

Why Did God Seek To Kill Moses?

Exodus 4:24 (ESV): "At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met him and sought to put him to death." Wait a second! What changed? God chooses Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt in 4:17. Moses returns to Midian, requests leave from his father-in-law, gathers his family (Zipporah, Gershom, and Eliezer), sets course for Egypt on a donkey, and God seeks to kill him. What happened?

Most Bibles have a footnote in verse 24 that cross-references Genesis 17:14: "Any uncircumcised male...shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." The footnote is appropriate. Zipporah loved Moses and didn't want him to die, but she detested the rite of circumcision. Fortunately, her faithfulness to Moses won, and she hastily circumcised the unnamed son.

Moses' deference to circumcise his son angered God. God detests disobedience, especially when it involves His covenant commands. God was sending Moses to urge Pharaoh to release the Israelites, His firstborn son. If he did not comply, God would "Kill [Pharaoh's] firstborn son" (Ex. 4:22-23). If Moses couldn't handle leading his family to follow God, how could he lead God's family out of Egypt? God's leaders must not be hypocrites. They must practice what they preach.

Notice that Moses didn't circumcise the son; Zipporah did, presumably because Moses was so afflicted. Zipporah called Moses " 'a bridegroom of blood' because of the circumcision (Ex. 4:26). Circumcision disgusted her, but God commanded it to keep his covenant. Zipporah hated it, and Moses did not insist on it. Therefore, God sought to kill Moses because he neglected His covenant command. Moses was so incapacitated that only Zipporah could perform the rite, thus making restitution for her sin.

We can only suppose which son was circumcised, but that is to miss the story's point: Moses' call included his family's preparation. Moses' obedience required his son's circumcision. God required Zipporah's obedience even if she didn't understand, and it was repulsive to her. Moses and Zipporah served God together. Each reflected the faith of the other. The two were one flesh.

Some quick points of application. 1) Faith and service to God are family matters. My wife and kids are beside me in my call to preach and teach the Lord's will. It's my responsibility to ensure my family follows the Lord's will. That's not what the world teaches, but it is what Scripture teaches. 2) Faithful service to God demands obedience. There is a tendency to teach the blessings and promises of God and neglect the curses and wrath of God. Scripture says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life." Immediately after, It says, "Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:36). Moses nearly died because of disobedience. His eighty years of preparation for service nearly came to naught. Thinking that God won't severely punish something you consider insignificant is a mistake. God is faithful to do all He has said He will do according to how He has said He will do it and to whom. May God be with you and bless you in His service. Amen.