

# EXODUS

## THE GOD WHO RESCUES

---

### SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 4:24-31

To understand more about Moses, Zipporah, and Aaron.

---

### Read the Text:

*At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. 25 Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched (his) feet with it and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" 26 So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision. 27 The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. 28 And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do. 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. 30 Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. 31 And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped. (Exodus 4:34-31, ESV)*

---

### Study the Text:

## A Strange Text

Picking up where Session 8 left off, Moses and his wife Zipporah and their son Gershon are on their way back to Egypt to "do before Pharaoh all the miracles" that the LORD gave to Moses (Ex. 4:21). Immediately, we are met with a difficult passage to interpret. Verse 24 begins: "At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death." The question is, "Who did the LORD seek to put to death?" Was it Moses? Or Gershon? To make matters more complicated, Moses' name is never mentioned in verse 24 through 26 once; translators put his name in to clarify to whom the pronouns are connected. Below is a breakdown of some key words and concepts that help clarify the point of this story.

### AN ATTACK

The initial concern of this text is centered around why the LORD sought to put either Moses or Gershon to death? First, we will assume the LORD sought Moses, not Gershon, to attack. But why? The simplest answer, given the context of the passage, is that Moses had not been appropriately circumcised. Being born an Egyptian, he likely had either not been circumcised at all, or had received the Egyptian "half-circumcision," a practice seen as illegitimate by the Israelites and later referred to as "the reproach of Egypt" (Jo. 5:9). Either way, as the new heir apparent to the Israelite cause, it would not stand for him to be uncircumcised. Circumcision was central to the Jewish experience as a sign and seal of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:9-14). In fact, anyone uncircumcised was "cut off from the people" (Gen. 17:14).

It is likely that the issue of Moses' circumcision had even come up prior to their journey to Egypt, and perhaps Moses had not taken God seriously enough concerning this problem. Either way, God would not allow Moses to go any further because of his lack of obedience. The issue is further complicated, however, in that they are on their way to Egypt with a child in hand, and the recovery process for an adult was much longer than that of a child circumcised eight days following birth. For Moses to be circumcised en route to Egypt would put all of them at risk. Thus, Zipporah acts on behalf of her husband in a ritual to atone for her husband.

### ***A MIDIANITE RESPONSE***

Zipporah does not hesitate to act at all. There is no conversation between her and God, nor is there any indication that she was given any kind of further instruction. This gives strength to the idea that Moses' lack of circumcision was a topic of prior discussion. As soon as Moses was incapacitated by God, she "took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin" (Ex. 4:25). That Gershon had not been circumcised is also notable. This means that Moses had not raised him according to Jewish custom, but more than likely Midianite custom (perhaps out of respect for his father-in-law, Jethro, a Midianite priest). Historians have gathered that Midianites did practice circumcision, but not as infants; they waited until a man was engaged to be married. Thus, Gershon would have remained uncircumcised until he grew up and was ready to marry.

### ***FORESKIN AND FEET***

Zipporah's actions are strange, but seemingly fall into some kind of well-known Midianite ritual. She takes the flint and circumcises her son, takes the foreskin and "touched Moses' feet with it" (Ex. 4:25). A couple of points need to be made here. For one, it's unclear whether she touches Moses' feet with the foreskin, or Gershon's. There is no proper name in this passage. The interpreter is left to decide. Given the way the story unfolds, it makes more sense for her to touch Moses' feet because it seems like what she is doing is performing a circumcision that in some way symbolically circumcises Moses to atone for his lack of proper circumcision. To further this, it's important to note that "feet" is a Hebrew term for "genitals" (Is. 6:2; Deut. 28:57). She uses the term "a bridegroom of blood" as well (Ex. 4:26), but this does not necessarily mean something to do with being married. It could also simply translate as "kinsman."

### ***PUTTING IT TOGETHER***

The actions of Zipporah are clear. Moses is incapacitated because he has not been circumcised, nor has he circumcised his son. As a representative of the LORD to Egypt, this would not stand. Zipporah swiftly circumcises her son and in a ritualistic act, touches the foreskin of Gershon to the genitals of an incapacitated Moses and declares Gershon and herself to be kinsman of Israel, signifying that they have left their Midianite identity and embraced being Israelites. This appeased the LORD and allowed Moses to continue their journey without needing an in-depth healing process before they could continue.

## **The Team is Assembled**

The LORD had told Moses that Aaron would serve as his mouthpiece to communicate all that Moses said to him (Ex. 4:14). The LORD even told Moses that Aaron "is coming out to meet you," presumably meeting them halfway as they traveled back to Egypt (Ex. 4:14). Verse 27 explains how Aaron will know to do this: "The LORD said to Aaron, 'Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.' So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him." The LORD communicates with Aaron His plans for him to meet Moses, and upon meeting, "Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do" (Ex. 4:28). This reunion between brothers set the stage for the rest of the events that play out in Egypt.

### ***GAINING SUPPORT***

When you imagine this story unfolding, it's easy to think that Moses and Aaron were the lone two voices in opposition against Pharaoh. While it is true that Moses is the prophet highlighted in the retelling of these events, Moses and Aaron didn't go at it alone: "Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel" (Ex. 4:29). First, Moses and Aaron went and spoke with the elders of the people of Israel. Next, they spoke to the people: "Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people" (Ex. 4:30). After having the support of the elders, the people were addressed and the signs given to prove to Israel that Moses was the prophet God was sending were

performed successfully. Thus, “the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped” (Ex. 4:31). This unifies the people of God. Moses is seen as the prophet of God. Aaron is his speaker. The people receive them and worship the LORD in gratitude for hearing their cries and acting.

## What About Now?

One takeaway is the importance of holiness. Circumcision during this time was an important aspect of obedience that set God’s people apart, and Moses had not been obedient to that end. As important as Moses was, his status as the prophet did not exempt him from God’s wrath towards disobedience. While circumcision is not the sign of the new covenant in Christ, the importance of holiness should not be minimized. Peter reiterated what God said in Leviticus 11:44-45: “For it is written: ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’ (1 Pet. 1:16). God will not minimize holiness; neither should we. Another takeaway is the importance of unity towards God’s overarching mission. God brings the pieces together in His own sovereign way. He speaks to Moses. He speaks to Aaron. He draws them both to the elders and then ultimately the people as a whole before the mission begins. Unity is crucial (Eph. 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:8). Where the people of God are not unified, chaos ensues. Where the people are unified, there is peace.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Exodus 4:24. Where were Moses and Zipporah and Gershon? What did the LORD do? Why do you think the LORD acted this way? Who did He seek to put to death? (Hint: See above notes)

---

---

2. Read Exodus 4:25. How did Zipporah respond? What did she do? What is the significance of her touching Gershon’s foreskin to Moses “feet?”

---

---

### Day Two

1. Read Exodus 4:26. Did this appease the LORD? What is the significance of the term “a bridegroom of blood?” (Hint: See above notes)

---

---

2. Read Exodus 4:27. What did the LORD say to Aaron? How did Aaron and Moses embrace?

---

---

### Day Three

1. Read Exodus 4:28. What did Moses say to Aaron?

---

---

2. Read Exodus 4:29. Who did Moses and Aaron go to next? Why is this important?
- 
- 

### Day Four

1. Read Exodus 4:30. Who did Moses and Aaron go to after approaching the elders? What did Moses say and do before them?
- 
- 

2. Read Exodus 4:31. How did the Israelites respond to Moses' words and miracles? What did they do in response to this?
- 
- 

### Discuss the Text:

## Week 9 Discussion: Unity

One of the themes that builds in the latter portion of this passage is the importance of unity among God's people toward's God's mission. First God calls Moses. Then He tells Moses that Aaron will aid him. Then they both go to the leadership of Israel in Egypt. Last, they approach the whole of the people. After all of this takes place, the people of God are unified around the mission to lead the people away from Egypt and back into the land God had promised them. Talk as a group about the importance of unity today, whether that be in a small group or in the church at large.

1. Icebreaker: What are other, non-church related settings where unity is important?
2. What are some contributing factors to increased unity in a group?
3. What are some contributing factors to decreased unity in a group?
4. How important is unity within your specific local church?
5. What things are worthy of disrupting unity?
6. What are practical ways you can work towards developing unity in your small groups/church?

## Takeaways:

1. God attacks Moses when they are at a lodging place over the issue of circumcision.
2. Zipporah circumcises Gershon and performs a Midianite ritual to "atone" for Moses and God accepts it.
3. God tells Aaron to meet Moses as he approaches Egypt, and Moses shares with Aaron all that he has learned from God.
4. Moses and Aaron approach the elders of Israel and eventually all of the people to tell them what was doing.
5. The people rejoice that God heard their cries and was acting on their behalf.