

Exodus 33

Exodus 32-34 portray a low-point in the life of Israel. Israel was given the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 plus further laws through Exodus 23. In Exodus 24:3, 7, the nation committed themselves to obeying God's laws. Then Moses returned to Mount Sinai to receive the details for the tabernacle, through which Israel could worship God. He was gone for 40 days and 40 nights (24:18), during which time Israel builds a golden calf, violating the first two of the Ten Commandments as well as their commitment to be faithful to God. In this chapter, they will get a sense of the heinousness of their sin.

TRANSLATION - 33:1-8:

1 And Jehovah spoke to Moses, "Go! Go up from here - you and the people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob saying, 'To your seed, I will give it.' **2** And I will send before you an angel and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites and Hittites and Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. **3** To a land flowing with milk and honey because I will not go up in your midst because a strong necked people you [are]; otherwise I will consume you on the way." **4** And the people heard this calamitous word and they mourned and did not put a man his jewelry on him.

5 And Jehovah said to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel, you [are] a people strong necked, instantly once I will go up in your midst, then I will destroy you and now, remove your jewelry from on you and I will know what I will do to you." **6** So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their jewelry at the Mountain of Horeb. **7** And Moses took the tent and he removed it outside from the camp at a distance from the camp and he called to him at the tent of meeting and it was all those seeking Jehovah went up to the tent of meeting which [was] outside from the camp. **8** And it was when Moses went up to the tent the people arose and they stood a man at the door of the tent and they gazed after Moses until he went into the tent.

HEBREW WORDS:

"To send" (ver. 2) was used earlier at 2:5. "To drive out" was used earlier at 2:17. For these nations, see 3:8, 17. For the phrase "milk and honey," see 3:8. "Calamitous" (ver. 4) is the word "evil," but here it refers to what God is doing and He cannot do moral evil. This is the only use of "to mourn" in Exodus; it is used 36 times in the OT. "Jewelry" is used three times in this text: 33:4-6. It is used 14 times in the OT. "To destroy" (ver. 5) was used earlier at 5:13-14.

"To strip" (ver. 6) was used earlier at 2:19. "To stand" (ver. 8) is used earlier at 2:4. "To gaze" was used only once before in Exodus, at 3:6.

REFERENCES (REFERIRI) AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

See comments and references at Exodus 2:24 relative to God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give them the land of Canaan.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

On "Mount Horeb," see comments at 3:1.

COMMENTARY:

In verse 1, Jehovah makes several comments. First, He commands Moses to leave Mount Sinai and lead the people. Secondly, He identifies Israel as the people whom Moses had brought up from the land of Egypt (compare 32:7, 11). Thirdly, He reminds Moses and Israel of the covenant which He had made with Israel, through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - the covenant which Israel was in danger of losing through their idolatry!

In verse 2, Jehovah states that He will send a messenger, an angel, to drive out the inhabitants of the land, consistent with Jehovah's words in 3:8. Observe that, although Israel would have to fight to take the land, Jehovah is the One who will drive out the inhabitants Himself. In verse 3, God reminds Israel - through Moses - of the blessings available for them in

the land. He also states that He will not go from Mount Sinai with Israel because Israel was an obstinate people, literally a “strong necked” people, and His holiness would destroy them. Israel will be identified as “obstinate” on many occasions: Exo. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9.

Israel received this message, through Moses, and it caused them to mourn and to repent (ver. 4), which is what God desired them to do. They chose not to put on their jewelry or ornaments, probably because it was related to idolatry or had motivated them to engage in idolatry (see Exodus 32:2-3; Genesis 35:1-4). Verse 6 suggests that Israel did not engage in this type of idolatry again, at least not during the days Moses or Joshua.

The tent mentioned in verse 7 is not the tent for worship, since it has not yet been constructed. This is likely a special meeting place between Moses and Jehovah God. It was pitched outside of the camp of Israel, a distance away because of the holiness of the place where God would come and commune with Moses. When Israel sought Jehovah’s words (compare 18:19-20), they would come to this tent. When Moses entered the tent, Israel would rise out of respect for Jehovah God and His messenger (ver. 8).

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - For further reference to Israel being obstinate, see: Deut. 2:30. Beginning at 27:21, the phrase “tent of meeting” is used 146 times in the OT. Most of its occasions refer to the tent for worship, the tabernacle. However, in this text and the next chapter, it seems like it was a separate tent in which Moses communed with Jehovah, before the tabernacle was constructed.

Later Jewish writers - The prophets also identify Israel as obstinate: ; Isaiah 48:4; Ezekiel 2:4; 3:7. While “tent of meeting” is used mostly in the Law, it is used frequently in the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles: 1 Chron. 6:32; 9:21; 23:32; 2 Chron. 1:3, 6, 13; 5:5.

NT writers - God requires humility and repentance of Christians, just as He required it of the Israelites. “Repent” and “repentance” are found 56 times in the NT. “Humble” is found 20 times while “humility” is found 6 times: Acts 20:19; Eph. 4:2; Phil. 2:3; Col. 3:12; James 1:21; 1 Peter 5:5.

TRANSLATION - 33:9-16:

9 And it was when Moses went to the tent, there came down the pillar of cloud and stood at the door of the tent and He spoke with Moses. **10** And all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the door of the tent and all the people arose and worshipped each at the door of the tent.

11 And Jehovah spoke to Moses face to face just as he will speak a man to his friend and he returned to the camp and his servant Joshua, the son of Nun did not leave from the midst of the tent. **12** And Moses spoke to Jehovah, “See - you are saying to me - Bring up the people. And you have not made known who you will send with me. And you will say, ‘I know you by name’ and even ‘you will find grace in My eyes.’ **13** And now, if please I find grace in your eyes, make known please your way and I will know for what sake I will find grace in your eyes and see that your people is this nation.”

14 And He said, “My presence will go and I will give you rest.” **15** And he said to Him, “If your face is not going, do not bring us up from here. **16** And what will be known then that I will find grace in your eyes, I and your people? Will not your going with us and we are different I and your people from all the people who [are] on the face of the land?”

HEBREW WORDS:

“Pillar” (ver. 9) was used earlier at 13:21-22. “To worship” (ver. 10) was used earlier at 4:31. “Servant” (ver. 11) is used earlier at 24:13. “To leave” was used earlier at 13:22. The verb “to know” (ver. 12) was used earlier at 1:8. “Grace” was used earlier at 3:21. “To give rest” (ver. 14) is related to the name “Noah;” it was used earlier at 10:14. “To be different” (ver. 16) is used earlier at 8:18.

COMMENTARY:

In verse 9, Moses goes into further detail about the events which happened when Moses would enter the “tent of meeting” to learn of God’s will. The pillar of cloud, in which was the presence of Jehovah God (13:21-22; 14:19-20, 24; 16:10), would descend on the tent of meeting while Moses was inside. This was to inform the Israelites that God’s presence was in the tent, speaking with Moses. At the appearance of the cloud (ver. 10), Israel would worship, each family at his own tent. In this way, Jehovah would speak with Moses (face to face; see Num. 12:8), in the manner in which friends would talk. While Moses was in the tent (ver. 11), Joshua, his young servant, would remain in front of the tent, perhaps to guard it from the intrusion of prideful Israelites.

Moses returns to the conversation between himself and Jehovah, which he left off at 33:3. In response to Jehovah’s statement that He would not go with Israel from Mount Sinai, Moses begins to present a case to Jehovah that Moses needed His presence. In verse 12, Moses states that Jehovah told him to “bring up” the people of Israel. Yet, Moses does not want to go alone. Next, Moses states that Jehovah said He knew Moses by name and that Moses had found “grace” or “favor” before Him. Therefore, in verse 13, Moses wants to know God’s “ways.” If Moses knows God’s “ways,” then Moses will be able to stay faithful to Him. Moses reminds Jehovah again that Israel was *His* people (cf. 32:11-14).

In verse 15, Moses tells Jehovah that if His presence does not go with Israel as they leave Mount Sinai, then Moses does not want to go. Indeed, who wants to travel through life without Jehovah God with them? Moses asks a question in verse 16: how can Moses know that he has found grace before Jehovah God if Jehovah does not go with him? With Jehovah’s presence with them, then the world will know that they are God’s people.

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - God cannot be present in the midst of sin (Hab. 1:13). We see the hint here that man needs a mediator to cleans him so that he can be in God’s holy presence.

NT writers - The gospel message is fundamentally about how God can save sinful man through Jesus Christ to His own glory. Paul will discuss this point in Romans (see 3:22-24).

TRANSLATION - 33:17-23:

17 And Jehovah said to Moses, “Even this word which you have spoken I will do that you will find grace in My eyes and I know you by name.” **18** And he said, “Show me, please, Your glory.”

19 And He said, “I will cause to pass by all My goodness before your face and I will call by name Jehovah before your face and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

20 And He said, “You are not able to see My face because man cannot see Me and live.

21 And Jehovah said, “Behold a place with Me and you will stand at the rock. **22** And it will be when My glory passes by that I will put you in the crag of the rock and I will cover you with My hand until I pass by. **23** And I will remove My hand and you will see after Me, but My face will not be seen.”

HEBREW WORDS:

“Glory” (ver. 18) was used earlier at 16:7, 10. “To pass by” (ver. 19) was used earlier at 12:12, 23. “Goodness” is used only here in Exodus; it is used 32 times in the OT. “To be gracious” is related to the noun “grace.” It is used only here in Exodus; it is used 77 times in the OT. “To have compassion” is used only here in Exodus; it is used 47 times in the OT.

“To stand” (ver. 21) was used earlier at 2:4. “Rock” was used earlier at 17:6. “Crag” or “cleft” (ver. 22) is used only twice; here and Isaiah 2:21. “To cover” was used earlier at 25:20. “To remove” (ver. 23) was used first at 3:3-4.

REFERENCES (REFERIRI) AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

Jacob wrestled with God and saw His face in Genesis 32:30.

COMMENTARY:

In verse 17, Jehovah God responds. First, He tells Moses that he has found grace before Jehovah and that Jehovah does know him by name. At this point, Moses cries to Jehovah, "Show me Your glory!" This seems to suggest that Moses wanted some type of visual, as opposed to auditory, confirmation that he was speaking to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the heavens and the earth.

To this cry, Jehovah states to Moses (ver. 19) that He will allow His goodness to pass before Moses, to "proclaim the name of Jehovah" to him. Jehovah shows His "goodness" to Moses by allowing him a glimpse of God's glory without being destroyed by that sight. Jehovah will be gracious to the ones to whom He chooses to be gracious and show compassion to those to whom He chooses to show compassion. In this case, it is Moses who receives God's grace and compassion. However, in verse 20, Jehovah states to Moses that no one can look at Jehovah's full glory (His "face") and live. Instead, there was a rock present with a crack in it large enough for Moses to enter (ver. 21), so that Jehovah would pass by Him and block much of His glory so that it would not consume Moses (ver. 22). Moses would be allowed to see enough of Jehovah's glory so that it would strengthen his faith without destroying him. When Jehovah says that Moses will see His "back" (ver. 23), He uses an anthropomorphism, a figure of speech which uses human terms to refer to God. The idea is that Moses would only see a partial view of Jehovah's glory; he would not see His "face," or His full glory. That would have to wait until man sheds his physical body and puts on his spiritual body (2 Cor. 5:1-5; Matt. 5:8).

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - When the elders "saw" God in 24:9-10, they only saw the pavement beneath His feet. The Scriptures are consistent that man is not able to see God in His full glory: Deut. 4:15.

Later Jewish writers - Job expressed his desire to see God (19:26-27). King David also expressed a desire to see God (Psa. 17:15). When Isaiah "sees" God in Isaiah 6, he only sees the edge of His robe. God is described as being "good" in Psa. 86:5; 100:5; 118:1; Jer. 33:11. This means that God is *inherently* good and cannot do anything evil. It would violate His nature to do evil. There are also references to "seeing God" in: Judges 13:22; Daniel 7:9. On the "goodness" of God, see: Jeremiah 33:11; Hosea 3:5; Psalms 86:5; 106; 145:9.

NT writers - No one can see God (John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; 1 John 4:12), which is why Jesus Christ came in the flesh, so that whoever sees Jesus - even if it is through the written words of the Gospels - then He sees God (John 14:9). Jesus is "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). The apostle Paul, to illustrate God's sovereignty, quotes verse 19 in Romans 9:15.