

Moses Told to Move; God Gives a Warning; Moses Intercedes and Requests to See God

Exodus 33

Outline

- 1-3 | God tells Moses to continue the journey, but warns that He would not be with them, else He might destroy them on the way
- 4-6 | The people mourned and God tells Moses to have the people strip themselves of their ornaments as a sign of the repentance
- 7-11 | Moses and the Tent of Meeting
- 12-16 | Moses intercedes, asking God to continue leading the people to the land
- 17-23 | God promises to go with the people; Moses requests to see God's glory

Reflections

God tells Moses to continue leading the people to the promised land but that He would not be with them. Why? Because they are an "obstinate people" and He might destroy them along the way. This causes the people to go into mourning, so much that they refused to adorn themselves with ornaments.

These ornaments were probably similar to the very items that were used to form the golden calf. This could be a sign of repentance on the part of the people, acknowledging that the forming of the idol was a sign against God.

Verses 7-11 appear to be an explanatory passage in which the location and purpose of the tent of meeting (not the tabernacle) were used by Moses where he would meet with God in preparation for verses 12-16. It was a temporary structure until the tabernacle could be constructed in the coming chapters.¹

Most commentators note the location as indicating that sin had entered the camp and thus it had to be located outside the camp, noting the separation of God from His people when they sin. Moses could enter the tent to meet with God, face to face in principle but never in person, as indicated in verses 17-23. The people could see God's presence descend and appear before the tent whenever Moses entered the tent.

Additionally, Joshua appears to have been continually present in the tent. The Believer's Bible Commentary² notes, "Perhaps this was the secret of his later spiritual success." Today, we don't have a "tent of meeting" that we can commune in for long periods of time like Joshua, continually dwelling in God's presence, but we can go about our day in an attitude of prayer, communing in God's presence even while we go about our everyday lives. Something I need to work on more.

Now in verses 12-16 Moses intercedes for the people. The Bible Knowledge Commentary³ notes the contrast to Moses' intimate association with God and the distance between God and the rest of the people. The people could come and inquire of the Lord but not enter His presence, only Moses could do that, even that was limited.

Moses makes a strong case for God to go with them and God listens to Moses and agrees to do as he requests.

Exodus 33:15-16 NASB 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

- 1 Too many commentators to list them all separately.
- 2 MacDonald, William, and Arthur Farstad. *Believer's Bible Commentary: An Exposition of the Sacred Scriptures*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers; e-Sword, 1995.
- 3 Walvoord, John, and Roy Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: Old & New Testament*. Victor Books; e-Sword, 1983.

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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 upon the face of the earth?"

Moses makes the point that if God didn't go with them, what would make them different than any other peoples. All along God had been calling them His people ("Let My people go!").

Moses then asks God to allow him to see God's glory. The IVP Bible Background Commentary⁴ indicates that this is different than what God had promised and they had already experienced and will experience in the future regarding God's glory.

In Exodus 16:7 the people were told they would see God's glory (see also Leviticus 9:23).

Exodus 16:6-7 NASB So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, "At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; **7** and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?"

Leviticus 9:23 NASB Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people.

The IVPBBC indicates that Moses was asking God to go before them and lead them. It seems appropriate then that God would only allow Moses to see His back and not His face, as God would be leading the people.

There are a number of chapters that indicate that we are to seek God's face in repentance.

I Chronicles 16:11 NASB Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually.

II Chronicles 7:14 NASB and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Psalms 24:6 NASB This is the generation of those who seek Him, Who seek Your face—*even* Jacob. Selah.

Psalms 27:8 NASB *When You said*, "Seek My face," my heart said to You, "Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."

Psalms 105:4 NASB Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually.

Hosea 5:15 NASB I will go away *and* return to My place Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.

When the Tabernacle is constructed in a few chapters, we will see another picture of God's presence among His people. In the meantime, spend time communing with God today.

Lord God, We pray that You will always be leading us and that Your presence among us is an ongoing and awesome reality. Help us to know You are among us and that we are following Your leading. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, in Jesus' name. Amen.

On a side note: I have to admit that I've started working on this three times. I don't know why this has been so difficult to get done. I had every intention of completing it each time I would sit down to work on it but just couldn't seem to stay focused. I pray that God will help me understand why.

4 Walton, John H. et al. IVP Bible Background Commentary. InterVarsity Press; e-Sword, 2000.

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