

Week 13: The heart of Yahweh - Exodus Ch 33-34

Pre-Work

- In this class, we will explore the most quoted 2 verses of the Bible in the Bible! To prepare for this monumental study, please watch the following excellent video on the subject of God's character in Exodus 34:6-7 from the Bible Project.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/character-of-god-exodus/>

- Please read Exodus 33-34 in the translation of your choice. What stands out to you in these chapters? What questions arise in your mind when you read them?

Class Notes

- Golden Calf recap
- The changes at Sinai to follow

33 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give it.’ ² And I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. ³ *Go up* to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way.”

- In Exodus 20, Yahweh said he would send “my angel...and I will defeat [your adversaries]” (20:23)
- Here, the promise is repeated, but with this change: “I will not go up in your midst...or I might destroy you on the way”
- The change is that they will get the land and Yahweh’s guidance, but not Yahweh’s presence, which would be far too dangerous for them

⁴ When the people heard this sad word, they went into mourning, and none of them put on his jewelry. ⁵ For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the sons of Israel, ‘You are an obstinate people; *if* I were to go up in your midst for *just* one moment, I would destroy you. So now, take off your jewelry that I may know what I shall do to you.’” ⁶ So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their jewelry, from Mount Horeb *onward*.

- The risk of losing the Presence of Yahweh is a much bigger problem to the biblical authors than the risk of losing the land, reflected in the mourning of the Israelites
- “...that I may know what to do with you...” suggests that the decision has not been finalized

⁷ Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. ⁸ And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. ⁹ Whenever

Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses.¹⁰ When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would stand and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. ¹¹ So the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

- This section slows the pace of the narrative to hold the reader in the tension of “what will Yahweh decide?”
- Before the Tabernacle was constructed, a “tent of meeting” was used by Moses to meet with Yahweh “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend”. We will see that this changes, as soon Moses can only see Yahweh from behind.

¹² Then Moses said to the LORD, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’ But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, ‘I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.’ ¹³ Now then, if I have found favor in Your sight in any way, please let me know Your ways so that I may know You, in order that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.” ¹⁴ And He said, “My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest.” ¹⁵ Then he said to Him, “If Your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here. ¹⁶ For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are on the face of the earth?”

- Moses now intercedes for Yahweh’s presence for Israel, in spite of the disloyalty/spiritual adultery of Israel.
- Intercessory “argument” - a) You commanded me to bring the people up b) You have shown me favor, so please show me Your ways c) these people are Yours
- Yahweh says His presence will go (away or with them?), and Moses will have rest
- Moses’ intercessory plea: “without You, Your people will be no different than the dispossessed families of the earth”

¹⁷ The LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.” ¹⁸ Then Moses said, “Please, show me Your glory!” ¹⁹ And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion to whom I will show compassion.”²⁰ He further said, “You cannot see My face, for mankind shall not see Me and live!” ²¹ Then the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; ²² and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the

cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.”

- “I will do this thing”...Yahweh agrees to keep His direct presence with the people (although how it will be managed, as we will see in Leviticus, is quite different than direct “tent of meeting, face-to-face” with Moses style)
- Moses’ culminating request: “Show me Your glory” (the last Moses speaks until 34:9) - Request to see Yahweh as before in the tent, or in a new way?
- All My goodness: My name, My “khen”, My “racham” (Jacob’s words to Judah in Gen 43:14)
- Face is withheld (you cannot see face and live/ dual meditation on seeing the face of God and losing life)
- Stand on the rock/cleft of the rock/cover with My hand/see My back but not My face

34 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 smashed. 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 one is to come up with you, nor let anyone be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds are not to graze in front of that mountain.” ⁴ So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses got up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took *the* two stone tablets in his hand.

- Yahweh’s glory (goodness of name, grace, compassion) will be partly *seen*, partly *written*, and partly (as we see next) *in presence and voice*
- The smashing of the tablets...2nd of 3 major incidents of Moses’ anger issue (first time the tablets were written with the finger of God - what about this time?)

⁵ And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD.

- Moses called on the name of Yahweh, and Yahweh stood with him Romans 10:13, Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21

⁶ Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in faithfulness and truth; ⁷ who keeps faithfulness for thousands, who forgives wrongdoing, violation of *His Law*, and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, inflicting the punishment of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

- The 2 most quoted or alluded to verses in the Bible (at least 27 times)
- Foundational in understanding Yahweh's stated character of Himself
- Rachum/womb/compassionate
- Khanun/carry/gracious (translated "merciful" in NASB)
- Erek appayim/long of nose/slow to anger
- Chesed/lovingkindness/mercy/faithfulness
- Emet/solid trustworthiness/amen/truth - "Faithful and True"
- Chesed and forgiveness to the iniquity and transgression of thousands (generations)
- Reliably just - consequences to the third and fourth

⁸ And Moses hurried to bow low toward the ground and worship. ⁹ Then he said, "If in any way I have found favor in Your sight, Lord, please may the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our wrongdoing and our sin, and take us as Your own possession."

- Worship for the revelation of Yahweh's character
- Worship for the request renewed in light of Yahweh's character
- Exodus 23:21 states that rebellion against Yahweh's/Angel of Yahweh's instructions will not be pardoned. Yahweh now changes the relational dynamic from punishment to pardoning sin in keeping with His unchanging *character*. (theme of the Book of Jonah)

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.

- Yahweh is replacing the guardrail of "you sin, you die" with the guardrail of a Covenant/ mutual participation (Israel will violate this covenant repeatedly)

¹¹ "Be sure to comply with what I am commanding you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite from you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. ¹² Be careful that you do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. ¹³ But *rather*,

you are to tear down their altars and smash their memorial stones, and cut down their Asherim ¹⁴—for you shall not worship any other god, because the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God— ¹⁵ otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they would prostitute themselves with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, ¹⁶ and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might prostitute themselves with their gods and cause your sons *also* to prostitute themselves with their gods. ¹⁷ You shall not make for yourself *any* gods cast in metal.

- The driving out of the Canaanites is a way to guard the Israelites against the idolatry they have shown a propensity toward. They are called to be a “kingdom of priests”, which means mediating God’s blessing to the non-elect so that the families of the earth can be blessed. This cannot happen if they are mediating the worship of the very corrupt spiritual powers the families of the earth are chained to.

¹⁸ “You shall keep 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.

- Unleavened bread/passover/ready to leave...reminder that this way of living in the land is not the final destination

¹⁹ “The firstborn from every womb belongs to Me, and all your male livestock, the firstborn from cattle and sheep. ²⁰ You shall redeem with a lamb the firstborn from a donkey; and if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck. You shall redeem all the firstborn of your sons. None are to appear before Me empty-handed.

- “Ironclad law of primogeniture” reframed into “the firstborn is Yahweh’s”/ Passover redeemed/ there is a reversal of primogeniture but for the purpose of fulfilling the “true purpose of the firstborn”

²¹ “You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; *even* during plowing time and harvest you shall rest. 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. 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 from you and enlarge your borders, and no one will covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the LORD your God.

- The Promised Land Life is supposed to be a continuous ritual reenactment of Genesis 1:1-2:3

²⁵ “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread, nor is the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover to be left over until morning.

- The Promised Land Life is supposed to be a continuous ritual reenactment of the Passover

²⁶ “You shall bring the very first of the first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God.

- The Promised Land Life must be about dining with Yahweh before all else (Genesis 18)

“You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

- The Promised Land Life eschews cruelty to the animals they oversee (Genesis 2, Genesis 8)

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.” ²⁸ So he was there with the LORD for 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.

- The first set of Commandments written by the finger of God, the second written through Moses
- This Covenant is a reminder of Genesis 1-2, a way to journey back to the Garden and the Presence of Yahweh
- 40 days and nights (40 motif: 40 days of rain, 40 days of fasting (here), 40 years of wilderness, 40 days of spying the land, 40 days of Goliath’s taunts, 40 days to the destruction of Nineveh, Elijah’s 40 days of fasting, Jesus’ 40 days of fasting, Jesus’ 40 days with the disciples post-resurrection)

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. ³⁰ So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to approach him. ³¹ Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. ³² 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. 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 put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with Him.

- Moses' intercession made him a reflector of Yahweh's glory (His name, His grace, and His compassion)
- Word play "karan"/radiant with "keren"/horns

"Such *is the* confidence we have toward God through Christ. Not that we are adequate in ourselves so as to consider anything as *having come* 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, engraved in letters 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, **8** how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be *even* more with glory? **9** For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness excel in glory. **10** For indeed what had glory in this case has no glory, because of the glory that surpasses *it*. For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory. Therefore, having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech, **13** and *we are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not stare at the end of what was fading away. **14** But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. **15** But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts; **16** but whenever *someone* turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. **17** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is freedom. **18** But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

~The Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 3:4-18

Reflections