

# Exodus – Lesson 24

## Moses Intercedes for the People

### Read Exodus 33:1-23

- (a) From verses 1-3, what *promises* does God extend to the people? What *limitation* does he impose upon these promises?

God promises 1) a land which was previously promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; a land “*flowing with milk and honey*” (v. 3), 2) an angel to go before them to lead them to this land, and 3) to drive out the inhabitants of the land so that they could take possession of it. The *limitation* of these promises is that God himself *would not go up among them*. God refuses to go before them because he is holy, and his holiness might “consume” them, as they were sinful (i.e. stiff-necked; refusing to bow down before the Lord in obedience and humility; see 1c below).

- (b) What were the “*ornaments*” that the people were wearing that God commanded them to remove? *When* did God give them this command?

The ornaments were probably the various kinds of *jewelry* that the people had taken from Egypt and used to adorn themselves. They were probably made of gold, and may have been used (partially) to construct the golden calf (see 32:2-3). From these verses it would appear that God had given this command *before* the golden calf incident; the “Mount Horeb” reference may indicate that God had *forbade* them to “costume” themselves with ornamental jewelry because of its 1) connection to the evils of Egypt and the gods there, and 2) the haughtiness of wearing golden jewelry over against a humble spirit before God. The golden calf incident would have even *greater* significance as an act of evil because the people would have taken off items they were *already* forbidden to wear (in defiance of God’s command) and used them to build the calf. This is similar to the injunction Paul gives to women in 1 Timothy 2:9-10.

- (c) From Exodus 33:3-5, Deuteronomy 4:24, and Hebrews 12:28-29, what does it mean that God might “consume” the Hebrews on their journey?

The word “*consume*,” in these contexts, relates to the *destruction* of anything that is *unholy* before it enters the presence of a holy God. As holy, *nothing* can enter the presence of God that is imperfect, and anything that is unholy must be destroyed. The “consuming” nature of God is such that he is *perfectly* holy and his presence destroys anything that is not. For God to enter the presence of the Israelites, a people who were *seriously* unholy (note the golden calf incident just prior), might mean that they would be destroyed *just because they were sinful*. God could not enter their presence, lest his perfection destroy their imperfection.

- (a) What is another name for the “*tent of meeting*?” (see v. 7) Why does Moses pitch this tent *away* from the camp?

The tabernacle is also called “*the tent of meeting*.” This is a logical title used by Moses: the tabernacle was the place where God would come and *meet* with his people – thus the name. Moses pitches this tent *away* from the camp for a number of reasons: 1) because it was holy and God’s presence is holy, the people would be protected from God (see 2c above), 2) being far out from the camp, it would be protected from the dangers of people near to it (i.e. being damaged), 3) being far out from camp, it would be clearly *visible* to all in the camp and act as a central place of focus for the people, 4) anyone who wished to come to the tent would have to leave the comfort of the camp and venture out, symbolically pointing to the *sacrifice* that would be made at the tent, and 5) being out from the camp would imply that it was available for *all* the people, not just those who might be near to it.

(b) What happens when Moses *enters* the tent of meeting? Why is this *significant*?

Whenever Moses would enter the tent, the cloud of God's presence would come down to the entrance, and God would speak to Moses. This is *precisely* what the tabernacle was designed for: God would come down and speak to the people, and the people would worship God who was central to the purpose and meaning of their lives.

3. (a) From verses 12-16, list the reasons Moses gives for *why* God must go with the people to the promised land?

Moses gives a number of reasons: 1) God has not given any instructions about who was to go, implying that he expected *God* to go (v. 12), 2) God had said that Moses found "*favor*" in God's sight, meaning that God had already indicated that he liked Moses (vv. 12-13), implying that God *should* go with Moses, his favored one, and 3) if God *did not* go with the people, his reputation as the God of the Israelites would be tarnished (vv. 15-16) and his promise to make this people his own would be suspect.

(b) How does God *respond* to this request? What is significant about God's statement that he knows Moses "*by name*" (v. 17)?

God promises to go before the Israelites *instead* of sending just an angel; the presence of God *himself* would lead the Israelites, just as it had done before. The statement of God in which he knew Moses "*by name*" indicates the *personal* relationship that God had with Moses. Just as Moses desired to know the name of God at the burning bush so that he would identify God before the people and bring them into *personal* contact with God, so the name of Moses before God would do the same. However, the *greater* value of knowing a person by name (as it is with God) is to know their *nature* and *purposes*. Just as the name of God represents his character, so would the name of Moses (as it was known by God) represent the character of Moses, his nature as a man of conviction and loyalty to God and love for the people.

4. (a) What *request* does Moses make of God in v. 18? *Why* does he make it?

Moses requests to "*see*" the glory of God, to have God reveal *his full beauty* to Moses. The glory of God is the *expression* of the full character and nature of God, all that he is and all that he does as a result of who he is. The glory of God is the *weightiness* of God: the fullest expression of the dignity, majesty, and splendor of God as it *appears* in tangible ways. The creation reflects the glory of God (Psalm 19), human beings retain some of the glory of God and express it in their nature and actions (Psalm 8), and Christ is seen as the *preeminent* expression of God's majesty and splendor (John 17). God's glory is that which "*radiates*" from God as his nature is revealed into his creation. Moses makes this request because it is the *logical* question to ask: in this personal relationship, Moses wishes to *know* as much of God as is possible. Thus he asks to see the glory of God, which God will show him, up to a point.

(b) Connect God's statement of v. 19 to Romans 9:14-18. What is the *point* of this in relation to the people of *His* choice?

God's glory centers around his nature and his majesty. As the nature of God is *expressed* into the created order, the glory of God is revealed. Part of the nature of God, of course, is his grace, by which he *chooses* to be gracious to others and to give to them *what they do not naturally possess*. The Israelites had experienced the grace of God in his *choice* of them; they had seen the glory of God as it was expressed in his *choice* of them. Moses was about to see the fullest expression of God's glory, and God's statement in the midst of this display was *what his glory was all about*. In other words, the electing action of God *is* an expression of the *glory* of God, and may be considered central to what the glory of God is all about. This is why Paul chooses this event when discussing the act of God choosing people for himself: the glory of God is *expressed* (tangibly) by God when he elects people to receive his mercy. This is why Paul is able to give all glory to God in salvation (see Romans 11:36): the *entire* work of salvation, including God's action to elect, call, draw, gift, justify, and sustain believers is an *expression* of the glory of God. God is most glorified when the *entirety* of the process is his alone.

(c) According to Matthew 5:8 and John 1:14, *how* has God displayed his glory for us to see *now*?

The *fullest* expression of God's glory is the *person* of Jesus Christ. Not only is he the *visible* representation of the entire nature of God, he is the *central* means by which God chooses and draws a people to himself. God's displays his glory in Christ, and we "see" that glory when we embrace the truth of Christ as Lord. Our calling and election are *always* within the person of Christ, who calls us to his Lordship and to faith in his person and work. Thus, the glory of God is *manifested* through the saving work of Christ, but (more importantly) it is displayed through the *person* of Christ. Whereas Moses was unable to look upon the glory of God, we are fully able to do so because God has created within us a "*pure heart*" through faith in Christ. Our eyes are not "protected" against the glory of God, but God has made this glory *fully present* to our sight in Jesus Christ.