

## Some Sins Follow After

In the early chapters of the Bible, God makes great plans for His people Israel, to rescue them from Egyptian captivity with mighty miracles.

God selects Moses as their savior. He protects Moses from Pharaoh's death-decree, and providentially provides for him to be raised in the Egyptian palace, yet still learning the traditions of the Jews from his own mother. At about 40 years old, God helps him flee into the wilderness, where he develops as a shepherd and a leader for another 40 years.

At about 80 years old, God calls to Moses from a burning bush and reveals all His plans, impressing Moses into service. God promises success against Pharaoh, sends his brother Aaron to assist him, and gives Moses the power to perform amazing miracles.

“So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand” (Exodus 4:20).

It seems like everything is off to an auspicious start, which is why a sudden, dark turn is so puzzling.

Now it came about at the lodging place on the way, that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, “You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.” So He let him alone. At that time she said, “you are a bridegroom of blood” because of the circumcision (Exodus 4:24–26).

Why would God behave in such an apparently bi-polar manner? Why would God strike up such a beneficent conversation with Moses, entrust to him such great responsibilities, and bless him beyond measure, sending him on his journey with the warm sun in his face and the wind at his back, only to pounce on Moses at a quiet moment in the middle of the trip?

We can figure out a few things from the passage. Obviously, Moses had not circumcised his son. This is surprising! Certainly Moses knew the commandment of God to Abraham, that all male children of Israel were to be circumcised on the eighth day (Gen. 17:9–14) as the sign of the covenant.

Certainly Moses himself was circumcised. What possible reason could there be that Moses had failed to obey?

There's not a lot to go on here, but Zipporah's actions offer a clue. It may be that Zipporah performed the circumcision because Moses was too sick to move. Her angry statement "you are a bridegroom of blood to me" may also indicate that she realized that she was part of the problem. Maybe she had resisted Moses' efforts to circumcise his son. Since Moses had "sons" (in 18:1–5, two are named, Gershom and Eliezer), and only one is circumcised here, maybe Moses had compromised. Maybe as a Midianite she disliked the customs of Israel and prevailed upon Moses. Or, maybe she understood the trials that awaited Moses and resented the disturbance, and sought to hold off the inevitable call upon his life by refusing to cooperate with God; it's telling that Moses sends her and the children back home early (Ex. 18:2), maybe even at this very moment.

This is all speculation about how Moses could have possibly neglected to circumcise one of his sons, but the main point is that he had! Months in the past, if not years or decades, Moses had disobeyed God's command. If Moses was to faithfully lead Israel, he needed to be faithful in his own household. Despite numerous blessings, God's had not overlooked Moses' disobedience. God, in His own wisdom, had finally chosen the time and the place to deal out the consequences.

A friend of mine is a landlord. He has a renter who shorted him \$100 on one of his monthly payments. That was over a year ago, and my friend said, "He thinks I've forgotten about it because I haven't mentioned it in a while, but he will have to pay me that \$100 before I close his contract." Is God any less aware than a typical landlord? Had Moses felt bad about his negligence at the time, but put it out of his mind since nothing bad had happened? Had he thought he had gotten away with it?

The lesson is that God is merciful, but doesn't overlook sin. The lesson is also that no man is above obedience. Moses was later identified as God's friend, the only prophet (excepting Jesus, Deut. 18:15) that God ever spoke to so intimately, on a face-to-face basis (Ex. 33:11, Deut. 34:10)—yet God still held Moses accountable (Deut. 32:48–52). Circumcision was a very serious requirement, and God could not bless Moses until he obeyed. We must realize that it doesn't matter:

- How much time has washed away the sharpness of the guilt. The passage of time does not cleanse sin (Rev. 22:11–12); only the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses sin.
- How many promising qualities we offer God’s kingdom, nor how many good works we’ve done for God. Good deeds do not cleanse sin (Matt. 7:21–23, Acts 10:1–6); only the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses sin.
- How many ways God has blessed us since. Good fortune and favorable weather does not cleanse sin (Matt 5:45); only the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses sin.

Numbers 23:32 warns, “be sure that your sins will find you out.” We must never be lulled into thinking that because we’ve quieted our conscience through the passage of months or years, that God has necessarily let the matter go. Paul told Timothy, “The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after” (1 Tim. 5:24). Oh, the problems that sometimes burst forth from graves that we thought were deep enough to hide them! C.S. Lewis remarks, “A math problem can be put right, but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point; never by simply going on” (*The Great Divorce*, VII).

Consider what happened with David in 1 Samuel 11. As king, he committed a great sin. He slept with Bathsheeba, and then killed her husband. Bathsheeba became pregnant, and David married her and brought her into his own palace. Nine months later she bore him a son. David might have thought that unpleasantness had been forgotten, smoothed over, behind him. It hadn’t been a good situation, but David had handled it with political knack, he had avoided the potential embarrassment. Everything was chugging along fine, now. However, the chapter ends with a glimpse into God’s mind: “but the thing that David has done was evil in the sight of the Lord.” David was at ease; God was nursing vengeance!

At some point—at least nine months later, maybe even a few years later—God sent a prophet to David named Nathan. The prophet told him a story about a rich man who had everything, who stole a poor man’s one little beloved ewe lamb and killed it. David, whose forgetful conscience suspected nothing, lashed out in anger at such a man who would do such a horrible thing. But of course, Nathan shouted, “you are the man!” (12:7) and David’s world came crumbling down.

Let us beware that we may yet encounter the seeds of sins that we have planted years ago, beyond the horizon of our memories. I recently encountered a person who was ready to convert to Christ, but, during the final lesson on repentance, discovered God's view of the marriage he had abandoned years previously. That sin now raised its ugly head. Let us therefore take all that much more a serious view of sin. Let us also thank God that, while our sins may be numerous and awful, God wants to save us and wash away our sins! Let us learn to deal with our sins in a positive and courageous manner.

—*John Guzzetta*