

God Seeks to Kill Moses

Exodus 4:24-26

How do you understand this passage? Does God really want to kill Moses? If God wanted to kill Moses, surely the sovereign God could have done so? So what is going on here?

1. Abraham was given very clear instructions about the rite of circumcision:

Genesis 17:1-14

When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the Almighty God. Obey me and always do what is right. ²I will make my covenant with you and give you many descendants." ³Abram bowed down with his face touching the ground, and God said, ⁴"I make this covenant with you: I promise that you will be the ancestor of many nations. Your name will no longer be Abram, but Abraham, because I am making you the ancestor of many nations. ⁶I will give you many descendants, and some of them will be kings. You will have so many descendants that they will become nations.

⁷ "I will keep my promise to you and to your descendants in future generations as an everlasting covenant. I will be your God and the God of your descendants. I will give to you and to your descendants this land in which you are now a foreigner. The whole land of Canaan will belong to your descendants for ever, and I will be their God."

⁹ God said to Abraham, "You also must agree to keep the covenant with me, both you and your descendants in future generations. You and your descendants must all agree to circumcise every male among you. ¹¹⁻¹²From now on you must circumcise every baby boy when he is eight days old, including slaves born in your homes and slaves bought from foreigners. This will show that there is a covenant between you and me. ¹³Each one must be circumcised, and this will be a physical sign to show that my covenant with you is everlasting. ¹⁴Any male who has not been circumcised will no longer be considered one of my people, because he has not kept the covenant with me." (GNB)

2. Abraham followed those instructions exactly:

Genesis 17:23-27

²³ "On that same day Abraham obeyed God and circumcised his son Ishmael and all the other males in his household, including the slaves born in his home and those he had bought. ²⁴Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised, ²⁵and his son Ishmael was thirteen. ²⁶They were both circumcised on the same day, ²⁷together with all Abraham's slaves." (GNB)

Genesis 21:4 When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. (NIV)

3. Circumcision was practiced very carefully even in Jesus' day. Anyone who did not receive this rite was not considered a part of God's people. (See Genesis 34)

Exodus 12:43-50: ⁴³ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "These are the Passover regulations: no foreigner shall eat the Passover meal, ⁴⁴but any slave that you have bought may eat it if you circumcise him first. ⁴⁵No temporary resident or hired worker may eat it. The whole meal must be eaten in the house in which it was prepared; it must not be taken outside. And do not break any of the animal's bones. ⁴⁷The whole community of Israel must celebrate this festival, ⁴⁸but no uncircumcised man may eat it. If a foreigner has settled among you and wants to celebrate Passover to honour the LORD, you must first circumcise all the males of his household. He is then to be treated like a native-born Israelite and may join in the festival. ⁴⁹The same

regulations apply to native-born Israelites and to foreigners who settle among you.”⁵⁰ All the Israelites obeyed and did what the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron.” (GNB)

Leviticus 12:3: “On the eighth day, the child shall be circumcised.” (GNB)

John 7:20-24:²⁰ The people answered, “You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?”²¹ Jesus answered them, “I did one deed, and you all marvel at it.²² Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man upon the sabbath.²³ If on the sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the sabbath I made a man’s whole body well?²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” (RSV) (See also *The Desire of Ages* 456,457)

4. During the forty years that Moses was working with sheep in the wilderness of Midian, he married and had two children. (Exodus 2:21,22; 4:20) He also wrote the book of Genesis. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 251) Thus he knew very well the story of Abraham and the requirement and promise of circumcision.

“Though called a “Cushite woman” (Numbers 12:1, R.V.), the wife of Moses was a Midianite, and thus a descendant of Abraham. In personal appearance she differed from the Hebrews in being of a somewhat darker complexion. Though not an Israelite, Zipporah was a worshiper of the true God. She was of a timid, retiring disposition, gentle and affectionate, and greatly distressed at the sight of suffering; and it was for this reason that Moses, when on the way to Egypt, had consented to her return to Midian. He desired to spare her the pain of witnessing the judgments that were to fall on the Egyptians.” *Patriarchs and Prophets* 383,384

5. Moses had neglected to circumcise his second son on the eighth day as required by the Law because of his wife’s objections:

“Moses returned to his father-in-law and expressed his desire to visit his brethren in Egypt. Jethro’s consent was given, with his blessing, “Go in peace.” With his wife and children, Moses set forth on the journey. He had not dared to make known the object of his mission, lest they should not be allowed to accompany him. Before reaching Egypt, however, he himself thought it best for their own safety to send them back to the home in Midian.

“A secret dread of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, whose anger had been kindled against him forty years before, had rendered Moses still more reluctant to return to Egypt; but after he had set out to obey the divine command, the Lord revealed to him that his enemies were dead.

“On the way from Midian, Moses received a startling and terrible warning of the Lord’s displeasure. An angel appeared to him in a threatening manner, as if he would immediately destroy him. No explanation was given; but Moses remembered that he had disregarded one of God’s requirements; yielding to the persuasion of his wife, he had neglected to perform the rite of circumcision upon their youngest son. He had failed to comply with the condition by which his child could be entitled to the blessings of God’s covenant with Israel; and such a neglect on the part of their chosen leader could not but lessen the force of the divine precepts upon the people. Zipporah, fearing that her husband would be slain, performed the rite herself, and the angel then permitted Moses to pursue his journey. In his mission to Pharaoh, Moses was to be placed in a position of great peril; his life could be preserved only through the protection of holy angels. But while living in neglect of a known duty, he would not be secure; for he could not be shielded by the angels of God.” *Patriarchs and Prophets* 255,256 (1890) Compare *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 195,196 (1864); *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 175,176; Compare also *The Signs of the Times*, February 26, 1880

God does not intend for His instructions to be ignored or taken lightly. Political and religious leaders are

always in the public spotlight and Moses' lack of compliance with the Law would have been discovered almost immediately even in such a private matter as his son's circumcision. How could he expect the children of Israel to follow his directions and commands as though they were from God when he, himself was out of compliance with one of God's clearest commands? Thus God on this occasion found it necessary to remind Moses of his duty just as parents constantly do with their children. In other words, God is here acting just as we would expect any loving, concerned, caring parent would!

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