

## ***For Better or For Worse - Lessons From Old Testament Couples***

### ***Moses and Zipporah: Relating with Relations***

Lesson #5 for August 4, 2007

Scriptures: Exodus 2-4, 18:1-27; Numbers 12:1-12.

1. Moses was born as an Israelite slave but grew up as an Egyptian prince. He married a Midianite nomad. Were these two unequally yoked together? What do we know about the Midianites? Who were their ancestors? Did they worship the true God? They were descendants of Abraham and his second wife Keturah. They were defeated by Moses after the Balaam "incident" (Numbers 22:4-6; 25:1-18; 31:1-12) and later mostly destroyed by Gideon. (Judges 6-8)
2. Surely, Moses must have had opportunities to marry while still in the Egyptian court. Why do you think he was still unmarried at age 40? Or was he unmarried? Do you think he married Zipporah because he really loved her or was that a marriage of convenience?
3. Zipporah's father is called several different names in Scripture—Jethro, Reuel ("Friend of God"), and sometimes the "priest of Midian." Do we know anything more about him? Reuel was probably a personal name; Jethro a title.
4. When Zipporah married Moses, did she have any idea what she was getting into?
5. How did Moses meet Zipporah? Why was Moses in the Midianite desert? Do we know where the Midianite desert is? When Moses fled from Egypt, did he flee in his princely clothing? What kind of relationships had Jethro and his family had with Egyptians in the past? Did Jethro's daughters identify Moses because of his dress or because of his speech? What language did they use to communicate with each other? What do you think took place at the well where Moses first met the daughters of Jethro? How did Moses go about defending these girls?
6. Why do you think the Egyptians were so willing to turn on Moses? Is it possible that the Pharaoh was a rival of Moses? Was he afraid that Moses was a threat? Zipporah's story sounds something like a fairy tale! She was apparently the oldest daughter of a nomad shepherd living in a remote corner of the world. She ended up marrying a foreign prince who in turn ended up being the military and spiritual leader for millions of followers. Was there anything in her background or her childhood that prepared her for that role?
7. Reuel, or Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was a priest. To whom did he minister? The name Reuel means "friend of God." Do you think that was a title or a name given to him by his associates? Do you think that the home of Jethro reminded Moses of his childhood home?
8. What kind of relationship do you think developed between Jethro and Moses? Did Moses's training at the palace prepare him to be a shepherd? Why did God make His people suffer for 40 more years in slavery while He left His servant, Moses, out in the wilderness to herd sheep? Couldn't Moses have gone back to Egypt and done what he needed to do sooner?
9. What did Moses learn in those 40 years while herding sheep? Do you think Moses was away from his home and family for extended periods of time?
10. After the "burning bush experience," Moses returned to his father-in-law's home and said, "I need to return to Egypt to see if my relatives are still alive!" Was that a deception? Did Moses tell his father-in-law, his wife, and their other family members about the burning

bush?

11. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* describes Jethro as a pagan priest or at least a polytheist. Do you agree with that assessment?
12. Is it possible that Moses was embarrassed or even afraid to tell his in-laws about his experience with the burning bush?
13. In this lesson there is considerable discussion about in-laws. Even in our day of nuclear families, it is true that when one marries, he/she is “marrying” the whole family. How do you reconcile the two commands from God: “A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh;” (Genesis 2:24, *NKJV*) and “Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12, *NKJV*) Is it possible to observe both of these commands at the same time?
14. Moses had lost contact with his own families—both his Hebrew family and his Egyptian family. Did he adopt this Midianite family as his new family?
15. Read Exodus 4:19-26. What happened in this story? By that time Moses had two children, Gershom and Eleazar. Reading between the lines, we can see that Moses had not circumcised his youngest son. At issue was the basic question—was this family going to be an Israelite family or a Midianite family? See *Patriarchs and Prophets* pages 255, 256:

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 [256] 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.** {PP 255.5}

**In the time of trouble just before the coming of Christ, the righteous will be preserved through the ministration of heavenly angels; but there will be no security for the transgressor of God's law. Angels cannot then protect those who are disregarding one of the divine precepts.** {PP 256.1}

16. Is it really true that if we neglect some tiny detail of God's instructions, He cannot work with us or bless us? Doesn't that sound “exacting”? The words from Ellen White suggest that it is not that God will not work with such people but that He cannot! What do those words mean? Notice that similar conditions will exist at the end of time.
17. Some time later in the journey of the children of Israel through the desert, trouble arose. It appears that Moses chose the advice of his wife and his father-in-law without specifically consulting his brother and his sister, Aaron and Miriam. Was that an error on Moses' part? Why do you think it so upset Aaron and Miriam?

18. Read God's response to Aaron and Miriam in Numbers 12:4-12:

<sup>4</sup>Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "I want the three of you to come out to the Tent of my presence." They went, <sup>5</sup>and the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, stood at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, "Aaron! Miriam!" The two of them stepped forward, <sup>6</sup>and the LORD said, "Now hear what I have to say! When there are prophets among you, I reveal myself to them in visions and speak to them in dreams. <sup>7</sup>It is different when I speak with my servant Moses; I have put him in charge of all my people Israel. <sup>8</sup>So I speak to him face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he has even seen my form! How dare you speak against my servant Moses?"

<sup>9</sup>The LORD was angry with them; and so as he departed <sup>10</sup>and the cloud left the Tent, Miriam's skin was suddenly covered with a dreaded disease and turned as white as snow. When Aaron looked at her and saw that she was covered with the disease, <sup>11</sup>he said to Moses, "Please, sir, do not make us suffer this punishment for our foolish sin. <sup>12</sup>Don't let her become like something born dead with half its flesh eaten away." (GNB)

19. Does that seem a little extreme to you? Do you think the response of Aaron and Miriam was based on racial prejudice, jealousy, or both?
20. Even later in the history of their wanderings, Moses invited his brother-in-law, Hobab, presumably Zipporah's brother, to join them and become a part of God's covenant people. Did Moses feel that God's guidance—as given through the pillar of cloud and of fire—was not adequate? What additional help did he expect to receive from Hobab?
21. Clearly, we are told in other parts of Scripture that God is seeking to reach out to all nations. (Isaiah 56:1-7; Romans 11:17-19) What do you think was Moses' motive for asking his brother-in-law to go with them? Did his father-in-law go as well? Was that for the purpose of maintaining some family for Zipporah?
22. What kind of prejudices are apparent in your family and your culture? Last week we talked about Jacob going to Haran to find a wife. Was that because he was prejudiced against Canaanites?
23. In this lesson we see that sudden and massive changes can occur in people's lives. Sometimes, those changes are a direct result of the hand of God. People find themselves suddenly in a position they had no dream of ever being in! Are we prepared to step up and speak the truth for God—even before national councils and even before the entire universe?

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