

## Exodus Chapter Thirty-Three

Read **Exodus 33:1-6** – Israel Loses God's Presence

**v.1** “THEN THE **LORD** SAID TO MOSES, “DEPART *and* GO UP FROM HERE, YOU AND THE PEOPLE WHOM YOU HAVE BROUGHT OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, TO THE LAND OF WHICH I SWORE TO ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB, SAYING, ‘TO YOUR DESCENDANTS I WILL GIVE IT.’”

God now commands Moses to take the people of Israel and to up to the borders of the land when he had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to give to their descendants.

**Genesis 12:7** “THEN THE **LORD** APPEARED TO ABRAM AND SAID, “TO YOUR DESCENDANTS I WILL GIVE THIS LAND.” AND THERE HE BUILT AN ALTAR TO THE **LORD**, WHO HAD APPEARED TO HIM.”

**v.2** “AND I WILL SEND *My* ANGEL BEFORE YOU, AND I WILL DRIVE OUT THE CANAANITE AND THE AMORITE AND THE HITTITE AND THE PERIZZITE AND THE HIVITE AND THE JEBUSITE.”

In prior instructions we find that they were warned about the angel that was to lead them:

**Exodus 23:21-22** “BEWARE OF HIM AND OBEY HIS VOICE; DO NOT PROVOKE HIM, FOR HE WILL NOT PARDON YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS; FOR MY NAME *is* IN HIM. BUT IF YOU INDEED OBEY HIS VOICE AND DO ALL THAT I SPEAK, THEN I WILL BE AN ENEMY TO YOUR ENEMIES AND AN ADVERSARY TO YOUR ADVERSARIES.”

The angel that God promised to send to lead Israel had great power and authority. In this verse it seems that a lesser angel is being sent as nothing of this nature is mentioned. Israel has broken their covenant with God. God knows that this pattern of behavior would continue and did not want to destroy them.

**v.3** “*Go up* TO A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY; FOR I WILL NOT GO UP IN YOUR MIDST, LEST I CONSUME YOU ON THE WAY, FOR YOU *are* A STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE.”

Israel is to continue their sojourn and their journey toward Canaan. But God will not reside directly with them. His presence would be a great blessing but due to their rebellion, their refusal to humble themselves before him, serve him and keep His covenant they would be in danger of being destroyed.

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**v.4** “AND WHEN THE PEOPLE HEARD THIS BAD NEWS, THEY MOURNED, AND NO ONE PUT ON HIS ORNAMENTS.”

It is a custom, even unto this day, in the Middle East that those who are mourning do not wear their ornaments, or expensive jewelry. In this case it was God's command.

**v.5** “FOR THE **LORD** HAD SAID TO MOSES, “SAY TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, ‘YOU **are** A STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE. I COULD COME UP INTO YOUR MIDST IN ONE MOMENT AND CONSUME YOU. NOW THEREFORE, TAKE OFF YOUR ORNAMENTS, THAT I MAY KNOW WHAT TO DO TO YOU.’”

The laying aside of their ornament, and even their better clothing was to be a sign of repentance. We find similar activities throughout the scriptures. Even Ahab, one of the most wicked kings in Israel:

**I Kings 21:27** “SO IT WAS, WHEN AHAB HEARD THOSE WORDS, THAT HE TORE HIS CLOTHES AND PUT SACKCLOTH ON HIS BODY, AND FASTED AND LAY IN SACKCLOTH, AND WENT ABOUT MOURNING.”

As we studied in the book of Jonah, even those who were not of Israel, but under the Patriarchal Law knew what to do:

**Jonah 3:6-7** “THEN WORD CAME TO THE KING OF NINEVEH; AND HE AROSE FROM HIS THRONE AND LAID ASIDE HIS ROBE, COVERED **himself** WITH SACKCLOTH AND SAT IN ASHES. AND HE CAUSED **it** TO BE PROCLAIMED AND PUBLISHED THROUGHOUT NINEVEH BY THE DECREE OF THE KING AND HIS NOBLES, SAYING, LET NEITHER MAN NOR BEAST, HERD NOR FLOCK, TASTE ANYTHING; DO NOT LET THEM EAT, OR DRINK WATER.”

**v.6** “SO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL STRIPPED THEMSELVES OF THEIR ORNAMENTS BY MOUNT HOREB.”

Some had already removed their ornaments or jewelry in order for Aaron to make the golden calf. Now, all of Israel follows suit as a show of repentance.

Read **Exodus 33:7-11** – Moses Dwelling Moved

**v.7** “MOSES TOOK HIS TENT AND PITCHED IT OUTSIDE THE CAMP, FAR FROM THE CAMP, AND CALLED IT THE TABERNACLE OF MEETING. AND IT CAME TO PASS **that** EVERYONE WHO SOUGHT THE **LORD** WENT OUT TO THE TABERNACLE OF MEETING WHICH **was** OUTSIDE THE CAMP.”

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We remember from our earlier study that Moses and God functioned as the Supreme Court of Israel. This was established when Jethro advised Moses concerning how to govern Israel. Based on Jethro's advice, Moses chose men to lead and judge 10's, 100's, and 1000's reserving for Moses only the hardest cases and those that God should decide.

**Exodus 18:26** "SO THEY JUDGED THE PEOPLE AT ALL TIMES; THE HARD CASES THEY BROUGHT TO MOSES, BUT THEY JUDGED EVERY SMALL CASE THEMSELVES."

So since God can no longer reside within the camp of Israel, or meet with Moses within the camp of Israel, Moses moves his tent, his dwelling far outside the camp. There he will be free to meet with God without God being required to enter the camp of Israel. Their sin had separated them from God, just as ours does today.

The tabernacle of God had not yet been built, the patterns and instructions had just been given so this is not the tabernacle that would serve as their place of worship.

**v.8** "SO IT WAS, WHENEVER MOSES WENT OUT TO THE TABERNACLE, *that* ALL THE PEOPLE ROSE, AND EACH MAN STOOD *at* HIS TENT DOOR AND WATCHED MOSES UNTIL HE HAD GONE INTO THE TABERNACLE."

Not only has God removed himself from the midst of sinful Israel but now Moses also has as well. So when he goes out to his tent, the men of Israel stand and watch, continuing until Moses has entered the tent.

**v.9** "AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN MOSES ENTERED THE TABERNACLE, THAT THE PILLAR OF CLOUD DESCENDED AND STOOD *at* THE DOOR OF THE TABERNACLE, AND *the LORD* TALKED WITH MOSES."

The pillar of cloud, the symbol of God's presence and which was used to lead them in the daylight hours:

**Exodus 13:20-21** "SO THEY TOOK THEIR JOURNEY FROM SUCCOTH AND CAMPED IN ETHAM AT THE EDGE OF THE WILDERNESS. AND THE **LORD** WENT BEFORE THEM BY DAY IN A PILLAR OF CLOUD TO LEAD THE WAY, AND BY NIGHT IN A PILLAR OF FIRE TO GIVE THEM LIGHT, SO AS TO GO BY DAY AND NIGHT."

So it was manifested to the children of Israel that God was there and God talked with Moses.

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**v.10** “ALL THE PEOPLE SAW THE PILLAR OF CLOUD STANDING *at* THE TABERNACLE DOOR, AND ALL THE PEOPLE ROSE AND WORSHIPED, EACH MAN *in* HIS TENT DOOR.”

We see an entirely different attitude in these people now that Moses has returned from the mountain, the calf has been destroyed and God has removed his presence from their midst. They now are willing to stand and worship, paying homage to God as he meets with Moses.

**v.11** “SO THE **LORD** SPOKE TO MOSES FACE TO FACE, AS A MAN SPEAKS TO HIS FRIEND. AND HE WOULD RETURN TO THE CAMP, BUT HIS SERVANT JOSHUA THE SON OF NUN, A YOUNG MAN, DID NOT DEPART FROM THE TABERNACLE.”

So we see here the relationship between Moses and God. Miriam and Aaron are reminded of this special relationship when they are rebuked for rebelling against Moses:

**Numbers 12:8** “I SPEAK WITH HIM FACE TO FACE, EVEN PLAINLY, AND NOT IN DARK SAYINGS; AND HE SEES THE FORM OF THE **LORD**. WHY THEN WERE YOU NOT AFRAID TO SPEAK AGAINST MY SERVANT MOSES?”

The record speaks of God and Moses speaking as friends, face to face, but no one has ever seen the face of God. Two references recorded by the apostle John:

**John 1:18** “NO ONE HAS SEEN GOD AT ANY TIME. THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, WHO IS IN THE BOSOM OF THE FATHER, HE HAS DECLARED *Him*.”

**I John 4:12** “NO ONE HAS SEEN GOD AT ANY TIME. IF WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER, GOD ABIDES IN US, AND HIS LOVE HAS BEEN PERFECTED IN US.”

When Moses leaves the tent of meeting, Joshua stays behind to commune with God on his own. This would indicate to the people that Joshua had the same kind of relationship with God as Moses did.

Read **Exodus 33:12-23** – Moses Reasons With God

**v.12** “THEN MOSES SAID TO THE **LORD**, “SEE, YOU SAY TO ME, ‘BRING UP THIS PEOPLE.’ BUT YOU HAVE NOT LET ME KNOW WHOM YOU WILL SEND WITH ME. YET YOU HAVE SAID, ‘I KNOW YOU BY NAME, AND YOU HAVE ALSO FOUND GRACE IN MY SIGHT.’”

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This is either a record of the discussion that Moses had with God when he was in the tent or he returned to the tent after the leaving that was recorded in verse 11. Moses complains to God that he has been given instructions to bring this stiff-necked people up to the land they have been promised, but God hasn't told him who will be assisting him. Moses knows that this task is impossible without God and without God's intervention. First of all he tells God that he has been assured that God knows him by name. We're reminded that our Savior also knows us by name:

**John 10:3** "TO HIM THE DOORKEEPER OPENS, AND THE SHEEP HEAR HIS VOICE; AND HE CALLS HIS OWN SHEEP BY NAME AND LEADS THEM OUT."

And God has told Moses that he has "FOUND GRACE" or divine favor in His sight. Moses feels like he's being treated like a step-child, not because of his own sin, but because of the sin of Israel.

**v.13** "NOW THEREFORE, I PRAY, IF I HAVE FOUND GRACE IN YOUR SIGHT, SHOW ME NOW YOUR WAY, THAT I MAY KNOW YOU AND THAT I MAY FIND GRACE IN YOUR SIGHT. AND CONSIDER THAT THIS NATION *is* YOUR PEOPLE."

Moses, since God has found favor with him, wants God to show him the way, His way, that he wants the children of Israel led to Canaan. Some might think that Moses is rebelling against the commandment God has given him, but while God is all powerful and rules over all He can still be approached with reason. We're reminded of His words to the prophet:

**Isaiah 1:18** "COME NOW, AND LET US REASON TOGETHER," SAYS THE LORD, "THOUGH YOUR SINS ARE LIKE SCARLET, THEY SHALL BE AS WHITE AS SNOW; THOUGH THEY ARE RED LIKE CRIMSON, THEY SHALL BE AS WOOL."

Moses also may be rankled just a little bit by God's words on the mountain because he reminds God that while these are his people, they are also God's people, people that He chose to lead out of Egypt.

**v.14** "AND HE SAID, "MY PRESENCE WILL GO *with you*, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST."

God's gives Moses the reassurance that He will indeed go with them. Apparently through all of this; God's relationship with Moses has not changed but His relationship with Israel has. Moses, and we as well, must remember that the presence of God has many forms, or as one commentator says, "many faces."

Just as the promised "land" of heaven is the place that we look forward to today as our "haven of rest" God has promised them rest in the promised land of Canaan. Moses reminds Israel of this just before God takes him away:

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**Deuteronomy 12:10** “BUT *when* YOU CROSS OVER THE JORDAN AND DWELL IN THE LAND WHICH THE **LORD** YOUR GOD IS GIVING YOU TO INHERIT, AND HE GIVES YOU REST FROM ALL YOUR ENEMIES ROUND ABOUT, SO THAT YOU DWELL IN SAFETY,”

But Moses needs further understanding.

**v.15** “THEN HE SAID TO HIM, “IF YOUR PRESENCE DOES NOT GO *with us*, DO NOT BRING US UP FROM HERE.”

Moses recognizes that without God and God’s assistance and outright intervention he cannot lead these people where they need to go. Men are in the same situation today, are we not? Like one of my favorite hymns says so beautifully, “without Him we can do nothing”. We’re reminded of the words of Jeremiah:

**Jeremiah 10:23** “O **LORD**, I KNOW THE WAY OF MAN *is* NOT IN HIMSELF; *It is* NOT IN MAN WHO WALKS TO DIRECT HIS OWN STEPS.”

We usually apply this verse to the necessity of man to follow the law of God but its application is much broader than duty. In the record of the Apostle John, John the Baptizer said it this way:

**John 3:27** “JOHN ANSWERED AND SAID, “A MAN CAN RECEIVE NOTHING UNLESS IT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO HIM FROM HEAVEN.”

This is a truth that Moses realized with his entire being and men desperately need today but have rejected.

**v.16** “FOR HOW THEN WILL IT BE KNOWN THAT YOUR PEOPLE AND I HAVE FOUND GRACE IN YOUR SIGHT, EXCEPT YOU GO WITH US? SO WE SHALL BE SEPARATE, YOUR PEOPLE AND I, FROM ALL THE PEOPLE WHO *are* UPON THE FACE OF THE EARTH.”

Moses continues to reason with God. How can they know that they and Moses personally, know that they are in favor with God if He refuses to accompany them on their journey? We’re reminded of the words of the prophet:

**Amos 3:3** “CAN TWO WALK TOGETHER, UNLESS THEY ARE AGREED?”

In the record of Amos, God applies this concept to Israel’s fellowship with the world, but we can turn this around and also ask, as Moses is here: “How can two be agreed without walking together?”

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If God separates himself from Israel, then how can they be led? Unless God goes with them, guides them, not just to the route that they must take but guides them as a nation they will fail and probably not survive.

God has plucked them out of all of the other peoples of the world, chosen them for his special purpose, the ultimate end of fulfilling the seed promise made in the garden to Eve (**Genesis 3:15**). He can't leave them now when they need him most.

**v.17** "SO THE **LORD** SAID TO MOSES, "I WILL ALSO DO THIS THING THAT YOU HAVE SPOKEN; FOR YOU HAVE FOUND GRACE IN MY SIGHT, AND I KNOW YOU BY NAME."

God reassures Moses. He will do as he has promised because Moses has "FOUND GRACE" or favor in His sight and He knows Moses, not only by name but the goodness of his heart as well. We can have no greater friend than God or His Son, Jesus Christ. Just as God assures Joshua:

**Joshua 1:5** "NO MAN SHALL *be able to* STAND BEFORE YOU ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE; AS I WAS WITH MOSES, SO I WILL BE WITH YOU. I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU."

And we also have been assured as well, in fact the Hebrew writer quotes Joshua:

**Hebrews 13:5** "*Let your* CONDUCT *be* WITHOUT COVETOUSNESS; *be* CONTENT WITH SUCH THINGS AS YOU HAVE. FOR HE HIMSELF HAS SAID, "*I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU.*"

**v.18** "AND HE SAID, "PLEASE, SHOW ME YOUR GLORY."

In response to God's assurance, Moses asks to see His glory. This reminds us of Jesus disciple, Phillip. Jesus has told them that he would be betrayed, that where he was going they could not follow. Then He told them not to be troubled, **John 14:1**. But Philip declares:

**John 14:8** "PHILIP SAID TO HIM, "LORD, SHOW US THE FATHER, AND IT IS SUFFICIENT FOR US."

Christ's assurance wasn't enough for Philip, and in this setting God's assurance isn't enough for Moses, he wants more. He wants to see God.

**v.19** "THEN HE SAID, "I WILL MAKE ALL MY GOODNESS PASS BEFORE YOU, AND I WILL PROCLAIM THE NAME OF THE **LORD** BEFORE YOU. I WILL BE GRACIOUS TO WHOM I WILL BE GRACIOUS, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I WILL HAVE COMPASSION."

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God tells Moses that He will choose. He will show grace or graciousness and compassion upon whom he will. We know that He will grant His grace, mercy and compassion upon those who are obedient to His commandments. To satisfy Moses' request he will indeed make all of his "GOODNESS" pass before him.

**v.20** "BUT HE SAID, "YOU CANNOT SEE MY FACE; FOR NO MAN SHALL SEE ME, AND LIVE."

However, there is one restriction left. Moses cannot see the face of God because he would die. This confirms the declarations made by the John the Baptizer in **John 1:18** and confirmed by John the Apostle in **I John 4:12**, that no man has seen the face of God. At the same time Moses has talked with God as though he was talking to a friend face to face.

**v.21** "AND THE **LORD** SAID, "HERE IS A PLACE BY ME, AND YOU SHALL STAND ON THE ROCK."

At the beginning of this section we discussed whether this was the conversation that Moses had with God in the tent of meeting or at some other time. This verse and those that follow would indicate that it was at another time and on the mountain where rocks and crevices were readily available. And again we see some symbolism between the physical realm of the Old Testament record and the spiritual record of the New. In the New Testament "THE ROCK" is Jesus Christ upon whom we stand and within whom we are hidden from the wrath of God with our sins forgiven.

We even sing the words from a song of David:

**Psalms 61:2** "FROM THE END OF THE EARTH I WILL CRY TO YOU, WHEN MY HEART IS OVERWHELMED; LEAD ME TO THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER THAN I."

**v.22** "SO IT SHALL BE, WHILE MY GLORY PASSES BY, THAT I WILL PUT YOU IN THE CLEFT OF THE ROCK, AND WILL COVER YOU WITH MY HAND WHILE I PASS BY."

God will accommodate Moses to this extent. He will be able to see the glory of God when he passes by, but he will not be allowed to see God's face. God will put him in a cleft or crevice in the rock and put his hand over him that he might not see until God wants him to see.

**v.23** "THEN I WILL TAKE AWAY MY HAND, AND YOU SHALL SEE MY BACK; BUT MY FACE SHALL NOT BE SEEN."

God will allow Moses to see his back, as one walking away would be seen, but not his face.