

Did Moses have children?

According to 1 Chronicles 23:14-15, Moses had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, who were counted as part of Levi, the priestly tribe dedicated to the responsibilities of worship in the tabernacle.

In Exodus 2, Moses fled from Egypt after killing an Egyptian whom he had seen beating a Hebrew slave. Moses went to live in the land of Midian, where he met Zipporah and her father Jethro (who was also called Reuel). Moses married Zipporah and settled down there to work for Jethro as a shepherd (verse 21). Moses and Zipporah had a son whom Moses named Gershom, saying, “I have become a foreigner in a foreign land” (verse 22). Gershom means “sojourner there.” The birth of Gershom seemed to be a sign for Moses that he had done the right thing by fleeing from Egypt.

Moses and Zipporah had a second son in Midian. His name, Eliezer, means “my God is helper.” Moses named Eliezer in response to God helping him escape Egypt as a fugitive on the charge of murder. Eliezer is only mentioned twice in the Bible, and then only as Moses’ son (Exodus 18:4 and 1 Chronicles 23:15). Nothing more is known of Eliezer except that he had one son named Rahabiah, who had numerous descendants (1 Chronicles 23:17, 25-26).

A perplexing account involving Moses, his wife, and their son Gershom is found in Exodus 4:24-26. After receiving God’s call to return to Egypt to lead the Hebrew people out of bondage (Exodus 3:7-4:9), Moses took Zipporah and their two children and began to travel to Egypt. Along the way, God came without warning to kill Moses. Moses, who was about to lead the circumcised people of Israel, had not yet circumcised his own son.

Zipporah quickly intervened, taking a flint knife to circumcise Gershom, in conformity with the prescribed sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. She touched her husband's feet with the child's foreskin and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me" (Exodus 4:25). After that, God let Moses live (verse 26).

Moses' failure to circumcise Gershom was a serious offense to God. Some scholars suggest that Moses had not circumcised the child because Zipporah was opposed to the practice, as her "bridegroom of blood" comment seems to indicate. In any event, God made it abundantly clear to Moses that he must be obedient in all aspects of the covenantal relationship if he was to be a fitting mediator and savior to God's people. For Moses to successfully carry out God's commission, he would have to prove himself to be a faithful servant of the Lord in his own house first.

It was probably at this point that Zipporah and her two sons were sent back to Jethro in Midian, because they did not end up accompanying Moses all the way to Egypt (Exodus 18:2-3). Moses' wife and two children remained in the care of Jethro until God had miraculously delivered the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt. Jethro returned Zipporah, Gershom, and Eliezer to Moses after the Israelites had reached Mount Sinai in the desert (Exodus 18:5-12).