



# BIBLE WORD STUDY

But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. (Isaiah 28:13).

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EX424-FB

## Death of the Firstborn or Moses? (Exodus 4:24)

The token of the Abrahamic Covenant was circumcision. It was required of “every man child” whether he was a Hebrew or not. The Abrahamic Covenant was given to Abraham and his seed many years before the Israelites went into slavery in Egypt.

- 9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.**
- 10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.**
- 11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.**
- 12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.**
- 13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.**
- 14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant. (Genesis 17:9-14)**

Moses flees from Egypt to the land of Midian. He marries Zipporah and has two sons (Exodus 18:3-4; Acts 7:29). He is eventually called to return to Egypt and lead his people out to the land God promised to Abraham and his seed.

- 21 And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.**
- 22 And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn:**
- 23 And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.**
- 24 And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him.**

**25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.**

**26 So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision. (Exodus 4:21-26).**

This is a difficult passage. Since the context of v. 22 is the “firstborn” the “him” that follows in v. 24 refers to Gershom who was the firstborn son of Moses by Zipporah, a Midianite.<sup>1</sup>

24 And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him (**Gershom**), and sought to kill him (**Gershom**).

25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son (**Gershom**), and cast it at his (**Moses**) feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.

26 So he (**the LORD**) let him (**Gershom**) go: then she said, A bloody husband thou (**Moses**) art, because of the circumcision.

First, from the immediate context, the “firstborn” (v.23), “him” (v.24), “him” (v.24), “her son” (v.25) are all connected.

Gershom (Ex 2:22) is Moses’ firstborn and the subject “him” mentioned in Ex. 4:24-25. According to Genesis 17:14 (above), the “uncircumcised man child” will be cut off—*not his father. Therefore, it appears God “sought” to kill Gershom, not Moses.* (Later, it is the “firstborn” who die in Egypt, not the Israelite or Egyptian parents)

Moses is to take God’s ultimatum regarding “blood” and “firstborn” of vss. 22-23 to Pharaoh. Up to this point Moses has not obeyed God’s command in Genesis 17 regarding Gershom’s circumcision. Remember that this is a transition point in Israel’s history. Israel has not yet enjoyed the land and nation promises of Genesis 12-17. They have been in bondage to Egypt but are now going to be delivered through the leadership of Moses. I believe God was gracious to Moses up to this point regarding an uncircumcised son under bondage to another nation (Egypt) but now the leader of the house must set his affairs in order and be the proper example to the future nation of Israel. The phraseology, “sought to kill him” (Exodus 4:24) implies long suffering or a warning from the Lord.

In order of importance, there are possibly four reasons for the event:

1. Circumcision is the token of God’s covenant with the nation of Israel (Genesis 17). They are about to become established as a “holy nation” (Exodus 19:6).

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<sup>1</sup> Moses fled from Egypt and married Zipporah, a Midianitess.

16 Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.

17 And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.

18 And when they came to Reuel their father, he said, How is it that ye are come so soon to day?

19 And they said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and also drew water enough for us, and watered the flock.

20 And he said unto his daughters, And where is he? why is it that ye have left the man? call him, that he may eat bread.

21 And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter.

22 And she bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land. (Exodus 2:16-22).

2. Moses is God's leader and must set his own house in order before he leads others.
3. The "firstborn" is the point of contention between God and Pharaoh at this major turning point in Israel's history.
4. Physical circumcision in the OT lays a typological foundation for the spiritual circumcision mentioned in the NT epistles. (Colossians 2:11-12).

The 1599 Geneva Bible note makes the "sought to kill him" (Moses). "God punished him with sickness for neglecting his ordinances." This interpretation is followed by many but its basis is in the immediate grammar rather than the entire context of God's covenant requirements upon the nation.

Others properly understand the "him" to be Gershom. This is known as *contextual interpretation*. The Bible context (see comments above on Genesis 17) is allowed to define the meaning of "him" rather than interpreting isolated text by grammar rules.

Adam Clarke in his commentary states:

"The meaning of the whole passage seems to be this:-The son of Moses, Gershom or Eliezer, (for it does not appear which,) had not been circumcised, though it would seem that God had ordered the father to do it; but as he had neglected this, therefore Jehovah was about to have slain the child, because not in covenant with him by circumcision, and thus he intended to have punished the disobedience of the father by the natural death of his son. Zipporah, getting acquainted with the nature of the case and the danger to which her first-born was exposed, took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son. By this act the displeasure of the Lord was turned aside..."