

Exodus 4

This chapter records further efforts by Moses to avoid going back to Egypt. His first effort suggested he was not important enough for the mission (3:11). The second effort suggested Israel would not know who God is (3:15). In this chapter, Moses will try three more times to avoid the responsibility, eventually bringing Jehovah God to the first account of His wrath (4:14). Finally, Moses will go and the elders of Israel will respond to him (4:31) exactly as God had predicted (3:18).

TRANSLATION - 1:1-17:

1 And Moses answered and said, "Even behold, they will not trust me and they will not listen to my voice because they will say, 'Jehovah has not appeared to you.'" **2** And Jehovah said to him, "What [is] that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff." **3** And He said, "Throw it to the ground." And he threw it to the ground and it became a snake and Moses fled from its face. **4** And Jehovah said to Moses, "Extend your hand and seize it by its tail." And he extended his hand and seized it and it became a staff in his hand. **5** "...So that they will trust that Jehovah has appeared to you, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

6 And Jehovah said to him again, "Bring, please your hand into your bosom." And he brought his hand into his bosom and took it out and, behold, his hand [was] leprous as snow.

7 And He said, "Return your hand to your bosom." And he returned his hand to his bosom and he took it out from his bosom and, behold, it returned as his flesh.

8 "And it will be if they do not trust you and will not listen to your voice [after] the first sign, then they will trust your voice [after] the second sign. **9** And it will be if they do not trust even this second sign, and they will not listen to your voice, then take from the waters of the Nile and pour it on the ground and the waters will be as you take from the Nile and it will be blood on the ground."

10 And Moses said to Jehovah, "Oh, My Lord, not a man of words I [am]! Both from a long time and from three days [ago]; even from since You spoke to your servant that heavy of mouth and heavy of lips I have!" **11** And Jehovah said to him, "Who put the mouth on man? Or Who will make the mute or the deaf or the seeing or the blind? Am not I Jehovah?" **12** And now, go and I, Myself, will be with your mouth and I will teach you what you will speak."

13 And he said, "O Lord, send, please [someone else] by the hand, you will send." **14** And the anger of Jehovah burned at Moses and He said, "Is not Aaron your brother, the Levite? I know that to speak he himself will speak and even, behold he, himself, is going out to meet you and he sees you and he rejoices in his heart. **15** And you will speak to him and you will put the words in his mouth and I, Myself, will be with your mouth and with his mouth and I will teach you all what you will do. **16** And he, himself, will speak for you, to the people, and he, himself, will be for you for a mouth and you, yourself, will be for him as 'God.' **17** And this staff you will take in your hand which you will do with it the signs."

HEBREW WORDS:

"To trust" (ver. 1) means "to prove reliable, faithful, trustworthy, believe in." The verb is used 97 times in the OT; it gives us the English word "amen," used 30 times in the OT. In Exodus, the verb is used here in 4:1, 5, 8-9, 31; 14:31; and 19:9. "To appear" was used earlier at 1:16; 2:2, 5-6, 11-12, 25; 3:2-4, 7, 9, 16. See comments on those verses. "Staff" (ver. 2) means a "staff, rod, or tribe." The noun is used 252 times, often with the meaning of "tribe." It is used 21 times in Exodus, both with the meaning "tribe" but also as Moses' "staff." It is an Egyptian word. "To throw" (ver. 3) was used earlier at 1:22. "Snake" was used earlier at Genesis 3:1-2, 4. The word is used in Exodus only here and 7:15. It is used 31 times in the OT. "To flee" is used here; 9:20; 14:25, 27; and 21:13 in Exodus. It is found 160 times in the OT. "To seize"

(ver. 4) is used 63 times in the OT; in Exodus at 4:4, 21; 7:13, 22; 8:15; 9:2, 12, 35; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 12:33; 14:4, 8, 17; 19:19. “Tail” is used 11 times in the OT; only here in Exodus.

“Bosom, lap” (ver. 6) is used 38 times, only here in Exodus (4:6-7). It is probably referring, figuratively, to Moses’ robe. This word “leprous” is only use here in the OT.¹ The noun is used 35 times; the verb, 20 times. “Snow” is used 20 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. “Sign” (ver. 8) was seen earlier in Exodus at 3:12. “Nile” (ver. 9) was seen earlier at 1:22. “To pour” is used here and 29:12 in Exodus; it is used 117 times in the OT, often with the connotation of shedding blood. “Ground” denotes dry ground (used 14 times), related to the verb “to become dry.” The word is used in Exodus here and 14:16, 22, 29; 15:19.

“Slave or servant” (ver. 10) is used 803 times in the OT; it is related to the verb “to serve” which we have stated is an important verb in Exodus. This noun is used in Exodus 43 times. “Heavy” is the word often translated “glory,” which is its translation most frequently in Exodus, where it is used 12 times (41 times in the OT). “Mouth” is used 498 times, 23 times in Exodus. It can also be translated “opening.” “Lips” is used 117 times, often translated “language.” It is used in Exodus only here and 11:7. “Mute” (ver. 11) is used 6 times: here; Isa. 35:6; 56:10; Habakkuk 2:18; Psa. 38:14; Prov. 31:8. “Deaf” is used 9 times: here; Lev. 19:14; Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:18-19; 43:8; Psa. 38:14; 58:4. “Seeing” is used only here and 23:8. “Blind” is used most frequently as it can be used metaphorically for the unwise or ignorant. The word is used only here in Exodus, out of 26 times.

“To teach” (ver. 12) is used 47 times in the OT, in Exodus 4:12, 15; 15:25; 24:12; 35:34. It is the verb related to the noun for “Law,” or *Torah*. “Lord” (ver. 13) is the normal word for “master.” It is used 774 times in the OT. It is not the word translated “Jehovah” or “LORD” (in English translations), but it is the word Jews read aloud whenever they came to the word “Jehovah.” “Lord” is used for Jehovah God 439 times. This is its first use in Exodus; it is used 16 times in Exodus. “To send” was seen earlier at 2:5; 3:10, 12-15, 20; 4:4. “Please” was seen earlier at 3:3. “To burn” (ver. 14) is used 93 times, frequently with the subject being “anger;” in Exodus at 4:14; 22:24; 32:10-11, 19, 22. “Anger” is used 277 times. The word actually means “nostril or nose” and denotes, with “anger,” the idea of flaring one’s nostrils, as a sign of anger. The word is used in Exodus at 4:14; 11:8; 22:24; 32:10-12, 19, 22. “Aaron” is mentioned 347 times in the OT, especially in Exodus (116 times), Leviticus (80 times), and Numbers (101 times). “Levite,” a descendant of the family of Levi, is used 350 times; in Exodus only here and 6:19, 25; 38:21. “Brother” was used first at 1:6. “To meet” was used earlier at 1:10; 3:18. “To rejoice” is used 156 times, only here in Exodus. “Heart” is one of the most used nouns in the OT; it can mean “mind or will.” It is used 854 times, in Exodus, 46 times. “To speak” (ver. 15) was used earlier at 1:17.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

The expression “to speak, he himself will speak” (ver. 14) translates an infinitive absolute along with the imperfect form of the same verb; this is the Hebrew language’s way of showing emphasis.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

God did not perform these types of “signs,” or miracles, in the book of Genesis. While Abraham was referred to as a “prophet” (Gen. 20:7), God did not communicate His will to mankind as He begins doing so here at the exodus.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

To understand the significance of the Nile River, both physically and spiritually, see comments under “Archaeology” under 1:22. We noted that the Nile was worshipped under the

¹ Sarna (21) suggests a better translation would be “encrusted” and that the similarity to snow is not in its color (white) but in its flakiness.

designation “Hapy”; it was also related to two other gods: Khnum and Osiris. When God attacked the Nile River, He was attacking some of the gods of the Egyptians (12:12).

Leprosy, biblically speaking, referred to a broad category of various skin diseases. The Law of Moses will discuss it in Leviticus 13-14. Only one category of “leprosy” is what we think of leprosy today, which is better known as Hansen’s disease. See also Num. 5:2; Deut. 24:8-9; 2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chron. 26:19. The incident with Elisha and Naaman in 2 Kings 5:7 illustrate how men believed that only God could cure leprosy.

A staff would often have unique carvings on it to associate it with its owner. See Genesis 38:18 and the author’s commentary on that text. Moses will use the staff at 9:23; 10:13; 14:16; 17:5, 9. Aaron would also have a staff which he would use in Exodus 7-8 (8:5, 16-17) and Numbers 20:1-13.

COMMENTARY:

Moses’ third effort to avoid responsibility relates to the matter of trust. Highlight the verb “to believe” throughout this chapter. Moses did not believe that the elders of Israel would trust him and, subsequently, would not “listen to his voice.” They would not believe that Jehovah had appeared to him. God responded, asking Moses what he held in his hand. It was a staff used by a shepherd. Jehovah told him to throw it to the ground. Moses obeyed and the staff immediately turned into a snake (we have no idea if it was venomous or not). This startled Moses and he ran from the snake. Then Jehovah told him to grasp the snake by its tail, which Moses did and the staff reverted back to its natural form. Modern herpetologists frequently grasp a venomous snake by its tail, but the position of holding the snake does not serve a role in the story. In verse 5, Jehovah applies the message of this “sign:” Israel “will trust that Jehovah God has appeared to you,” the One who was the “God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” One might see this event as one sign or two, turning the staff into a snake and then turning it back into a staff.

For the second sign, God tells Moses to put his hand into his robe at the level of his chest. When Moses did so and removed his hand, “behold” (to draw the audience’s attention to the miracle), it had become white or flaky like snow. God told Moses to return his hand into his robe and, “behold,” it was returned to normal as his other flesh. Again, this might be considered one or two signs.

In verse 8, God states that if Israel would not believe, or “trust,” and listen to his voice from the first sign (turning the staff into a snake), then they will trust his voice after the second sign. Observe that God expected Israel to trust Moses’ message. However, in the event that Israel will not trust either of the first two signs, God informed Moses that he would take water from the Nile River, pour it on the ground, and it would turn into blood.

Moses’ fourth effort to avoid the responsibility of leading Israel out of Egypt related to his ability to speak (ver. 10). He said he was not “a man of words.” He also stated that neither in times past nor recently (literally, “three days ago”), nor since Jehovah began speaking to him, Moses had been “heavy of mouth” (literally) and “heavy of lips.” We do not know what Moses meant by these words. From subsequent speeches, including the whole book of Deuteronomy, it does not appear that Moses was lacking in eloquence. However, we know from Numbers 11:17 that Moses was guided by the Holy Spirit in his teaching and writing (cf. Num. 12:6-8). In the words of David, the word of the Spirit was “on his tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2).

At the same time, Jehovah responds in two ways. First, He asks Moses Who it was Who made the mouth of man? Who was it Who made someone mute, or deaf, seeing, or blind? All power to create or to heal came from Jehovah God. He could work with Moses if He called Moses to His task. “Am not I Jehovah?” God asked Moses. In verse 12, Jehovah repeated His fundamental command: “Go now.” God promised to be “with Moses’ mouth” and teach him what he would speak. This last statement is the fundamental responsibility of a prophet and a preacher of the gospel (see also 4:15).

Moses’ final effort to avoid the role of spokesman to Pharaoh is in verse 13. He finally said, “Lord (not “Jehovah” but the normal word for “master”), *send please someone else!*” Then

for the first time in mankind's history (as far as biblical history relates), Jehovah God got angry! Literally, the text reads that Jehovah "flared His nostrils," which is a Hebrew expression for showing anger. Jehovah God got angry at Moses for all of his pitiful excuses. So, Jehovah's second response (to Moses' statement suggesting an inability to communicate), was to send Aaron, Moses' brother, to help him. Aaron was a Levite as well as Moses (2:1). We do not know why God mentions Aaron's tribal origin. Perhaps it was in anticipation of Aaron and the Levites serving as priests under the Law. But he was Moses' brother and Aaron would speak "for Moses." In fact, as God was speaking, Aaron was coming out to meet Moses and when he sees Aaron, he will rejoice. We have no record of God appearing to Aaron or speaking with him until verse 27. We wonder how Aaron had permission from Pharaoh to leave Egypt. Perhaps this suggests Aaron was one of the Israelite elders and therefore had permission to temporarily leave Egypt.

Be that as it may, God defines the work of a prophet in verse 15: Moses will speak to Aaron and put his words into Aaron's mouth and God will speak to Moses and put His words into Moses' mouth. And He will thus teach Moses, and through him Israel, all they needed to do. Verse 16 restates this same "chain of command": Moses, who will serve in the place of "God," will speak to Aaron, who will serve in the place of a prophet, who will in turn speak to the people. The shepherd's staff through which God had given several signs to Moses would be with him to do those signs and others. There was no reason for Moses to turn down this role.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - God will tell Israel, through Moses in Deuteronomy 13:1-5, that signs will be used to determine if a man is a true prophet of God or not. The Egyptian magicians will, in 7:8-12, "turn" their staffs into snakes. The snake represented the patron goddess of Egypt, in the form of a cobra. Pharaohs wore the image on their crowns, suggesting they were protected by the goddess and death would come to those who defied his (her) authority. In a parallel passage, 7:1, God informs Moses that Aaron will be his "prophet," that is, his spokesman. Moses' sister, Miriam, was afflicted by God with leprosy in Numbers 12:10-15. King Uzziah was also struck by God with leprosy in 2 Chronicles 26:16-21. In both occasions, Miriam and Uzziah were doing something without God's authority. Observe the use of "signs and wonders" in Deuteronomy: 4:34; 6:22; 13:2-3; 26:8; 28:46.

After Aaron's staff turns into a snake and then eats the Egyptian magicians' snakes (staffs), the ten plagues begin. The first plague was Moses turning the water throughout Egypt into blood (7:14-25). In Deuteronomy 18:18, Jehovah God promises to send a prophet in whose mouth God will put His word. This prophet predicted is clearly a greater prophet than Moses!

Moses will strike the Nile, turning its water to blood in the first plague at 7:20. Along with the other plagues, Moses will illustrate God's battle against the gods of Egypt (12:12).

God will say, of Himself in Exodus 34:6 that He is "slow to anger."

Later Jewish writers - The prophets also portrayed God's word as on their tongue or in their mouth: 2 Samuel 23:2; Isaiah 51:16; Ezekiel 3:1-3; Jeremiah 1:6-7; 5:14; 15:16. When the prophets depict God's judgment against Egypt, they write in terms of the Nile River drying up: Ezekiel 29:9; 30:12; Zech. 10:11. Isaiah (10:26) and Micah (7:14) both referred to Moses' staff.

NT writers - Jesus also promised that His apostles would speak as the Holy Spirit guided them, not from their own initiative: Luke 10:16; John 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:13. Indeed, Jesus Himself did not teach on His own initiative: John 5:30; 8:28, 42; 12:49; 14:10; 16:13.

"Signs" are especially relevant for the Gospel of John. The purpose of that gospel was to record "signs" so that mankind might believe in the name of Jesus and through that trust in Him, to have eternal life (20:30-31). The word "signs" is used 77 times in the NT; in John, the word is used at: 2:11, 18, 23; 3:2; 4:48, 54; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37; 20:30. Jesus gave His apostles the ability to perform "signs" so that their audience would and could believe their message was sent by God: Mark 16:17-20; Acts 13:12; Heb. 2:3-4.

“Wonders” is also used to refer to true (or false) miracles in the NT: Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; John 4:48; Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12; 2 Thess. 2:9; Heb. 2:4.

Once again, we draw the reader’s attention to Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7 where he mentions the call of Moses (7:30-35). There Stephen says that Moses was “mighty in speech” (Acts 7:22).

Jesus is the “prophet like Moses” but greater than he, who was predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15-22, according to Peter in Acts 3:22. The definition of a prophet, one inspired by God, given in 4:15-16, is illustrated in the words of Jesus, relative to the apostles in Matthew 10:19-20 and Luke 10:16.

TRANSLATION - 4:18-23:

18 So Moses left and returned to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said to him, “Let me go, please, and let me return to my brothers who [are] in Egypt and let me see if they are still alive.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go, in peace.”

19 And Jehovah said to Moses in Midian, “Go, return to Egypt because dead [are] all the men seeking your soul.”

20 And Moses took his wife and his sons and he had them ride on the donkey and he returned to the land of Egypt and Moses took the staff of God in his hand. **21** And Jehovah said to Moses, “When you go to return to Egypt, see all the signs which I put in your hand and you will do before the face of Pharaoh and I, Myself, will harden his heart and he will not send out the people. **22** And you will say to Pharaoh, “Thus says Jehovah, My son, My firstborn, [is] Israel. **23** And I say to you, ‘Send out My son, that he may serve Me and you refused to send them. Behold I, Myself, am killing your son, your firstborn.’”

HEBREW WORDS:

“Peace” (ver. 18) refers to “well-being” or “wholeness;” it is used 237 times in the OT. In Exodus, it is used here; 18:7, 23. “To seek” (ver. 19) was used earlier at 2:15. “Soul” was used earlier at 1:5. “Staff” (ver. 20) was used at 4:2. The expression “staff of God” is used here and 17:9. The verb translated “to harden” (ver. 21) is translated “to seize” earlier at 4:4. “Firstborn” (ver. 22) is used 120 times, 20 times in Exodus. “Israel” was used at 1:1, 7, 9, 12-13. The verb “to serve” (ver. 23) was used at 1:13-14. “To refuse” is used 41 times, in Exodus at 4:23; 7:14; 8:2; 9:2; 10:3-4; 16:28; 22:17. “To kill” was used earlier at 2:14.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

“To kill” (ver. 23) is a present participle, indicating the *present* intent of God to punish Pharaoh.

COMMENTARY:

After receiving his commission from God, Moses returns to his father-in-law to inform him that he was going to Egypt. Remember, it has been at least 40 years since Moses left Egypt. He did not know exactly the situation of “his brothers.” To state that he wanted to “see if they are still alive,” is simply a way of saying he wanted to see about their health and welfare. Incidentally, “his brothers” refers to all of the Hebrews, not just Moses’ family. Jethro gives Moses his blessing: “Go, in peace.” They will see each other again after the exodus, in Exodus 18.

Jehovah spoke again to Moses, “Go, return to Egypt because dead [are] all the men seeking your soul.” If Moses’ earlier fear had anything to do with the “price on his head” from when he left (2:15), this might have strengthened his resolve. That pharaoh and his own henchmen were dead.

Moses took his wife and “sons” (plural). Moses does have two sons: Exodus 18:3-4. The second son’s name was Eliezer. It appears from 18:4 that Eliezer was born sometime after he escaped Egypt. Moses took Zipporah and Gershom with him on his way to Egypt and he

took the staff which God had chosen to use, through Moses, in His liberation of Israel from Egypt. It is referred to as the “staff of God” because it was really *God’s* instrument in Moses’ hand. The phrase “staff of God” is only found here and 17:9. Apparently Zipporah and Gershom return to Midian (18:2-5) and are brought to Mount Sinai later.

Jehovah spoke to Moses again. Moses would return to Egypt and perform, with the use of “God’s staff”, the signs which God would enable him to do “before the face of Pharaoh,” that is in his presence. Yet, God would harden Pharaoh’s heart and he will not send out God’s people. For more on “hardening Pharaoh’s heart,” see the verses below under “Moses’ contemporaries.” The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart appears twenty times. Half of the occasions are attributed to God; half are attributed to Pharaoh. We should not look at this action through the viewpoint of John Calvin.

God was not hardening Pharaoh’s heart in such a way as to steal his free will. We note in 9:27, 34; 10:16-17 that Pharaoh “sinned” against God when he refused to let Israel go. That shows that Pharaoh had the free will to humble himself before the God of heaven. However, as Pharaoh hardened his heart to God’s message and signs (7:13), God would have to put more pressure on him (“harden his heart”) even more until Pharaoh would practically *drive* out Israel from his presence (6:1). It is similar to a pressure cooker in the kitchen, which cooks and tenderizes meat under intense pressure. One has to “turn up the heat” in order for the pressure to tenderize the meat. God would have to “turn up the heat” in order for Pharaoh to get upset enough to “drive out” Israel from Egypt. The difference between a pressure cooker and Pharaoh, however, is that Pharaoh was a human being with the freedom to change his mind and his behavior. Instead, he continued to harden his heart even more until God would take the life of his firstborn.

God told Moses (ver. 22) that he would say to Pharaoh, “My son, My firstborn [is] Israel.” This statement implies that God intended *other* nations to be *His* as well; even Assyria and Egypt would be considered God’s inheritance one day (Isa. 19:23-25). When Jesus came to earth, He was considered God’s “firstborn from the dead” (see passages below under “NT Writers”) and the church of Christ would be considered the “church of the firstborn ones” (Heb. 12:23).

Because Israel was God’s “firstborn,” if Pharaoh did not release Israel to serve Him, God would kill Pharaoh’s firstborn son (ver. 23). We observe here that weeks (perhaps, or months) before God actually *does* kill Pharaoh’s firstborn, God *warned* him of the consequences of disobedience. In God’s grace and mercy, He allowed Pharaoh ample opportunity to change his mind and change his behavior and not suffer the loss of his firstborn son. Pharaoh could not complain that he was not warned!

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - The “firstborn” is mentioned many times in Exodus: 4:22-23; 6:14; 11:5; 12:12, 29; 13:2, 12-15; 22:29; 34:19-20. This paragraph (4:21-23) sets out the themes which will be found frequently throughout the first 18 chapters: Israel as God’s “firstborn son,” worship, and the death of Pharaoh’s “firstborn son.” For further uses of “sign” in Exodus, see: 3:12; 4:8-9, 17, 28, 30; 7:3; 8:23; 10:1-2; 12:13. For uses of “wonders,” see: 4:21; 7:3, 9; 11:9-10. See also 3:20; 15:11; 34:10.

Relative to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, see Exodus 4:21; 7:13, 22; 8:19; 9:12, 35; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17. These verses all use the same verb, “to harden the heart.”

Another Hebrew term, also translated “to harden the heart” is used at Exodus 7:3.

A third Hebrew term, “to harden the heart,” see Exodus 7:14; 8:15, 32; 9:7, 34; 10:1; 14:4.

For other passages which refer to “hardening the heart,” see Deut. 2:30; 15:7.

For other passages showing Israel was God’s “firstborn,” see Deut. 33:17.

Later Jewish writers - Joshua (11:20) refers to hardening the heart, as does the author of 1 Samuel (6:6) and 2 Chronicles 36:13. The Psalmist will warn against hardening the heart (95:8) and Proverbs will use the phrase (Prov. 28:14) and so will Isaiah (63:17). The historian in 1

Chronicles 23:15-17 gives the family of Moses. Other passages portray Israel as God's "son": Psalm 2:7; Hosea 11:1. For other passages showing Israel as God's "firstborn," see Psalm 89:27; Jer. 31:9.

NT writers - Jesus was declared to be God's Son twice in His ministry; the first time at His baptism (Matt. 3:17) and then at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5). The word "firstborn" is used in the NT 9 times: Luke 2:7; 2:23; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Heb. 1:6; 11:28; 12:23; Rev. 1:5. In all but three passages, it refers to Jesus. Luke 2:23 (speaking about Christ) is a quotation of Exodus 13:2, 12. Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5 refer to Jesus as the firstborn "from the dead." This suggests that the phrase refers to the resurrection of Christ's "brothers" (Rom. 8:29) from the dead, Jesus being the first one. Hebrews 11:28 refers to Exodus 12. Finally, "firstborn" in Hebrews 12:23 is plural, referring to Christians, who are "firstborn," being in Jesus Christ.

"Hardening the heart" is an expression also found in the NT: Mark 6:52; 8:17; John 12:40; Heb. 3:8, 13, 15; 4:7. Paul will mention "hardening the heart" in Romans 9:18 in the context of Pharaoh. See also Acts 19:9. The concept of a "hardened heart" is found in other passages like 1 Cor. 2:15-16 (the gospel is an "aroma of death to death"); 1 Timothy 4:2; Hebrews 6:4-6.

TRANSLATION - 4:24-26:

24 And he was in the desert of Midian and Jehovah met him and sought to put him to death. **25** And Zipporah took a flint [knife] and cut the foreskin of her son and threw [it] at his feet and said that, "A son-in-law of blood you [are] to me!" **26** Then He left him alone; then she said, "A son-in-law of blood," for the circumcision.

HEBREW WORDS:

"To meet" (ver. 24) is used 14 times in the OT; in Exodus only at 4:24, 27. "To put to death" is the verb "to die" but in a form indicating *causation*: "to cause to die." The basic verb "to die" is used 845 times; 53 times in Exodus. "Zipporah" (ver. 25) is mentioned only at 2:21; 4:25; 18:2. "Flint" (knife) (ver. 25) is used only here and Ezekiel 3:9. "To cut" is used 289 times; it is often used with making a covenant (cutting animals as a part of a covenant ceremony). In Exodus, the verb is used 14 times. "Foreskin" was used extensively in Genesis 17:11, 14, 23-25; 34:14. It is only used here in Exodus, out of a total of 16 times. "To throw" can mean to "touch" also; it is used 150 times, 7 in Exodus (4:25; 12:22; 19:12-13; 29:37; 30:29). "Son-in-law" refers here to a "bridegroom." The word is only used here in Exodus. It was used at Genesis 19:12, 14. It is used 20 times in the OT. This word for "circumcision" is used only here in Exodus but also at Joshua 5:5; Jer. 9:25. The Hebrew word for "circumcision" used most frequently is spelled slightly different than this word; this word is used 32 times in the OT. It was used in Genesis 16 times, almost entirely in chapters 17 and 34. The word is used in Exodus at: 12:44, 48.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

We noted above that the verb "to cut" is often used in covenant-making ceremonies. In Genesis 17:9-14, God made ("cut") His covenant with Abraham wherein circumcision was its sign. If a male was not circumcised, he would be "cut off" from his people.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

No parallel in Ancient Near Eastern literature has so far been found to the expression "a son-in-law (or bridegroom) of blood."

COMMENTARY:

Circumcision was widespread among most peoples of the Ancient Near East, including Midian (Zipporah's people) and Egypt. The Egyptians performed something like a "half-circumcision." Whether Moses was circumcised according to Egyptian custom or God's

covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14), we do not know, but presume it was according to God's covenant since Moses' mother was caring for him at that age.

The "he" in verse 24 almost certainly refers to Moses in the desert of Midian and Zipporah and Gershom (assuming that Eliezer is not yet born and the "sons" in verse 20 anticipates Eliezer's birth) are still with him. At this particular location, God "met" Moses and, in some way, sought to put Moses to death. We have no idea what God was doing to Moses or had communicated to Moses about His intentions but Zipporah drew the proper conclusion from God's behavior.

Zipporah grabbed a sharpened flint stone and cut off the foreskin of her son (we presume it was Gershom, unless it was Eliezer) and then threw the foreskin at "his" feet. We do not know whose feet it was. Some scholars suggest "feet" is a metaphor for the genitals but the further verses from the OT which they use to sustain that point do not prove their point. Since her words are directed at Moses, we presume she threw the foreskin at Moses' feet and calls out "A son-in-law of blood you [are] to me!" Scholars do not know what Zipporah meant by this statement, which she said again in verse 26 and Moses links her statement with the circumcision she had just performed. The blood of the foreskin and circumcision related in some way to the relationship which they had. Midianites performed circumcision so Zipporah was not ignorant of the practice. Perhaps she means that through the circumcision (the blood), Gershom now is a member of the covenant family.

Despite our ignorance, it is clear that the circumcision of their son turned God's wrath away from Moses and "He left him alone." Moses, the leader, was certainly obligated to obey God's every command just as surely as Israel was obligated. If the leader was not obeying God's covenant, how could Moses expect Israel to obey?

A final note on this passage is relevant, respecting the feminists' attack on the Bible. The Bible writers are not "writing women out of history."² Indeed, Moses is clear here, as he was in chapters 1 & 2 that women are "heroes." If the Bible were trying to "write women out of history," then Moses would have circumcised his own son! The text does not sustain the feminists' argument.

APPLICATION:

Later Jewish writers - Israel had not circumcised themselves throughout the wandering in the wilderness for forty years. As Joshua was preparing to conquer the Promised Land, he required Israel to obey that command: Joshua 5.

NT writers - Paul will teach that true circumcision is spiritual (Rom. 2:28-29) which happens when one is baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (Col. 2:11-12). Paul will also say that Christians are the "true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3).

TRANSLATION - 4:27-31:

27 And Jehovah said to Aaron, "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness." And he went and met him at the mountain of God and he kissed him. **28** And Moses announced to Aaron all the words of Jehovah for which He sent him and all the signs which He commanded. **29** And Moses went and Aaron and they assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel. **30** And Aaron spoke all the words which Jehovah spoke to Moses and he did the signs before the eyes of the people. **31** And the people trusted and they obeyed because Jehovah visited the sons of Israel and because He saw their oppression and they bowed and they worshipped.

HEBREW WORDS:

"To kiss" (ver. 27) is only used twice in Exodus (4:27; 18:7), out of 32 times. "To announce" (ver. 28) means "report." It is used 371 times. It is used in Exodus at 4:28; 13:8; 14:5; 16:22; 19:3, 9. "To command" is used 496 times; in Exodus, 54 times. "To assemble" (ver.

² Laffey, 50.

29) is used 200 times; in Exodus at 3:16; 4:29; 9:19; 14:13; 23:10, 16; 32:26. "Elders" was seen earlier at 3:16, 18. The verb "to trust" (ver. 31) was used earlier at 4:1, 5, 8-9. "Oppression" was seen earlier at 3:7, 17. "To bow" or "to kneel" is used 15 times; in Exodus only at 4:31; 12:27; 34:8. "To worship" was used 23 times in Genesis, only 11 times in Exodus (4:31; 11:8; 12:27; 18:7; 20:5; 23:24; 24:1; 32:8; 33:10; 34:8, 14), out of 173 times. It can also mean "to bow down," but in conjunction with the previous verb, here it denotes "to worship."

COMMENTARY:

God promised Moses that Aaron would be his spokesman (ver. 14). Here, God speaks to Aaron and tells him to go meet Moses in the wilderness. We do not know how Aaron was able to leave Egypt; perhaps he was one of the elders and had some freedom of movement. When the brothers met at the "mountain of God," which would have been Horeb (3:1), the two kissed. We do not know if they had seen each other in the forty years Moses had lived in Midian. Moses told Aaron everything which Jehovah had commanded him and the signs which Jehovah had commanded him to perform (ver. 28).

Subsequently, Moses and Aaron went to the elders of Israel in Egypt (see 3:16) and Aaron, serving as the spokesman (ver. 15-16) related everything which God had told Moses. The "he" in verse 30 might refer to Aaron but probably to Moses who did the signs which God had performed for him earlier in the chapter (4:1-9). Not only did Moses perform the signs in front of the elders, but he also did them in front of the people.

What God had promised in verses 8-9 is fulfilled here in verse 31. The people "trusted" Moses (despite his initial fear, ver. 1) and they "obeyed" because they saw the hand of Jehovah God "visiting" the sons of Israel. They understood that God "saw their oppression" (see Moses' comments at 2:23-25). They responded by bowing and worshipping in thankfulness.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Israel will bow again in worship at 12:27 and 32:8 (the golden calf) and 34:8 (Moses worships).

NT writers - When Christians acknowledge with thanksgiving what God has done for them, both through God's creation and Jesus' redemption, they can't help but worship Him. Jesus and His parents flee to Egypt for safety in Matthew 2:13-15. As Moses left Egypt because of persecution, so Jesus' family flees to Egypt because of persecution.