

Exodus Chapter 33

Verses 1-6

For the rest of Israel's journey to the Promised Land, God promised His protection and guidance through one He called "My Angel" (this was not Himself).

Losing God's immediate presence caused great mourning.

As a sign of their remorse, the children of Israel stopped wearing their "ornament" (jewelry), the equivalent of putting on sackcloth and ashes.

Later, in response to Moses' prayer (33:12-16), God agreed to go with them (33:17).

Exodus 33:1 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Depart, [and] go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto the land which I swore unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it:"

In continuation and explanation of the words recorded (in Exodus 32:33-34), but probably at another time, after Moses had once more descended from the Ras Sufsafeh to the plain at its base.

"The land which I swore unto Abraham ":

The misconduct of Israel in their worship of the calf would not annul the promises of God to the patriarchs.

These He was bound to make good.

"The LORD swore, and will not repent" (Psalm 110:4).

The LORD had given them directions now to move on.

It seems as though He had at least accepted Moses' offer to give himself for the people as a true sign of repentance.

He would not allow Moses to give his life for theirs, but He appreciated the offer.

It seems as though the LORD would not be with him in the same sense that He was before.

An angel would lead them.

The quickest way to lose God's presence is to get involved in a false religion.

Verse 2-6

Good news included bad news!

Entry into the Promised Land was not forfeited, but God's presence on the way was withdrawn.

What was a sworn covenant-promise to the patriarchs just could not be broken.

What was assured, the divine presence on the way, could be set aside because of sin (23:20-23).

Removal of their jewelry depicted outwardly the people's sorrow of heart.

It was a response analogous to donning sackcloth and ashes.

Exodus 33:2 "And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite:"

Not the angel before promised (Exodus 23:20), the Angel of his presence, the eternal Word and Son of God, but a created angel.

And so Aben Ezra observes, he does not say the Angel that was known, that his name was in him.

Though even this was to be looked upon as a favor, and showed that he had not utterly cast them off.

"And I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite":

Who were now the inhabitants of the land, and these he promises to drive out, to make way for their possession of it; and that "by his hand", as the Targum of Jonathan interprets it, by the hand of the angel.

Only six nations are mentioned, though there were seven; the Girgashite is omitted, but added in the Septuagint version (see notes on 3:8).

Exodus 33:3 "Unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou [art] a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way."

By my own special and gracious presence, as hitherto I have done, but I will depart from thee.

In pursuance hereof, God removes his tabernacle without the camp.

I will only make good my promise to thy fathers, and send an angel to accomplish it, but I will show no particular and further kindness to thee.

“Lest I consume thee in the way”:

Lest thy sins should be aggravated by my presence and favor, and thereby I should be provoked utterly to destroy thee.

So God shows that their perverseness makes this severity necessary for them, and that he, even in his judgment, remembers mercy to them.

We see here that God's plan to lead them to the Promised Land had not changed.

His promise to Abraham still would be carried out.

The difference, as we said above, was that the presence of God would be different.

God would not be in direct contact with them anymore.

He is a Holy God and cannot look upon sin.

He will burn it up.

He knew that these people were slow to learn the ways of God because they were so stubborn ("stiffnecked").

God was still leading them, but from a distance.

Exodus 33:4 "And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments."

That God would withdraw his gracious presence, and go not up with them himself, only send an angel with them.

And especially this may respect what is threatened (Exodus 33:5), and had been said at this time.

"They mourned":

Were inwardly and heartily grieved for their sin, whereby they had provoked the LORD to depart from them, and gave some outward and open tokens of it.

"And no man did put on his ornaments":

They used to wear at other times, their rings and jewels, which the princes and the chief among the people especially were accustomed to wear.

And in common the people did not put on their best clothes, or what they usually wore, but clothed themselves in mournful habits, in sackcloth and ashes, or in some such like manner.

Suddenly true repentance and grief had struck the camp.

The putting on of their ornaments was probably associated with gladness and joy.

This that they had done was similar to sackcloth and ashes in that this was an outward show of their grief in learning that the LORD Himself would not be in their presence now.

Exodus 33:5 For the LORD had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye [are] a stiffnecked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee."

The message did not precede the repentance of the people, but followed it.

"I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee":

Rather, were I to go up in the midst of thee, even for a moment (a brief space), I should consume thee.

The people learnt by this the reason of God's proposed withdrawal.

It was in mercy, that they might not be consumed, as there was danger of their being unless they repented and turned to God.

"That I may know what to do unto thee":

The language is accommodated to the feeble apprehensions of men.

God judges the state of the heart by the tenor of the conduct.

In the case of the Israelites, He cherished a design of mercy; and the moment He discerned the first symptoms of contrition, by their stripping off their ornaments, as penitents' conscious of their error and sincerely sorrowful.

This fact added its weight to the fervency of Moses' prayers, and gave them prevalence with God in behalf of the people.

This was a bit of a repetition of the verses above.

God knew if He travelled in their immediate presence, that He would utterly destroy them.

God knew that with their attitude, they would not be easily taught the ways of God.

"Stiffnecked" can mean so many things.

Some of them are arrogance, self-centeredness, unteachable, proud, stubborn, and set in their ways.

We will see all of these present as they continued on their way to the Promised Land.

Exodus 33:6 "And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb."

"stripped themselves of their ornaments":

Rather, leave off thy ornaments.

I.e., put them aside altogether; show thy penitence by giving up the use of them.

Then shall I know what to do with thee; then shall I be able to deal with thee in a way which otherwise were impossible.

In seasons of mourning, it is customary with Eastern people to lay aside all showy things and divest themselves of their jewels, their gold, and everything rich and splendid in their dress.

This token of their sorrow the LORD required of His offending people.

Exodus 33:7 "And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, [that] every one which sought the LORD went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which [was] without the camp."

"The tabernacle of the congregation":

In the time prior to the construction of the tabernacle, Moses' tent became the special meeting place for Moses to talk intimately, "face to face" (verse 11), with God.

No doubt the people watching from afar were reminded of the removal of God's immediate presence.

How sad that God would remove His presence.

Sometimes it is in judgment, sometimes mercy, and sometimes a little bit of both.

God has always wanted to fellowship with man.

In the Garden of Eden, God fellowshiped with Adam, but Adam's sin not only drove himself out of the garden, but also drove God away from him.

God will not dwell where there is sin.

The one really great promise about all of this is, if we are still alive, God will allow us to repent and He will open Himself to us again.

God never moves very far away.

There is just sometimes a cloud of sin between us and God.

Prayer and true repentance can remove this cloud and bring us into the very presence of God.

Exodus 33:8 "And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, [that] all the people rose up, and stood every man [at] his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle."

For when he had pitched it he did not continue there; which shows it was not the tent or tabernacle he dwelt in.

But whither he went to and fro, both to meet the LORD in it, and transact the affairs of the people, especially the great affair now depending between God and them.

"That all the people rose up":

In reverence of him as their ruler, and the minister of God, and as their Mediator between God and them.

Though they had but lately thought and spoke very meanly and contemptibly of him (Exodus 32:1; see Job 29:8).

"And stood every man at his tent door":

None offering to go in, nor to sit down until he was gone into the tabernacle, which was an instance of their respect to him.

"And looked after Moses until he was gone into the tabernacle":

Kept their eye on him as long as they could see him, thereby expressing their esteem of him, signifying their desire that he would intercede for them.

And wishing him success therein.

The Targum of Jonathan interprets all this of the ungodly among them that looked after Moses with an evil eye.

Finally we see a little reverence for God from these people.

Moses was meeting with God to pray for them.

Exodus 33:9 "And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood [at] the door of the tabernacle, and [the LORD] talked with Moses."

Here we see that the “pillar of cloud” was in fact an appearance of Yahweh.

Moses had not been a part of the illicit worship, so his tent “without the camp” became the only place the LORD would meet with Moses, His only contact.

Exodus 33:10 "And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand [at] the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man [in] his tent door."

They being every man at his tent door; and this must be a pleasing sight to them, and give them some hope that God would be merciful to them, forgive their sin, and not depart from them.

"And all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door":

Not Moses, nor the cloudy pillar, but the LORD in it.

It was not a civil bow they made to Moses, and in respect to him, for he was gone into the tabernacle out of sight, but a religious adoration of the LORD in the pillar of cloud.

We see that Moses was still communing with God.

He was not only communing with God for himself but for these people as well.

It seems that the presence of God was probably staying on Mount Sinai and just coming into the tabernacle when Moses was there.

There was a visible manifestation of God that hovered over the tabernacle when God was there.

It was a pillar of smoke.

God had removed Himself from the people.

The tabernacle was not in the camp.

Now they saw the need to worship and they worshipped in their tents as Moses communed with God.

Exodus 33:11 "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle."

Amazingly, the LORD spoke to him “face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend”:

The LORD’s tender care for Moses is underscored (in 33:17), where He says, “I know thee by name”.

This just showed that beautiful fellowship that God had with Moses.

This "face to face" means that Moses was in the actual presence of God and that He and God conversed like two friends.

It appears that Joshua had become Moses' right hand man.

And in the absence of Moses in the tabernacle, Joshua was there to take care of things until Moses returned.

Joshua seemed to be Moses' personal assistant at that time.

He served Moses on the side of the mountain as well as in the tabernacle.

Joshua had not even been in the camp when the idolatry took place.

He had no part in this sin.

He was near Moses at the time.

Joshua had not gone all the way to the top of the mount with Moses, but had waited at a designated place where Moses told him to wait.

Here we see Joshua, near to serve Moses and God as well.

You might even say Joshua was in training.

We know that later on we will discover that Joshua took over the leadership of the people at Moses' death.

Verses 33:12 – 34:7

Moses had seen God's astounding acts during the Exodus, but now he wanted to see more, God's "glory".

God granted this bold request, passing His "goodness" before Moses and proclaiming His own "name", the expression of His character.

The LORD speaks of His manner as being "gracious" and showing "compassion" (words Paul used in Romans 9:15-18).

In verses 12-17, again Moses entered earnestly and confidently into the role of intercessor before God for the nation whom he again referred to as "Thy people" (verses 13 and 16).

Moses clearly understood that without God's presence they would not be a people set apart from other nations, so why travel any further?

Moses' favored standing before the LORD comes out in the positive response to his intercession (verse 17).

Exodus 33:12 "And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight."

It is likely that Moses, being satisfied with the penitence of the people, returned to the tabernacle, and there had this communication with God, in which he is an importunate supplicant for two favors, and prevails for both.

In this he was a type of Christ, the great Intercessor, whom the Father heareth always.

He is earnest with God for a grant of his presence with Israel in the rest of their march to Canaan.

Thou sayest, "Bring up this people":

LORD, it is thou thyself that employs me, and wilt thou not own me?

I am in the way of my duty, and shall I not have thy presence with me in that way?

"Thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me":

Thou hast only said, thou wilt send an angel before me (Exodus 33:2), but holds me in suspense whether thou wilt guide us in the pillar of cloud as thou hast hitherto done.

For the LORD had left him at an uncertainty of what he would do in the case the people did repent (Exodus 33:5).

"Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name":

In a special and particular manner.

Thou hast disclosed to me peculiar marks and testimonies of thy love and favor.

The expression is borrowed from the manner of kings, who, of all their subjects, know few by name but their favorites, and those who have access to their persons.

Exodus 33:13 "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation [is] thy people."

Which he said, not as doubting whether he had or not, but as taking it for granted he had.

And so argues from it, and improves his interest in it, in his pleading with God.

"Show me now thy way":

Either the way which he himself would take, the way of his providence in bringing the children of Israel into the land of Canaan; or the way he would have him take.

The way of his duty, how he would have him behave in conducting them thither.

Unless he means the Messiah, Christ, the way to the heavenly Canaan, to whom he seems greatly to have respect in the following part of this chapter.

"That I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight":

By which he might have a further evidence of his being acceptable to God, and having a share in his good will.

As well as he would better know in what way grace is communicated.

Christ being the way both of access into the grace of God, and of acceptance with him, and of the communication of grace from him.

"And consider that this nation is thy people":

Though they had sinned against him in the manner they had done, they were a people he had chosen above all people to be his.

He had made a covenant with them, and was their covenant God.

He had redeemed them out of Egypt, and had called them from thence, and had wrought a great salvation for them.

And had bestowed many peculiar favors upon them.

And though for this their gross idolatry and sad apostasy from him they were unworthy of the relation.

And he had thought fit not to call them his people, but the people, or the people of Moses.

Yet they still were his people, and he entreats he would consider the relation they stood in to him, and show mercy to them.

We see that before Moses moved a single inch, he wanted to know how and who would lead them.

Moses was taking advantage of this conversation with God to get a better understanding of where they were headed and if God had completely given up on this, His people, or not.

He even reminded God that he was acting on God's orders to bring them out.

This just seems, again, to be a wonderful conversation between two friends.

Moses was almost pleading with God to go with them Himself.

He begged for the people's forgiveness, as well.

Exodus 33:14 "And he said, My presence shall go [with thee], and I will give thee rest."

This is God's answer to Moses request.

"My presence shall go with thee":

Or before thee, both with Moses and before the people; meaning the Angel of his presence he had before promised.

The eternal Word and Son of God, who saved them, redeemed them, bore and carried them all the days of old.

Or "my faces shall go"; all the three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit.

There was Jehovah the Father, whose the Angel of his presence was; and there was Jehovah the Son, Christ, whom they tempted in the wilderness; and there was Jehovah the Holy Spirit, whom they vexed (see Isa. 63:9).

"And I will give thee rest":

Not ease, and peace and tranquility of mind, or a freedom from the fear of enemies, and all dangers by them, much less rest in the grave, before Israel should be brought into Canaan's land.

Rather the Promised Land itself, which was "the rest" that was promised, and would be given, and was typical of that eternal rest which remains for the people of God in heaven.

And is a pure gift; for this promise is not personal and peculiar to Moses, but belonged to all the people, to whom God would give the typical rest (see Deut. 12:9).

Here God reassured Moses that He would go with him and Moses would have nothing to fear, or be disturbed about.

God was giving Moses perfect rest.

Exodus 33:15 "And he said unto him, If thy presence go not [with me], carry us not up hence."

Moses said unto the LORD.

"If thy presence go not with me":

Or with us, as it may be as well supplied, and which agrees with what follows.

"Carry us not up hence":

From the mount to the land of Canaan; though God had promised his presence, which was the thing requested, Moses could not forbear expressing himself after this manner, to show the high esteem he had of this blessing.

And how worthless and insignificant everything else was without it.

That even Canaan, the land of rest promised, was nothing in comparison of it.

It is not much matter where we are, or what we have, if God is not with us.

But if he grants his presence, the greatest hardships in a wilderness are made easy, and difficulties are gotten through with pleasure.

Though some read the words in the preceding verse by way of interrogation, "should my face" or "presence go", and "should it give thee rest"?

As carrying in it a kind of denial, which makes Moses here more urgent for it, and such a version those words seem to require.

Exodus 33:16 "For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? [is it] not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that [are] upon the face of the earth."

At Sinai, among the mountains in the wilderness.

"That I and thy people have found grace in thy sight":

Were acceptable to him, highly esteemed by him, and had received peculiar favors from him.

What evidence would there be of this?

How would it appear to others?

What knowledge could they have of it?

"Is it not in that thou goest with us?":

In such a grand majestic manner, and so visible as in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night.

This is a full proof, and a strong and convincing argument, even to a demonstration, that they were a special and peculiar people, the favorites of God, highly esteemed and honored by him.

But should this be discontinued, as seemed to be threatened, there would be nothing to demonstrate that they had found more grace and favor than other people; but this being the case.

"So shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth":

Distinguished by this favor from them, and that in a very wonderful and marvelous manner, as the word signifies.

And so some render it, "marvelously separated"; for the pillar of cloud and fire was a very marvelous thing, and distinguished the people of Israel from all others in a surprising manner, none having been ever favored in the like manner.

If these people were to be a separated people, then there had to be some way that the world could tell the difference.

The presence of the LORD needed to be visible.

This applies to us as well.

If we are no different than the rest of the world in our behavior, how can they tell that we are Christians?

Here we see Moses telling God that he did not want to go forward without His presence.

It is important to God for the world to recognize that God's people are different, because He is with them.

Exodus 33:17 "And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name."

Or asked for, namely, go with them himself in this amazing and distinguished manner, in the pillar of the cloud and fire.

This he would do as well as show him his way and his works, and indeed all this he did by granting that.

"For thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name":

He owns the truth of the thing, on which Moses had formed his plan, and by granting his request gave a fresh proof and evidence of it.

And what can be a greater blessing than to partake of the special grace, favor, and good will of God, and to be particularly and personally known to him, with such a knowledge as has connected with it the strongest affection and highest esteem?

Here is a beautiful forgiveness statement by the LORD.

This forgiveness came because the LORD was Moses' friend.

This was an answer to Moses' request, not because these people deserved forgiveness.

Verses 18-23

Cautionary measures were needed for God to respond only in part to Moses' request to see more of Him than he was already experiencing (Num. 12:8), otherwise he would die.

Notwithstanding God's being gracious and compassionate to whomever He chose, Moses could not see God's face and live.

Whatever he saw of God's nature transformed into blazing light is referred to as "God's back" and was never subsequently described by Moses (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12).

Exodus 33:18 "And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory."

Thy glorious majesty, the brightness of thy countenance, some such manifestation of thyself as becomes thy excellence, and such as shall be seen in the other life, or the highest I am capable of seeing on earth.

Moses had lately been in the mount with God, and had had as intimate communion with God as ever any man had on this side heaven, and yet he still desires a further acquaintance.

"Show me thy glory":

Make me to see it; so the word is: make it some way or other visible, and enable me to bear the sight of it.

Not that he was so ignorant as to think God's essence could be seen with bodily eyes, but having hitherto only heard a voice out of a pillar of cloud or fire, he desired to see some representation of the divine glory, such as God saw fit to gratify him with.

Moses had talked with the LORD numerous times, but He had been hidden in the cloud.

Moses wanted to see his friend now and prayed, "beseech", for just that.

Exodus 33:19 "And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

Or, my beauty; for so that Hebrew word is sometimes used (Gen. 6:2 1; Sam. 9:2).

Or my Excellency; or my glory; as appears from Exodus 33:22), which was the thing Moses desired to see.

And the difference between his request and God's answer doth not lie.

In glory and goodness, but in showing his glory so as Moses might gaze upon it, and making it only, as it follows, to pass before him.

To wit, in a sudden and very transitory vision; though it may be understood properly of God's goodness and kindness to men, of which the following words speak, and that was the great, if not the only thing ascribed to God (Exodus 34:6-7).

"The name of the LORD":

I.e. my name; the noun for the pronoun, as is very frequent.

I will give thee notice when I come, that thou mayst attend; I will not surprise thee, nor steal by thee.

Or will proclaim, or publish of the name of the LORD, or of my name, i.e. some part of it, especially my goodness, which may seem to be here principally intended:

1. By comparing this with Exodus 34:6-7;
2. By the following words, which seem a limitation of this general expression: I will proclaim, manifest, and impart my goodness, but with a difference, not to all men, but to whom I please;
3. By other places, where the name of the LORD is principally, if not solely, understood of his goodness (as Isaiah 1:10), and in many places of the Psalms.

"I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious":

This may seem to be added, with reference to the people for whom Moses is interceding, lest Moses should misunderstand or misapply what is said here (and Exodus 34:6-7).

The sense is: I will show this peculiar favor to thee, I will also be gracious towards the people thou plead for, but not promiscuously.

Some of them I will severely and eternally punish for this and their other sins; and some of them I will pardon and save.

Not because they are righteous, or innocent, or less sinners than the rest, but merely out of my own good pleasure and most free grace, whereby I will show mercy to some, when I will not show mercy to others.

Thus this place is interpreted by the apostle (Rom. 9:16; see Romans 9:15).

Here the LORD was explaining to Moses that He did not have to explain why He blessed someone.

He could bless anyone He wanted to.

We see that He is about to reveal more of Himself to Moses than He ever had to anyone else.

God's goodness is beyond man's comprehension.

God has a hidden name and perhaps this will be revealed to Moses as God passed very near.

The LORD was not obligated to show Moses anything.

He just did, because Moses had found favor with Him.

Verses 20-23

There were limits to what Moses would see, for no one can look upon the LORD and live.

God is Spirit, with no physical features whatsoever.

So the use of anthropological imagery ("My face, My back"), is simply a means to help humans understand what cannot be understood otherwise.

Moses' passing view of the LORD's "back" was still more than ever had been seen (see John 1:18; 14:7).

Until Jesus, in whom the transcendent God was revealed in human flesh.

Exodus 33:20 "And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live."

The inability proclaimed in these words is not an absolute inability to see God, but an inability to see and survive the sight.

Jacob, when he wrestled with the angel, marveled that he could see God, even in that intermediate way, and live (Genesis 32:30).

It may well be that actually to see God, while we are in the flesh, would kill us.

The thought that no one could “see God,” at least in His full glory “and live”, is often expressed in the Old Testament (Gen. 32:30; Deut. 4:33; 5:24; 5:26, Judges 6:22; Exodus 13:22; Isa. 6:5).

Whatever this presence is, flesh cannot look upon Him and live.

We do know that God is spoken of as a consuming fire.

Whether this is what is meant here or not, we do not know.

We do know that some danger exists in a mere mortal seeing the face of God.

If we are Christians, we will see Him in heaven.

Exodus 33:21 "And the LORD said, Behold, [there is] a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock:"

Near him, not in or by the tabernacle, where it may be the pillar of cloud now was, as it had been (Exodus 33:9).

But upon the rock, where it had been for many days, and near to which there was a fit place for Moses to be in, and have that view of the goodness and glory of God he would favor him with.

"And thou shalt stand upon a rock":

In Horeb, typical of Christ the rock, the rock of Israel, and the rock of ages, the rock of refuge, salvation, and strength.

Comparable to one for shelter, solidity, firmness, strength, and duration.

And happy are they who stand upon this rock; they are safe and secure, they stand on high, and have noble prospects of the perfections of God, and of the riches of his grace and goodness (see Psalm 50:2).

Exodus 33:22 "And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:"

The displays of his grace and goodness are made.

"That I will put thee in a clift of the rock":

In one of the clefts, made by smiting it, through which the waters gushed out for the relief of the Israelites, and their flocks.

And we are told, that to this day, on the summit of Mount Sinai, by the Arabians called Gibel el Mousa.

Or the mountain of Moses, is perceived a large chasm in the rock, said to be the cave where Moses hid himself from God, when the glory of the LORD passed before him.

Now this cleft may be an emblem of Christ, as crucified, smitten, wounded and slain; who was smitten by the law and justice of God.

As this rock was smitten by the rod of Moses: And had gashes and wounds made in him like the clefts of a rock, being pierced with the nails and spear.

And in these clefts of the rock saints dwell by faith (SOS 2:14).

"And will cover thee with my hand":

With his cloud, as Ben Melech, and so may denote the cloudiness, obscurity, and darkness of the legal dispensation.

But here it seems to denote imperfection, not being able to bear the full sight of the divine glory, and which angels themselves cannot bear, but cover their faces.

And also the danger of being consumed, were it not that saints are in Christ, and covered and secured in him, otherwise God is a consuming fire.

"While I pass by thee":

Or his glory, the glory of all his perfections, wisdom, holiness, justice, power, and faithfulness, and especially of his grace, mercy, and goodness in Christ.

Exodus 33:23 "And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen."

Speaking after the manner of men: As soon as the dazzling splendors of my majesty, termed, my face, which it is impossible for man to behold and live.

Are passed by, I will, by degrees, withdraw the cloud that limited and concealed those splendors, and thou shalt see my back parts, or those rays of my glory which are not too bright and piercing for mortal eyes to sustain.

After the Divine Presence had passed by, Moses was to be permitted to look out, and would see so much of the Divine glory as he would be able to bear.

But still something far short of that which he had desired to see.

The explanation that "the back of God" means "his works, the consequences of his activity".

(Kalisch) is fanciful, and not borne out by the context.

My face cannot be seen (see verse 20; compare John 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 John 4:12).

To explain this further, the face in man is the seat of majesty, and men are known by their faces.

In them we take a full view of men.

That sight of God Moses might not have, but such a sight as we have of a man who is gone past us and we only see his back.

Now Moses was allowed to see this only.

But when he was a witness to Christ's transfiguration, he saw his face shine as the sun.

All sorts of ideas of what God looks like go racing by in a person's imagination.

There are a few things we do know about God.

Many times, He showed Himself associated with fire such as "the burning bush", etc.

We know that Jesus said He was the Light of the world.

We know that Jesus told the disciples if they had seen Him, they had seen the Father.

Beyond this, it is not good to speculate.

We do know that the LORD put Moses in a crack in the rock and passed close enough to him that the LORD covered Moses with His Hand to protect him.

When He removed His hand, Moses saw the reflection of His glory.

Anything besides that, we will have to wait for in heaven.

This presence of the LORD this close to Moses had to cleanse him even further than before.

The cry of all mankind is "Oh, to see God".

There have been songs written about the "cleft of the rock".

"Hide me, Oh, Lord in the cleft of the Rock" (Jesus).

Exodus Chapter 33 Questions

1. Where did God tell Moses to take the people?
2. Who would lead them?
3. What is the quickest way to lose God's presence?
4. What people did God promise to run out of the land for the children of Israel?
5. What two things made the land inviting?
6. What kind of people did the LORD call the children of Israel?
7. Why had God not changed His mind to give them the Promised Land?
8. What does "stiffnecked" mean?
9. What caused these Israelites to mourn?
10. Taking off their ornaments was similar to what other outward show of repentance?
11. What had the LORD threatened to do, if He came among them?
12. Where did Moses pitch the tabernacle?
13. What was the tabernacle called?
14. What two things caused God to remove His presence?
15. God never moves very far away from His people. Sometimes there is a _____ of _____ between us and God.
16. When Moses went into the tabernacle, what did the people do?
17. What did this show these people have finally done?
18. As Moses entered the tabernacle, how did God show His presence?
19. What did face to face mean in verse 11?
20. Who had become Moses' servant?
21. In verse 11, Moses was called the LORD's _____.
22. Why was Joshua allowed in the temple?
23. In verse 12 and, what was Moses pleading for?
24. What was God's answer in verse 14?
25. How could the world know these were God's people?

26. What makes us different from the world?
27. In verse 17, the LORD gave Moses two reasons why He would do what Moses asked. What were they?
28. In verse 18, Moses asked the LORD for what?
29. What did the LORD tell Moses would pass before him?
30. The LORD said, " There shall no man _____, _____.
31. Where would the LORD put Moses to protect him while He passed by?
32. What was the only part of the LORD that Moses saw?
33. The cry of all mankind is what?