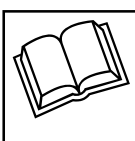


Testament, and the idea is picked up and applied to Christ in the New Testament; indeed there are Old Testament passages of this character that are clearly prophetic of Christ.

One such is quoted in 1 Peter 2: "Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded" (v. 6). Christ is here depicted as the cornerstone of God's work of salvation, and, as Peter remarks, we are like individual stones, built on that foundation, part of a spiritual house for God's glory. This is but one of many passages

speaking of the ultimate security of our lives if they are built upon Christ.

Many people immediately after the disaster must have felt very insecure and unsafe, indeed they do so anyway in today's rapidly changing world. For many the old securities have gone; families break up or become widely scattered, the comfort and security of familiar surroundings and old friends is lost as people move all over the place in their work. But we have a security no one can take away from us: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8).



## Exposition

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# The Exodus

## A commentary on Exodus 1-15

### D. Moses' commission—Exodus 3-4 (Part 4)

Mark Vincent

#### The format of the commentary

The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.

Each major section is broken into **subsections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.

#### Introduction

**M**oses, GRASPING at last the urgency and non-negotiable nature of his calling, bids farewell to his father-in-law in Midian and sets off at God's behest to the land of Egypt. On the way he has a remarkable encounter with an angel, which results in the circumcision of his son. While all this has been going on, God has also appeared to Aaron, commanding him to go to meet the returning Moses. This he does, the two of them meeting at Sinai and returning to Egypt together to summon the elders of Israel and report to them the wonderful news of God's saving plan. With these incidents our examination of Exodus 4 will be complete, and we shall proceed next month to the first encounter of Moses and Pharaoh in Exodus 5.

#### Moses returns to Egypt

4:18 And Moses went and returned to Jethro<sup>1</sup> his father in law, and said unto him, Let me go, I pray thee, and return unto my brethren

which are in Egypt, and see whether they be yet alive.<sup>2</sup> And Jethro said to Moses, Go in peace.

- 4:19 And the LORD said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life.<sup>3</sup>
- 4:20 And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand.
- 4:21 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,<sup>4</sup> that he shall not let the people go.
- 4:22 And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is My son, even My firstborn:<sup>5</sup>
- 4:23 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.

### Comment

After his encounter with God at the burning bush, Moses goes to his father-in-law to ask permission to leave. There is a practical point behind this. With his new mission Moses might have been so full of his own self-importance, so intent on 'doing the Lord's work', that he might simply have left Midian, perhaps with a bald announcement of his departure. But although Moses' allegiance to God was more important than his allegiance to Jethro, this did not give him licence to ride roughshod over his domestic responsibilities. Moses has the decency and politeness to ask for Jethro's permission; he wishes to remain on good terms with his relatives and to avoid confrontation.

Twice, at verse 19 and verse 21, the narrative is interrupted as God speaks to Moses again to add new instructions or information—as if God is saying, "Oh, and by the way . . .", or, "And don't forget . . .". This perhaps creates the impression that God kept having to remind Moses of the urgency of his mission. What is both touching and comforting about this, if correct, is that God is willing to offer this support and prodding encouragement. He is in constant communication with His servant, and persists in working with him even though He might have found somebody else who was much less reluctant to go.

So Moses takes his wife and sons and begins the journey towards Egypt, taking "the rod of God" in his hand. This designation, "the rod of God", is instructive. Before, it had simply been

Moses' rod, no better or worse than any other, the one he happened to have in his hand when the Lord had appeared to him in the burning bush. But it is Moses' rod no longer. Now it is "the rod of God", for God has empowered Moses to use the rod in His service to glorify His Name. The things that we once looked upon as our own are likewise no longer such when we take up God's commission. For we are His, and those things which were once ours are now His too, to be used in His service. This is the very concept behind the words, "Take my heart, it is Thine own . . . Take my silver and my gold . . . Take my intellect, and use every power as Thou shalt choose" (Hymn 111).

In God's second communication with Moses (vv. 21-23) a principle is laid out that is crucial both to an understanding of God's destruction of the Egyptian first-born and to the immediately following narrative in 4:24-26. Moses is to tell Pharaoh that Israel is God's son, His first-born. God has not previously had a relationship with a people as close as His relationship with Israel. He has not made promises to the ancestors of other peoples of the magnitude of those He has made to the fathers of Israel, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel is His first-born son.

Yet Pharaoh holds God's first-born captive as a slave. God thus makes a simple point of exchange. Unless Pharaoh lets God's son go so that he may serve/worship Him, God will slay (rather than take captive) the first-born of the Egyptians. By introducing us to the idea of Israel as God's first-born even before Moses has gone back to Egypt, the way is being prepared for the great climax to the plagues, the death of the first-born in Egypt.

God is developing a parallel between Himself and Pharaoh in relation to their respective first-borns. God has a first-born, He reveals, just as Pharaoh does. His first-born should be serving Him, but instead is serving Pharaoh. This will not do. Pharaoh is exercising a dominion that is not his to exercise, creating a tremendous imbalance which God will restore by evacuating His people by force.

Interestingly, however, the text does not specify this evacuation as the way in which God will redress the situation, although it, of course, remains a crucial part of God's plan. He will redress it, so this passage specifies, by exterminating Pharaoh's first-born, the first-born of the Egyptians. The parallelism here suggests that, so long as Israel are serving Pharaoh, they are as

good as dead as far as God is concerned. God's 'eye for an eye'-style response to this is to kill Pharaoh's firstborn to see how he likes it. By the parallel God develops here, Israel's state as Pharaoh's servants in Egypt is being described as a

death. And indeed it is, for us as well as for them. We are dead to God while we are Pharaoh's servants. Such thoughts might well have been in Paul's mind when he wrote about the dominion of sin in Romans.

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## God almost kills Moses

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4:24 And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought<sup>6</sup> to kill him.<sup>7</sup>

4:25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet,<sup>8</sup> and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.

4:26 So he let him go:<sup>9</sup> then she said, A bloody husband<sup>10</sup> thou art, because of the circumcision.

### Comment

These three verses rank amongst the most difficult in the Old Testament; they are full of potential ambiguity, and at first sight seem to have little connection with what comes before or after. I have written about them at length in "The Bridegroom of Blood".\* Here I will attempt a summary interpretation.

It is worth noting at the outset that it is not entirely clear whose life is in danger from the angel. The natural assumption in the context would be that it is Moses, but in some ways the passage would be more easily explained if Gershom, Moses' first-born son, were meant (see [note 7](#)). God has just made clear His readiness to kill Pharaoh's first-born son if necessary (v. 23), and in the very next verse we would find Him prepared to kill Moses' first-born too because of his uncircumcised, out-of-covenant state. In other words, the context may suggest that it is the life or death of first-born sons that is at stake throughout the narrative. I shall not press this point, however, and will assume it is Moses' life which is in danger.

It is essential to note that the assassination is staved off by the circumcision of Moses' son. The narrative is therefore one which revolves around circumcision, and it is interesting that the word 'inn' (v. 24), the location where all this takes place, is the Hebrew *m-l-w-n*, probably included as a word play on the root *m-w-l*, to circumcise. Because the son is eventually circumcised, life is spared and Moses is enabled to continue his mission.

On the face of it, Zipporah's taking of a flint and circumcising her son is a most bizarre way to react to an attempt on the life of one's husband. We can only assume from it that Zipporah (and thus Moses too) knew full well that Moses should have circumcised his son but had not done so. It appears to be the first thing that she thinks of to remedy the situation. It is possible that they had argued previously over whether Gershom should be circumcised or not (perhaps the Midianitess resisted). God was now demonstrating unequivocally the momentous nature of the act as a sign of membership of God's covenant people.

It is highly significant that, when Moses leaves Egypt as the deliverer of the Israelites in chapter 12, we read of the importance of circumcision as a precondition for taking the Passover (12:43-49), a command which is followed by the law of the first-born (13:1,11-15). How could Moses lead Israel out of Egypt to freedom, and stress to them the importance of being circumcised, if his own son were not? He would have to get his own house in order before he could return to Egypt with full authority as God's messenger. There was to be no hypocrisy, no 'do as I say but not as I do', in his role of leadership.

There is something very unusual about the words "cut off" in verse 25, for instead of the usual Hebrew term for circumcision, *m-w-l*, a different word, *k-r-t*, is used. This is very important. *Krt* basically means 'to cut', but it is used particularly in the Scriptures with the word 'covenant'; to cut a covenant means to make a covenant. The word is found in Genesis 17:9-14, a passage in which circumcision is called 'the sign of the covenant'. Genesis 17:14 tells that the person who fails to be circumcised will be cut off (*krt*) from his people for breaking God's covenant. To be uncircumcised alienates one from being part of God's people. No wonder God sought to slay (cut off?) Moses or Gershom for

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\* *The Christadelphian*, Jan. 1999, pp. 14-18.

this grave error. All the other males who came out of Egypt had been circumcised (Josh. 5:5), so it would have been highly inappropriate if their

leader had failed to circumcise his own son. Before his work began, therefore, the correct preparations had to be put in place.

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### Moses and Aaron meet and summon the elders of Israel

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4:27 And the LORD said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went, and met<sup>11</sup> him in the mount of God, and kissed him.

4:28 And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD Who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him.

4:29 And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel:

4:30 And Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people.

4:31 And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.

#### Comment

Though the narrative has been unfolding in Midian during the course of Exodus 3 and 4, this does not mean that God has taken His eyes off what is going on in Egypt. He now appears to Aaron too, instructing him to go to meet Moses. The two finally meet in Horeb and fondly embrace.

Together they return to Egypt and gather the elders of Israel, telling them the news and performing the signs that God has given. But the belief of verse 31 comes too easily for us to be very sure of it. For we have read too many times of how quickly faith is tried—as it will be in chapter 5, and with poor results. Nevertheless, for the time being their response is the right one. They believe, they hear, and they bow their heads and worship.

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1. **v. 18 Jethro.** As if to add to the confusion concerning the name of Moses' father-in-law (see note on 2:18), verse 18 contains two different spellings of the name Jethro. The first occurrence is spelt 'Jether'; the second 'Jithro' (the usual form). There is no obvious explanation for this orthographic peculiarity, other than it being an accident of transmission.
  2. **v. 18 whether they be yet alive.** This expression encompasses general welfare, not just the

literal question of whether or not they are still breathing. It may refer either to Moses' close family, or to the Israelites at large. Moses seems somewhat reluctant here to admit the true reason for his departure and the nature of his miraculous commission.

3. **v. 19 all the men are dead which sought thy life.** Here is an echo of the words of the angel of the Lord to Joseph when he was informed that the Herod who had tried to kill the baby Jesus was dead, and that they could consequently return to Israel from Egypt (Mt. 2:20). There is a close parallel between the early chapters of Matthew and Exodus.
4. **v. 21 harden his heart.** This topic of hardening occurs at least twenty times in the narrative; I shall discuss it in detail when we come to the plagues.
5. **v. 22 firstborn.** This verse, in which God refers to Israel as His first-born son, and thus in some sense a type of Christ, is extremely important. By the very designation God is expressing His privileging of Israel, for the first-born son obtained all the privileges of the birthright. Our knowledge of the preceding and succeeding history also allows us to discern something further in the designation. In Genesis the first-born was repeatedly usurped or passed over by a second or later son (Cain, Ishmael, Esau, Reuben, Manasseh); time and again it is through a second or later son that the promises came. This is also how it would be with Israel, through God's second *servant* and *first-born*, the Lord Jesus (paradoxically a second 'first-born!').
6. **v. 24 sought to kill him.** Better, 'was on the verge of killing him'.
7. **v. 24 him.** One of the difficulties of the account is its ambiguities. Who are the two 'hims' here in verse 24? Presumably the first is Moses, but given that the position of the narrative is so abrupt in the first place, the possibility that it is Gershom (Moses' son) cannot be ruled out. Or the first 'him' might refer to Moses, and the second to Gershom (see Comment). We have a similar problem in the next verse (does 'his' refer to Moses, or the son, or the angel?), and the next (is 'him' Moses, or the son?). This ambiguity is one of the reasons why the passage is difficult to interpret.

8. **v. 25 cast it at his feet.** There are several parallels between this whole incident and the Passover, of which this expression is one (my *Christadelphian* article of January 1999 has more details). The word translated 'cast' may also mean 'touched', and is the same word used to describe the *daubing* of the blood on the lintel and the doorposts in 12:22 at the Passover. 'Feet' may also be translated 'legs', so it is possible that, instead of thinking of the foreskin being cast at someone's feet, we are to think instead of the blood of the circumcision being daubed on the legs of the boy. In this case there would be a parallel between the blood of the Passover sacrifice, which averted the death of Israel's first-born, and the blood of the circumcision, which averts the death of Moses or his son. The blood functions as a protective sign against the destroyer. At the very least, the echo of Passover language would seem to be deliberate.
9. **v. 26 he let him go.** Life is spared, therefore, because of the quick response of Zipporah in verse 25. She takes on the role of a mediator in the passage, turning away the threat of death as blood is shed.
10. **v. 26 bloody husband.** Literally, 'bridegroom of blood'. The most straightforward reading would seem to be that Zipporah is angry that she has to go through this messy process of circumcision for the sake of religious convictions. It is interesting that in Arabic the stem used here for 'bridegroom' or 'husband' means 'to circumcise' as well as 'to protect'. 'Protect' is also the meaning of the root in Akkadian. Furthermore, the Hebrew stem behind the word Passover can also mean 'to protect'. The Jewish scholar Nahum Sarna thus suggests that the phrase "a bloody husband . . . because of the circumcision" in verse 25 could be translated/paraphrased to mean, "You are now circumcised [and so] protected for me by means of the blood—the blood of circumcision".
11. **v. 27 met.** This term is identical to the one used only three verses earlier to describe the angel's *meeting* Moses to kill him (4:24). The expression is not rare exactly, but it is not common either, and it seems intriguing that these two *meetings* are recounted in such close proximity and with the same vocabulary. What the connection might be eludes me, however.

## David and Goliath (2)

Geoff Henstock

SO DAVID SETS forth with no more accoutrements than he needs as a shepherd—just a staff, a sling, and five waterworn stones for the sling (1 Sam. 17:40). Goliath, accompanied by his shield-bearer, comes to meet him, reacting with disdain when he has a close look at his opponent (vv. 41,42). He regards him as a youth, using a Hebrew word that denotes inexperience. But "Pride goeth before destruction" (Prov. 16:18).

Goliath gives vent to his disdain in verses 43 and 44, lampooning his young opponent. It is ironic that he compares himself to a dog, for the Israelites would have so regarded him; but that was not the reason David came against him so lightly armed. Goliath focused on the staff, yet it was the sling that would bring him down. He invoked his gods in pouring scorn on David, but he was oblivious to the power of David's God to deliver. In every respect Goliath missed the point.

David corrects Goliath's misunderstanding. The armour of each of the protagonists is irrel-

evant. David declares that Goliath has defied the living God, Yahweh, "the God of the armies of Israel", and will be defeated (vv. 45,46). David freely ascribes his impending victory to God. The issue at stake in this contest is the vindication of God. Israel is in need of this lesson, as verse 47 indicates. David wants Israel to know that God can deliver in spite of the apparent weakness of the flesh. A similar lesson is expressed in the song of Hannah (2:1-10), in 1 Samuel 14:6, and in 2 Chronicles 20:14,15. It is a lesson that saints in all ages must learn and yet are so apt to forget.

### The combat

After David had clearly enunciated the facts of the case, and in the process no doubt enraged Goliath, the two advanced to meet in combat. Verse 48 is emphatic; David was not intimidated by his mighty opponent, he "hasted" to meet him. Before Goliath reached David, a stone was despatched and the giant fell to the ground