

Moses and Zipporah: Learning to Work Together



SABBATH—JULY 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Exodus 2–4; Exodus 18:1–27; Numbers 12:1–4.

MEMORY VERSE: “Moses had faith. So he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. That happened after he had grown up. He chose to be treated badly together with the people of God. He chose that instead of enjoying sin’s pleasures for a short time” (Hebrews 11:24, 25, NIV).

MOSES IS ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN PEOPLE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. Zipporah, his wife, is not as well known. She was from a nation others looked down on, and she remained in the background as much as possible. But she turned out to be a faithful¹ wife who remained with Moses during the problems that happened while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness. At the same time, Moses’ marriage to Zipporah brought her father, Jethro, into the family of Moses. And this turned out to be a great blessing to Moses and to the children of Israel. We can learn many lessons from their story. Maybe the most important one is this: The right family relations can be wonderful. But the wrong ones, sadly, can bring terrible results.

THIS WEEK’S STUDY UP CLOSE: When Zipporah married Moses, she had no idea what her life would be like. But she and her family were a great help to Moses in his work for God. This week we will learn just what blessings a good wife and good in-laws can bring.

1. faithful—being true and loyal; being someone that others can count on.

SUNDAY—JULY 29**THE HERO AT THE WELL
(Exodus 2:15–17)**

Why did Moses flee in Exodus 2:11–15? What does this event tell us about the kind of person Moses was? What does this tell us about Moses' love for his own people, even though he enjoyed special favors in Pharaoh's house in Egypt?

Since we know what kind of person Moses was, why are we not surprised at his actions in Exodus 2:15–17 and Acts 7:23–29?



Moses fought off the rough shepherds.

Moses sat by the well. He noticed that rough shepherds had waited till the seven daughters of Jethro had drawn water for their flock. Then the shepherds drove the women away so that they could water their own sheep with that water (Exodus 2:17). Moses could not stand injustice.² This is what had gotten Moses into trouble in Egypt.

2. injustice—something that is not fair; when people are not treated fairly.

3. influenced—had power over, or an effect on, persons or things.

According to Exodus 2:19, the daughters of Jethro described Moses to their father as an “Egyptian,” probably because of his dress. This showed how the Egyptian way of life had influenced³ Moses. Moses was clearly a foreigner. Exodus 2:19 does not say how Moses fought off the rough shepherds. But Moses clearly had enough power and strength to drive the shepherds away.

Reuel, another name for Jethro (see Exodus 2:18; Exodus 3:1), scolds the girls for not inviting their hero (Moses) home for supper. So Reuel tells the girls to invite Moses to eat with their family. Later Zipporah, probably the oldest daughter, is promised to Moses in marriage. In return, Moses takes charge of his father-in-law's flock (Exodus 3:1), just as Jacob did for Laban several hundred years earlier.

It was one of Moses' own people who put Moses' life in danger. What does this show us about how careful we need to be with those who are closest to us so that we do not hurt them by mistake?

MONDAY—JULY 30**MOSES AND HIS FATHER-IN-LAW
(Exodus 4:18)**

Moses' father-in-law has at least two names. Those two names are Reuel (Exodus 2:18) and Jethro (Exodus 3:1). Reuel means “friend of God” and could be a title that he held as a priest.

Several people in the Old Testament had more than one name (Esau/Edom, Jacob/Israel).



Jethro ordered his daughters to invite Moses to eat with them.

When Jethro hears how Moses chased away the rough shepherds from the well, he scolds his daughters. Jethro ordered them to invite Moses for a meal. Moses was happy to stay with Jethro. In fact, he spent 40 peaceful years in Jethro's home.

Read carefully Moses' words to his father-in-law in Exodus 4:18. What reasons does Moses give for wanting to return to Egypt? What reasons does Moses not give? Was he not being honest?

Jethro does not appear in the Bible again until Exodus 18:1–12. Imagine how surprised he was! His son-in-law (Moses) leaves on what was supposed to be a family visit. But then Moses comes back the leader of sev-

eral million people! This must have had a strong effect on Jethro. He gave praise and sacrifices⁴ to the Lord (Exodus 18:10–12).

What proof do we find in Exodus 18 of Moses' great respect for his father-in-law? What proof of the great wisdom of Jethro do we find here?

Moses' father-in-law gave Moses good advice⁵ in governing (ruling) these people. Moses clearly believed that Jethro's plan must have been God's will. If not, Moses would not have done what Jethro told him to do.

How easy it could have been for Moses to not follow the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law, who was born and lived in another land. Instead, Moses did what Jethro told him to do. What is the lesson here for us? How open are you to good advice, even when it comes from people you did not think could help you?

TUESDAY—JULY 31

ZIPPORAH AND HER HUSBAND'S RELIGION (Exodus 4:19–26)

What is happening in Exodus 4:19–26? Why did Zipporah do what she did?

Several peoples of the Near East in

4. sacrifices—gifts and offerings given to God.

5. advice—what you are told to do or how to do it; opinion.

Moses' time practiced circumcision.⁶ But God used circumcision as a sign of His special connection (closeness) with His chosen people. God told Abraham to circumcise⁷ every male in his household on the eighth day (Genesis 17:9–14). Abraham was 99 when he and his household were circumcised.

The Bible helps us understand how serious it was for Moses to fail to circumcise his son. God tells Moses to demand that Pharaoh let Israel, “‘my firstborn son,’ go” (Exodus 4:22, NIV). As a result of not letting His “firstborn son,” Israel, go, God plans to kill Pharaoh’s firstborn son (Exodus 4:22, 23). In the next verse (Exodus 4:24), we also learn that God planned to kill Moses for not circumcising his son, most likely his firstborn (Exodus 2:22).

By answering the following questions, try to understand what happened from God’s point of view:

(1) Did Moses know that Israelite male children were to be circumcised? (2) Did Moses know about the meaning of circumcision? (3) How might the Israelites feel if they knew that Moses had not circumcised his son? (4) How would God feel about His chosen messenger openly not following His command?

Moses was at the beginning of a mission that is a matter of life and

death for the Egyptians and for the Israelites too. Moses’ own life or the Israelites’ might be in danger if their rescue failed. Moses’ own safety lay in the hands God. God’s instructions (plans) for our lives must not be disobeyed at all.

We do not know why Zipporah called Moses a “‘bridegroom of blood’ ” (Exodus 4:25, NIV). Perhaps circumcision was a “bloody” ritual to Zipporah. Circumcision may have disgusted her. Perhaps Zipporah had not agreed to the circumcision of her son; so, she felt that she was to blame for what was happening. Anyway, she saw that God was not pleased; so, she went ahead with circumcising her son. She did something that Moses, God’s man, should have done himself.

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 1

ZIPPORAH WITH MIRIAM AND AARON (Numbers 12:1–3)

There is a suggestion that the Cushite wife in Numbers 12:1–3 may not be Zipporah. This is because Zipporah was a Midianite. Some think the woman here was a new wife that Moses could have taken after the death of Zipporah. But there is no biblical proof for a second marriage of Moses. A second marriage would have been a big event if there had been one. Zipporah the Midianite might also be a Cushite too (Habakkuk 3:7). Cushan is used as

6. circumcision—cutting off the foreskin of a male’s penis (physical); separation of oneself from sin (spiritual).

7. circumcise—cutting off the foreskin of the penis.

another word for Midian, and Cushan may even be an older word for Midian.

What can we learn about the character⁸ and talents of Miriam from Exodus 2:1–9; Exodus 15:20, 21; and Micah 6:4? Read also Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*,⁹ p. 382.



Miriam and Aaron complained to Moses about his wife. Hatred of others who are not like us is one of the most evil results of the Fall.

What bad traits¹⁰ are found in both Miriam and Aaron in Numbers 12:1?

Human prejudice¹¹ is one of the evil results of the Fall. Even people as gifted and honored and blessed as Miriam and Aaron were not safe from feelings of prejudice. What made things worse was that Zipporah had

proved herself loyal and true to Israel through all the troubles of the Israelite nation. According to Exodus 4:20, Zipporah and her children went with Moses back to Egypt. And she saved Moses' life (Exodus 4:26). Who knows what would have happened to Israel if Moses had died. Even worse was that this kind of prejudice came from leaders of Israel who themselves suffered from the prejudice of the Egyptians.

What was the real issue in the attack on Moses' wife in Numbers 12:2?

Miriam and Aaron may have felt that they were losing their power over the people. So they put the blame for this loss on the wife of Moses. It is Zipporah's father who told Moses to choose many leaders. These leaders brought to Moses only the problems they could not solve. The attack on Zipporah may have been an excuse to take power from Moses. Aaron and Miriam may never have truly accepted the wife of their brother.

Why is prejudice disgusting to those who follow Christ? How can Jesus free your heart of this sinful disease?

8. character—who you are; all the things that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; your character is the sum of the choices you make, such as the choice to be honest or to cheat.

9. patriarchs and prophets—patriarchs were early Bible leaders, such as Abraham and Isaac or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men and women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

10. traits—qualities or features, such as being honest and faithful, that make you who you are.

11. prejudice—(1) hating a person because of the person's skin color, religion, or sex (gender); not liking a person because he or she is different from you; not liking someone because he or she looks different or does things differently. (2) An opinion that a person has against another person or thing.

THURSDAY—AUGUST 2**MOSES AND HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW (Numbers 10:29–32)**

When you get married, you do not marry just your husband or wife. You also get his or her family. This was true for Moses too.

What is going on in Numbers 10:29, 30 between Moses and Hobab? Why did Moses make this offer?

According to Moses, if Hobab agreed to come, Hobab and his family would receive God's blessings promised for Israel. At the same time, Hobab would provide family for Zipporah, Moses' wife.

What symbol¹² is used in Isaiah 56:3 and Romans 11:17–19 to teach the idea that Gentiles shared in the blessings of Israel?

From the stories of Moses it was clear that God had His hand over the Israelites. Their future held great promise. But a life of wandering was tough. Moses, their leader, was Hobab's brother-in-law. But it was not easy for Hobab to leave his people and join with another group of people. Maybe that is why Hobab said "No."

What does Moses say in Numbers 10:31, 32 that shows

some "selfish" reasons that Moses may have had for wanting Hobab to come with Israel?

It is hard to understand why Moses may have wanted Hobab's help on the journey when the pillar of cloud led the people. On the day the tabernacle¹³ was completed and set up, the cloud settled over it (read Numbers 9). The cloud gave the signal to the camp of Israel to stop moving and to start going again. So, Hobab was not needed to help with that. But since Hobab knew the area so well, maybe Moses thought this knowledge a big help to the Lord's leading. Hobab could show the Israelites certain things about the area that could help them as they followed the cloud.

What decisions (choices) do you need to make soon? As you make plans, ask yourself, "What are my reasons for wanting to make this choice?" After thinking about those reasons, do you need to change your plans? Is doing the right thing for the wrong reason still doing the "right" thing?

FRIDAY—AUGUST 3

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "The Aged [Very Old] Parents," pp. 360–364, in *The Adventist Home*.

"Zipporah was not an Israelite. But she was a worshiper of the true God.

12. symbol—an object, mark, sign, or person that stands for, or means the same thing as, another object, idea, or thing.

13. tabernacle—a place of worship or house of God.

She was a shy and quiet and loving person. She grew upset when she saw people suffer. This is why Moses, while on his way to Egypt, had agreed that Zipporah could go back to stay with her family in Midian. Moses wanted to save her from the pain of watching the judgments¹⁴ that were to fall on the Egyptians.

“When Zipporah joined her husband again in the wilderness, she saw that his work was wearing away his strength. So, she told Jethro, her father, of her fears. Jethro made many good suggestions [ideas] for helping Moses. This was the chief reason for Miriam’s prejudice¹⁵ against Zipporah. Miriam blamed the wife of Moses for causing him to forget her [Miriam] and Aaron. Miriam also thought that Zipporah’s influence¹⁶ had stopped Moses from depending on advice [wisdom] from



Zipporah saw that Moses’ work was wearing away his strength.—Adapted, Ellen G White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 384.

her and Aaron the way Moses had done in the past.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*,¹⁷ pp. 383, 384.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ What kind of prejudice do you find in the place where you live and work? Do people treat other people badly because of skin color, religion, for being born in another country, for reasons having to do with being male or female, or for being poor? What have been the sad results? How can we learn to detect (find) prejudice in ourselves? What can we do to help get rid of this prejudice from the workplace, the church, and ourselves?

❷ As we saw earlier, the daughters of Jethro at first thought that Moses was an Egyptian. This shows the power of culture¹⁸ over our lives. What culture are you living in? How does your culture influence¹⁹ your faith? As a class, talk about the things in your culture that go well with your faith and the things that do not go well with it. Point out several of the problem areas. Then talk about what kinds of things you can do to help yourselves and other church members work through these problems.

14. judgments—the punishment received for doing wrong.

15. prejudice—(1) hating a person because of the person’s skin color, religion, or sex (gender); not liking a person because he or she is different from you; not liking someone because he or she looks different or does things differently. (2) An opinion that a person has against another person or thing.

16. influence—power to affect or change persons or things.

17. patriarchs and prophets—patriarchs were early Bible leaders, such as Abraham and Isaac or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men and women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

18. culture—the ideas, skills, arts, tools, and way of life of a certain people at a certain time; civilization.

19. influence—have power over, or an effect on, persons or things.