

GOD PORTRAYS MORE WOMEN

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

ZIPPORAH

(Exodus 2-18)

IN OUR LAST LESSON Moses' mother relinquished her son to Pharaoh's daughter. It was with many qualms and fears, yet in absolute faith in the Lord and in His purposes for her boy that she gave him up to her care.

When Moses "**was grown**," it came into his heart to visit his brethren. What he saw that day changed his whole life's history. He beheld injustice, cruelty, and oppression on all sides. How could he go on enjoying the pleasures of sin, the luxuries and treasures of Egypt and be indifferent to the sufferings of God's people? His concern was not because some of those people were his relatives, but because they belonged to the Lord. Like Daniel, he kept the Lord ever before him—seeing Him who is invisible—and His approval was paramount in his life.

Perhaps his first thought was to use his court influence to bring about better conditions among the slaves. But the least suggestion was repulsed by taunts, revilings, or abuse. At last his pity and interest in the afflicted people ripened into a costly yet noble resolve to descend those palace steps forever and throw in his lot with people of God.

Can you picture the parting scene between Moses and Pharaoh's daughter? What objections she would make to such a drastic step and what inducement she would offer him to abandon his plan! She would perhaps agree with him about the emptiness of court life and the futility of obtaining help for those for whom he felt so strongly. Yet she knew what taunts she would have to endure because of his holy resolve! She would hear, "I told you so, adopting the slave child!" It is a costly thing for anyone to step out from the world for God.

Acts 7 tells us Moses supposed his brethren would understand that he was to be their deliverer. Yes, young folk often think others will rightly appraise their qualifications and the sacrifices they made in renouncing the world. They look for a measure of appreciation and recognition. The Lord's work needs a preparation of soul that the curriculum of the school or college does not offer.

Moses tells us about his first attempt to effect deliverance and its utter failure through his blundering.

He went out and Exodus 2 says, **“He spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren,”** while Acts 7 points out that he had no reason for doing it. He looked this way and that, apprehensive and sensitive as a young man is to people’s opinions, and when he saw there was no man, he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

As a patriot he avenged the injustice, but **“the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God”** (James 1:20). Brute force is not the Lord’s weapon for His servants. This impetuosity—rash and ill-considered—postponed Moses’ usefulness for years. **“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord”** (Zechariah 4:6).

God’s way is not by smiting this man or that, cutting off ears or bringing down fire from Heaven. We may think our wrongdoings will never be known, but humiliatingly the skeleton jumps from the closet when we least expect it.

The next day two of the Hebrews strove together (as if they didn’t get beatings enough from the Egyptians without beating each other). Moses said to him that did the wrong, **“Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?”** (2:13).

This time he would use reason and be a reconciler of his brethren, but as usual the one in the wrong resented the interference and he said: **“Who made thee a prince** [insinuating he was not born a prince but only a prince by adoption] **and a judge over us** [you may be recognized in Egypt, but you have nothing in common with us]? **Intendest thou to kill me, as thou killest the Egyptian?”** (2:14). And Moses feared and said, **“Surely this thing is known.”**

“When Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled . . . and dwelt in the land of Midian” (2:15). His anger, his unseemly behavior, his unclean hands had disqualified him temporarily as the Lord’s servant and emancipator.

For forty years he had been training in Egyptian universities to be “somebody,” but the next forty years were spent in God’s school in the desert. Here he learned meekness, submission, patience, and dependence on God for strength and wisdom. He became like the thorn bush he beheld in the wilderness, burning indeed for God, yet not consumed. He entered The University of Hard Knocks, and graduated with flying colors in humility and lack of self-confidence.

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham, through his second wife Keturah, and believed in God. Perhaps that determined the direction of Moses’ flight. Reuel, or Jethro, he is called, was a priest or prince of Midian and had seven pretty daughters. Though princesses they were not above tending their father’s flocks. These girls had been drawing water from the well for the sheep the day Moses arrived.

He was strikingly arrayed in fine Egyptian clothes and, in contrast to the rude shepherds at the well, was very distinguished looking. He saw these rough uncouth fellows drive the girls and their animals away and appropriate all the water they had drawn for their own flocks. This had been a daily occurrence. Seeing this contemptible bullying of the women by the men of the desert, Moses’ chivalry was aroused.

He found injustice on the farm as well as in the city. Again he defended the oppressed. He was as ready to be a deliverer in obscurity as in public. He took the girls' part and stayed with them helping until all their flocks had enough water. Wouldn't those seven girls enjoy the thrill of such gallantry? They would talk excitedly about his fine qualities and appearance all the way home. It was a red-letter day for them in their monotonous life.

Reuel was surprised at their early arrival, and the girls vied with each other in their enthusiasm to tell about their champion who had put those mean shepherds in their place. The hospitable father said, "And where is he? why is it ye have left the man? call him, that he may eat bread" (2:20). He couldn't bear to see ingratitude in his daughters, or fail to recognize such courtesy to them. I wonder if it was Zipporah who outran her sisters to invite Moses to dinner,

"And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter. And she bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land" (2:21, 22).

"Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God" (3:1).

Did it seem to a man of such qualification like wasted time caring for dumb, driven cattle, in obscurity, year after year—alone and without fellowship? Were there times when he resented it? We are comforted when we recall the thirty obscure years in the life of our Lord, after which God opened Heaven to declare that He was well pleased with the time when He toiled inconspicuously as a carpenter. We forget it takes time to mature and adjust oneself spiritually as well as physically. We get too anxious to give prominence to the young converts. But God is never in a hurry.

Zipporah would be greatly distressed whenever Moses seemed preoccupied and had a faraway look in his eyes. She thought he wanted to be back in Egypt with God's people who were all strangers to her. At other times he would be very entertaining when the family would extract by questions some of his experiences of court and university life at the capital.

The day their first baby was eight days old, he suggested circumcising the child. A furor of opposition arose against "the bloody rite." Moses patiently explained the meaning of circumcision, that it was a mark in the body to show the need of cutting off that which is of the flesh. He and his should be in covenant relation to God, for had not God said:

"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 17:14).

God asserts His claims not only on us but on our children. Some may say, "That only applied in Old Testament times," but in I Corinthians 7:13, 14, speaking of the relationship of children to parents, one of whom is unbelieving, it is said: **"And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy."**

They are under the influence of godly upbringing. When the Philippian jailer asked, **“What must I do to be saved?”**—the answer was promptly given: **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”** (Acts 16:31). God wants not only the parents for Himself but all the household. Privileged indeed are those children brought up in the fear of the Lord. **“Thy walls are continually before me”** (Isaiah 49:16), and all contained within those walls.

On the day of the circumcision, Moses so longed for the fellowship and sympathy of those who understood God’s claims that he called the child “Homesick” or “A stranger in a strange land.” Poor Moses felt his spiritual loneliness.

Zipporah was terribly upset by this circumcision. She would argue, “You can believe in God without going through all these ceremonies. It’s painful to the child. I’ll never allow it again.”

Like many a mother, she was very possessive of her children. She gave them the place in her heart and affection that belonged to her husband. Some Christians do not think it is important to recognize the ordinances God has requested His own to observe. They argue that the essential thing is to know your sins are forgiven. They are usually lax in their behavior as children of God, and any trivial thing is an excuse for absenting themselves from the Lord’s Table. Yet these very folk seem to delight in pointing out any inconsistencies in those who observe the Lord’s Supper. They forget God has the same claim on every child of His whether obedient or disobedient. In time another baby arrived and Moses called him Eliezer, for he said: **“The God of my father . . . was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh”** (18:4). This time Zipporah refused to have the baby circumcised.

One day Moses beheld a bush that was burning and drew near to see why it was not consumed. Here God met him and quieted his fears by saying, **“All the men are dead which sought thy life”** (4:19). But when God proposed that he should go back to Egypt, Moses had many excuses and arguments to offer. How patiently the Lord dealt with each in turn. He gave him proofs and signs, and promised complete help for his weakness.

Moses then went home to ask permission of his father-in-law to return to Egypt to visit his brethren. He did not tell Jethro about his meeting with God at the burning bush. He felt as Paul did after being caught up to the third Heaven that it was not to be talked about. Jethro graciously granted his request.

“And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand” (4:20).

They had stopped at an inn, or caravansary, where Moses was taken violently ill. **“The Lord met him, and sought to kill him”** (4:24). You can imagine Zipporah’s hysteria! Why had she left home and all her people? What would happen to her and the children? What kind of a God was this that her fanatical husband was so anxious to please? Why does He allow such suffering? Her “whys” had to be faced, and face them she did. “I know it’s because of me and my rebellion against His commands. I am the hindrance. I hate to submit, but I’ll lose my husband if I don’t. I would not let him circumcise the baby. He’s too ill to perform the rite, I’ll have to do it myself.”

She was compelled by fear to do what she would not let him do. In desperation she performed the rite herself, and with taunting ill-humor she cast the foreskin at his feet, and though he was so dangerously ill at the time, exclaimed, **“A bloody husband art thou to me”** (4:25).

When she saw how quickly her husband recovered after her obedience, she reiterated, **“A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision”** (4:26). Poor Moses. God did not excuse the failures at home of those who would serve him in public. Someone has said, “No amount of eminence in service or knowledge in the things of God will excuse any neglect of God’s commandments.”

Are we remiss in things apparently trivial and hidden from view? Do we fail to honor God in our domestic relations? Then we cannot expect blessing in our public ministries. A deacon or elder must rule his own house well, or he is disqualified to rule in the church of God.

Zipporah had no heart-interest in Moses’ commission from the Lord, and either refused to accompany him or was so unpleasant that Moses sent her back to her father. Good old Jethro seems to have been more understanding than Moses’ wife. He had a real love and respect for Moses, which Moses reciprocated. Zipporah missed much by her ill-humor and stubborn way. She missed the companionship and privilege of helping **“the man of God”** as he is called in I Chronicles 23:14.

She did not recognize how great a man Moses was, or how dear he was to God. It is so foolish to allow our ill-humor and selfish petulance to rob us of those spiritual blessings we might enjoy from the genuine affection, love, cooperation and harmony of thought with the others in our own home. We are likely to treat them and all they bring as commonplace. We do not know their value until they are taken from us. Moses was honest indeed to record for our learning these embarrassing moments of his life that we might not fall into the same errors.

It is thought that Moses wrote the Books of Genesis and Job during the time he was in the desert. Since he was to lead the people of God through the wilderness, he must first be trained there himself. So our experiences are meant to be of benefit and comfort to others.

Moses had to go on alone—as the servants of the Lord and missionaries frequently do. God bless the Jethros who take over for a time the care of the wife and children that God’s servant may be free to labor for Him with liberty security!

I think it very touching to see God’s concern for the lack of affection which Moses found in his own family. God immediately said to Aaron, **“Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” “And he went and met him in the mount of God, and kissed him.”**

Wouldn’t you like to have seen meeting of those two old men, one eighty and the other eighty-three? If God calls us to forsake father and mother, etc., for the Gospel’s sake, the Lord assures us of reward even in this life. And what did the dear old men talk about? Their disillusionments, their disappointments? No. Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord.

Oh, that our reunion with our loved ones were edifying in the things of God! Such meetings would then prove to be the mount of God to us.

After the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt when they came to the place where Zipporah left Moses to go home to her father, Jethro brought his daughter and their two sons to join Moses. After the greetings were over, Moses recounted all the way the Lord had led him, and His wondrous deliverances of the people out of their bondage in Egypt, **“Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the lord had done to Israel”** (18:9).

“Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods” (18:11). And Jethro took a burnt offering and offered sacrifices to God. Then a dinner for seventy guests was given to celebrate the coming of Jethro with Moses’ family.

“And Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God” (18:12).

We would like to think Zipporah learned to fully appreciate Moses and that she tried to make up to him the years that the cankerworm had eaten. Perhaps that is what it means when later she became the envy of Moses’ sister Miriam. We will meet Zipporah again in the study of Miriam.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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