

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 24

Chapters 34

At the end of Exodus Chapter 33, the LORD had agreed to allow Moses to see His beauty. To do so, Moses would stand on a certain rock of the mountain to be in position for the viewing. When the LORD began to pass by Moses, the LORD would pick up Moses and place him in a hole in the mountain, cover the entrance with the palm of His hand and allow Moses to see His back as He moved away. Moses' wish would be granted, but not yet. The LORD had a few tasks for Moses before he could see the beauty or splendor of the LORD.

Moses to Cut New Tables

Exodus 34:1 Now the LORD said to Moses, "Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered. ² "So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain. ³ "And no man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of that mountain."

Moses had shattered the tablets of stone that the LORD had prepared just a day or so before. He had broken them in anger when he saw the people in the camp worshiping at the foot of the molten calf. Before the LORD would allow Moses to see His splendor, Moses would need to carve two new stones similar to those carved by the LORD previously. The LORD would rewrite the commandments on the stones that Moses prepared. The LORD gave Moses the rest of the day to go down the mountain, carve the two stones tablets and be ready to return to Sinai at the dawn of the next morning. He was to be careful that no person or animal followed him up the mountain. It was possible that Moses did not return to the camp to cut the stones. It is possible that Moses descended the mountain, below the cloud level, to cut the stones. From there, it might have been possible for people in the camp to see him and try to follow. Although this is complete speculation, it is logical. The LORD did not tell Moses to return to the camp. Later in this chapter, the Scripture indicates that Moses was on the mountain this time for 40 days and nights. If he did not go to the camp, then the time of cutting the two stone tablets was still part of the 40 days and nights; if not, then the 40-day period started anew. In this case, Moses most likely descended the mountain enough to exit the cloud in order to cut the stones and then returned to the cloud the next morning. It means that Moses did not leave the mountain and return to the camp.

Looking ahead in the Scripture we find that when Solomon built the Temple, no noise was to be heard on the holy mount (1 Kings 6:7). All the sound of the tools cutting the wood and stone was to be far enough away that it could not be heard on Mount Moriah. All the construction on that mount, the setting of the stones, the hanging of the joists, the covering of the roof, the placement

of the doors, was to be done in silence. This was the LORD's instruction then and it seems logical that the LORD did not want the sound of Moses hammering out the stones to be heard in the cloud on Mount Sinai, the place of the Holy Presence of the LORD at that time.

Moses Cuts Tablets

Exodus 34:4 So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand.

Following the LORD's instruction, Moses cut the stones that day and returned the next morning to the place on Mount Sinai where he was accustomed to meeting the LORD.

Moses Calls Upon the Name of the LORD

Exodus 34:5 And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. ⁶ Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

"And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD." When Moses returned to the place where he had left the LORD the day before, he "called upon the name of the LORD." The first time we saw man doing this is in Genesis 4:26 concerning Seth who was born to Adam when he was 130 years old. After the birth of Seth's son, Enos, Seth and all his godly line began to "call upon the name of the LORD." Seth's brother, Cain, had already moved to the east and away from Adam's family where he began his own family with his wife. By the time Enos was born, Cain's family was already blossoming in number. Cain's line did not "call upon the name of the LORD" at any time. Seth's did.

"Then the LORD passed by in front of him." We can safely assume that this was the "pass by" when the LORD allowed Moses to see His beauty. Moses had arrived on the rock where he was instructed to stand. He had the new stone tablets in his hand. The LORD placed him in the hole in the mountain, covered it with His palm and allowed Moses to see His back as He passed by. The wording is the same in this passage as it was in the instruction as to how the LORD would allow Moses to see His back including the words compassion and graciousness (Exodus 33:18-19).

In verses 6 and 7, the LORD proclaimed to Moses the attributes of His divine nature so that Moses could know Him.

The LORD called Himself **"the LORD God."** The word for LORD is *Jehovah* in every case throughout the English versions and specifically the New American Standard Version used in this study. In other languages, the word *Jehovah* is used instead of LORD as in Spanish versions

for example. The first attribute included by the LORD is the word **“God.”** In Hebrew it is *El* and it means *strong and mighty*. He is therefore the LORD *Strong and Mighty*.

The second attribute is that the LORD is **“compassionate.”** It is the word *Rachum* and it means that the LORD is a merciful Being Who is full of tenderness.

Third, the LORD is **“gracious.”** The word is *Channum* and it refers to His goodness; He is a loving God.

Fourth, the LORD is **“slow to anger.”** The words are *Erech Appayim* and they mean that He is not easily irritated and that in kindness He waits a long time before He reacts.

Fifth, the LORD is **“abounding in lovingkindness.”** The word is *Chesed* and it means that He is bountiful in his beneficence.

Sixth, the LORD is **“abounding in ... truth.”** The word is *Emeth* and it means that He is bountiful in *faithfulness*. He cannot deceive or be deceived. He is the source of all wisdom and knowledge.

Seventh, the LORD **“keeps lovingkindness for thousands.”** The words are *Noster Chesed* and it means that He is the bountiful keeper of mercy for thousands of generations while the world endures.

Eighth, the LORD **“forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.”** The words are *Nose avon vaphesha vechattaah*. **“Forgives”** (*Nose*), means that He *bears, lifts, carries or takes away*. **“Iniquity”** (*avon*), means *guilt*. The LORD forgives the guilt. **“Transgression”** (*vaphesha*), means *rebellious acts*. The LORD forgives rebellion. **“Sin”** (*vechattaah*), means *offense*. The LORD forgives offenses. He is therefore the Redeemer, Pardoner and Forgiver of all acts of evil including **“iniquity, transgression and sin.”** He is the only One who holds the right to forgive and pardon.

Ninth, the LORD **“will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.”** The word for **“unpunished”** is *naqah* and it means *acquitted*. A better translation is “The LORD will by no means leave the guilty free.” To acquit means to free. In other words, the LORD will not let the guilty go free He will punish that person.

Finally, the LORD expresses to Moses that He will visit **“the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”** We have just seen how the word for iniquity means *guilt*. Here, the same word is used. We might reword this passage to say, **“the guilt of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”** Passing on the guilt of a sin is not the same as passing on the sin. Just because a father sins does not mean that his child or grandchild will commit the same sin. However, the guilt of the father who committed that sin will be remembered in life as far down as the fourth generation. We must remember that couples began childbearing much earlier in life than we normally see today. Almost all girls were married by the age of 13 even though the groom may have been much older. It was common for fathers to see the birth of their great-grandchildren as was the case with Moses’ ancestors. The stigma of a sinful father or grandfather

remains with future generations, especially in the social structure set in place for the Israelites by the LORD. Each tribe would live in a tribal area given to them by the LORD. The sin of one person in a tribe, especially a grievous one, would be told down through the generations as long as heirs were alive. The same is seen in small towns today. Sometimes, the only way for a person to break the stigma put in place by an ancestor is to relocate to a new home in a new place, far from the original family. Today, in this modern world people are constantly moving from place to place and in conjunction with our instant communication abilities, running from the past sins of a family member has become increasingly more difficult.

Moses Bows

Exodus 34:8 And Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. ⁹ And he said, " If now I have found favor in Thy sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate; and do Thou pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Thine own possession."

After he had seen the beauty of the LORD and heard His instruction, Moses bowed to worship Him. The LORD had answered Moses' request fully. Moses then knew his place with the LORD. Notice that in Moses' worship, he prayed for the LORD to pardon the people in the camp.

A Covenant of Miracles

Exodus 34:10 Then God said, "Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth, nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the LORD, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you."

The LORD's answer to Moses was the offer of a covenant, a covenant that involved miracles not ever seen anywhere before on earth. Here we see the planting of the seed of the promise of the Mosaic Covenant for the first time.

Warning to Observe Commands

Exodus 34:11a " Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day:

The Mosaic covenant begins with the warning, **"Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day."**

No Covenants With Canaanites

Exodus 34:11b behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. ¹² " Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, lest it become a snare in your midst.

The first command of the Mosaic covenant was to **"make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going."** The Promised Land was called the land of Canaan or Canaan's Land. All those tribes listed in this passage were descendants of Canaan. The LORD

would drive them from this land and the Israelites would take it as their Promised Land. No deals were to be made with any of these Canaanites tribes. They all worshiped false gods and entering into a contract with them might cause their heresy in worship to bleed over into Israel's true worship.

No Canaanite Worship No Canaanite Brides

Exodus 34:13 " But *rather*, you are to tear down their altars and smash their *sacred* pillars and cut down their Asherim ¹⁴ for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God-- ¹⁵ lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they play the harlot with their gods, and sacrifice to their gods, and someone invite you to eat of his sacrifice; ¹⁶ and you take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods, and cause your sons *also* to play the harlot with their gods.

The second command of the Mosaic covenant required all the religious places of worship and items of worship in Canaan's Land to be destroyed. Again, the LORD warned that entertaining these Canaanite tribes could lure the Israelites into false worship.

Asherim was a Phoenician goddess and the Canaanites worshipped an image of her. She was also called the *Lady of the Sea* in literature from the 14th Century BC, near the time of this exodus story. The name is found in the Ras Shamra epic discovered in Syria in 1937. She was the goddess of Tyre pictured often by the side of Baal. Prophets are mentioned in 1 Kings 18:19 and utensils used in her worship are found in 1 Kings 23:4. Her cult was utterly detestable to the LORD (1 Kings 15:13). Other names for this goddess are Ashtoreth, Astarte (from which we get Estarte or Easter). Her image is most often represented as a nude woman riding a lion with a lily in one hand and a serpent in the other and she is called "the Holiness" or "the Holy One," English interpretations of the statues' name *Qudshu*. Male prostitutes consecrated themselves to her and in her honor they were called *Qudeshim* which is properly translated into English as "sodomites." (Deuteronomy 23:18, 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46) The lily symbolizes grace and sex appeal; the serpent represents fertility. Her specialties were sex and war. Her shrines were temples of legalized sexual immorality. In a fragment of the Baal Epic she slaughters mankind and wades through the bloody onslaught up to her throat while laughing joyously.

No wonder the LORD had a prohibition against marriage between the Canaanites and the Israelites in this covenant. It was not to be. However, this prohibition did not stop King Solomon from taking wives from the Canaanites which led to the downfall of the Nation of Israel during his reign.

The LORD's List of Instructions Reiterated

No Molten Gods

Exodus 34:17 " You shall make for yourself no molten gods.

Observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Exodus 34:18 **"You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in the month of Abib you came out of Egypt.**

First Offspring

Exodus 34:19 **" The first offspring from every womb belongs to Me, and all your male livestock, the first offspring from cattle and sheep. ²⁰ " And you shall redeem with a lamb the first offspring from a donkey; and if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck. You shall redeem all the first-born of your sons. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.**

Sabbath

Exodus 34:21 **"You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; *even* during plowing time and harvest you shall rest.**

Observance of the Feast of Weeks and Ingathering

Exodus 34:22 **"And you shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, *that is*, the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year.**

Males Observing Three Times a Year

Exodus 34:23 **" Three times a year all your males are to appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. ²⁴ "For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and no man shall covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the LORD your God.**

Offering Blood with Leavened Bread

Exodus 34:25a **" You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread,**

Keeping Left Overs from Feast

Exodus 34:25b **nor is the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover to be left over until morning.**

First Fruits to be Brought to the LORD's House

Exodus 34:26a **"You shall bring the very first of the first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God.**

Offering Blood with Leavened Bread Not Allowed

Exodus 34:26b **You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk."**

The third through the twelfth commands required in the Mosaic covenant were reiterations of commands given by the LORD to Moses before the Passover in Egypt and then with the giving of the 10 Commandments and the explanation of the LORD's Ordinance on the Commandments found in Exodus 21-23. (See Lessons 21 – 23 for commentary and explanation.)

Written Word

Exodus 34:27 Then the LORD said to Moses, " Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."

For a second time, the LORD instructed Moses to record His words for posterity and instruction of the people. The first time was in Exodus 17. In the next verse, we will discover that Moses did not leave the mountain until he recorded all the words of the LORD.

Another 40 Days and Nights

Exodus 34:28 So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

Moses was on the mountain this time forty days and nights. It was his second forty day visit to the mountain with his first in Exodus 32:15. This time, his entire stay was without food and water. Here we must wonder why he did not eat or drink. We do not have the answer. Was Moses aware of the days and nights while he was in the presence of the LORD on the mountain? Was Moses aware of the passing of time on the mountain? Did Moses sleep or was he awake the entire time? We know nothing about that. Did the time fly by and did Moses have no concern for food and drink? Did Moses intentionally not eat or drink while on the mount. The answers to any of these questions are just speculation.

Change in Moses' Face

Exodus 34:29 And it came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony *were* in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him.

Once again, we must wonder if Moses was writing this passage or was Joshua writing it? Perhaps, like with Exodus 33, someone else was writing the saga. Whether or not Moses was writing it or someone else was, we do not know, but we do know that Moses was a changed person when he returned to the camp, both mentally and physically.

Fear of Moses

Exodus 34:30 So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.

Moses' visit with the LORD, specifically his view from the hole in the rock when he saw the beauty of the LORD, changed the face of Moses for the rest of his life. His face radiated like the light of life, the Divine Glory of the LORD. All were afraid of him. His look was not natural.

Moses Calls Meeting

Exodus 34:31 Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them.³² And afterward all the

sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them *to do* everything that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai.

This time Moses had to make the call and draw the leaders and the congregation to his presence. This time the camp had not rebelled against the LORD while he was on the mount. This time the camp saw the Glory of their LORD reflected in Moses' face. This time the camp clearly heard Moses' instructions from the LORD and the covenant He had begun.

Moses and the Veil

Exodus 34:33 When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

³⁴ But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, ³⁵ the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.

From this point on in the story of the exodus, the people could not bear to see the face of Moses when he addressed them. For the next 40 years, Moses would wear a veil over his face because of the presence of the Glory of the LORD that radiated from him. Paul addressed it in his letter to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 3:4-8 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?

The people could not stand the radiance of the face of Moses, but the LORD could. His radiance was miniscule compared to that of the LORD. Did the radiance of Moses' face ever fade? No! Paul's point to the Corinthians is that the Mosaic covenant became ineffective when Christ fulfilled all things. For instance, with Moses, judgment of adultery, murder and theft was based on the act; with Christ, judgment of adultery, murder and theft was based on the thought. Christ Jesus made the law stronger and stricter.

We leave this chapter with one interesting question that is never answered in the Scripture. Did Moses wear the veil in the presence of his wife and children?

We begin the next chapter with Moses making the call for the offering and starting the process of building the Tabernacle with all its furnishings and fixtures.