussion has been going on centuries.

Resource from ALHATORAH.ORG allotted me a look at this story where I found documents with insight on the culture and ANE, the Hebrew bible and concordance which give a few more insight into why Moses and Zipporah did not circumcise their first-born son. "But it

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<sup>2</sup> (KAPLAN 1981), p 72.

was on the way, in the place of lodging, that the angel of the Lord met him, and sought to kill him, because Gershom his son had not been circumcised, inasmuch as Jethro his father-in-law had not permitted him to circumcise him: but Eliezer had been circumcised, by an agreement between them two.”<sup>3</sup>

Through this negligence both Moses and Zipporah eyes were open to the seriousness of the Devine assignment given to Moses by God. God demanded their complete and absolute surrender to his . God himself in the first half of Exodus 4 gave Moses the vision, and the tools he needed to accomplish it. This act of God demonstrated to Moses and Zipporah that he is also a God of Wrath. Moses by not fulfilling his role as the father to protect his son and by not performing the Abrahamic circumcision covenant placed his son and him at risk of death. God demonstrated to Moses and Zipporah that his disobediences to allow his son to come to him in worship would curse him and cause his death, in two ways he was cut off from God and his people. “But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant” (Gen 17-14) . Moses had made an agreement that was against the will of God and it had to be corrected.

In the ANE text that I have researched it gives the role of the Father and Mother, with the father being the Head of Household. “The boy should have been circumcised on the eighth day by Jethro, to whose household the child belonged according to the marriage and ascendancy pattern of Abraham’s Horite Hebrew people.”<sup>4</sup> So when Zipporah circumcised the first born son, and placed the blood upon the son/husband’s leg, it is not clear which, it is the subject of much debate. Some say she was angry with Moses, others say she was angry with God, but the circumcision ritual pleased the angel which God had sent to kill Moses and his son. This is also

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<sup>3</sup> (Yerushalmi n.d.)

<sup>4</sup> (Linsley 2017), p 2.

a debate, who the angel came to kill. We know it was not the youngest son, because he was circumcised according to the Abrahamic circumcision covenant.

Moses was experiencing an identity crisis. This was evident when God told Moses to go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let go us his first born. “But Moses asked God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” He still did not identify with his Israeli brethren. God had to remind who he was, that he was chosen to go speak on behalf of his people. He lived among the Medians, which had split and did not all follow Abrahamic covenant. This is why he entered into this disastrous contract to let one of his son from their religion and the other to for God. His house was divided and had to be corrected. Instead of Moses asking his father in law to circumcise his son, he avoided it. This is why he went to the Lodge so he could perform the Abrahamic ritual on the way to Egypt, this angry God because this would delay him even more on his mission. God was going to kill his first-born son, because he would not let him come to worship him. Moses as being the Deliver, the lawgiver had to be first part-taker of God commandment. “Then tell Pharaoh that this is what the LORD says: ‘Israel is My firstborn son, and I told you to let My son go so that he may worship Me. But since you have refused to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son!’” (Exodus 4:22-23). God was giving Moses one more chance to do the right thing. Instead of Moses circumcising his son, he went and ask Jethro permission to bring his family with him. The right thing to do would be to tell Jethro what God had said to him about delivering his people. Instead he told Jethro that he was going to check on some people, God had already told him was dead. The circumcising ritual would have put him back into the grace of God. God had sent the angel to kill him and his son because he would not enter the child into a conversant relationship with him. The final action was Moses taking his time to find lodging before circumcising

his son. This would cause a further delay to his mission to demand that God children would be set free. In this action God was showing him, that even his calling/mission would not save him if he did not obey God. Even after all the demonstrating of power God had shown him, he was still delaying the process. At this point in the bible it states that he sent Zipporah and the children home to Jethro. However, there are several text that state that she was with Moses in Egypt. In other interpretation it states that she encouraged the women and children when she arrived with her husband and children. So although there is some conflict with the time, Moses and Zipporah and their children went to Egypt.

Moses did make it to Egypt thanks to the quick thinking and action of his wife Zipporah. The family was accepted by some, if not all, because of them conforming to the Abrahamic circumcising ritual. The blood of the baby was used for atonement, Symbolic of the difference God promise the children of Israel if they applied the blood of a lamb to their door post. The covenant of blood is also a symbol of the blood of Christ for the remission of our sins.

“The Papyrus Ipuwer and The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage,” also mentions several of the prophecy that God told Moses he would perform. One being “In the Indeed, the river is blood, yet men drink of it. Men shrink from human beings and thirst after water.<sup>5</sup> The second stated was, “Indeed, the ship of [the southerners] has broken up; towns are destroyed and Upper Egypt has become an empty waste.”<sup>6</sup> The final statement I will use in this paper is, “Indeed, many dead are buried in the river; the stream is a sepulcher and the place of embalmment has become a stream.”<sup>7</sup> Through-out the

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<sup>5</sup> [ CITATION Gar69 \l 1033 ]

<sup>6</sup> [ CITATION Gar69 \l 1033 ]

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

translated document it tells of the mourning of Egypt. The slaves have taken over some of the people houses. Robbers and thieves run rampant because there is not Egyptian to defend the place. The people are looking for their Priest and their Gods. At one point, one cries that if anyone knows where God is, he will serve him. All these statement support the book of Exodus stating that God freed his people just like he said he would. The Egyptian people are in disarray, and foreigners are taking advantage of there situation. The families have not had time to truly mourn the lost of their life as they knew it.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Moses delayed the circumcision of his son because he was not ready to face the past and go forward into the role as Moses the Deliver, he had to put his own house in order first, so he procrastinated. Moses' action put both his life and his son at risk. Moses did not intentionally delay his trip because he did not want to be reminded of Egyptian practices, because he had left all Egyptian practices behind. He was still responding to his responsibility as he did in Egyptian, he was avoiding them, running away from his mission. God threat of punishment of death encourage Moses to go Egypt, God even asked his brother Aaron to meet him in the desert. I believe that the added resource of the ANE text, submission of scholarly papers and biblical translation, including the Hebrew bible open up this story of Moses and his wife Zipporah actions in Exodus 4. I will never view this story the same. Thank God for all the people and organization that help us to obtain these documents to better represent God in the Kingdom.

***Exodus 4:19-2***

*:<sup>19</sup> Now the LORD had said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all those who wanted to kill you are dead.”<sup>20</sup> So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand.*

*<sup>21</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.<sup>22</sup> Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son,<sup>23</sup> and I told you, “Let my son go, so he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.’”*

*<sup>24</sup> At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses<sup>[b]</sup> and was about to kill him.<sup>25</sup> But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son’s foreskin and touched Moses’ feet with it.<sup>[c]</sup> “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,” she said.<sup>26</sup> So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said, “bridegroom of blood,” referring to `+circumcision.)*

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