

Exodus

August 12, 2007

Chapter 33

I. New Commandments

The exact chronology of the chapter is a little difficult to understand. In some cases, Moses might be writing of events that will happen later than the primary events of chapters 32-34. The original readers would have known the chronology; this would not have been a problem for them. For us, the points that we are to receive from this chapter are not threatened.

There are also a number of points that might be confusing to us. In part, this is because Moses and the Israelites are confused as to God's nature and are groping to understand it.

II. Time to Move On

Ex 33:1-6

33:1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' 2 I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 3 Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."

4 When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments. 5 For the LORD had said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites, 'You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.'" 6 So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb.

NIV

- Verse 1 It is doubtful that the LORD is saying to leave immediately. He is more likely saying that they will leave, that the stay in Sinai while important was only one stop on the way to the Promised Land.
- Verse 3 Indeed while God continues to do great miracles, the greatest ones in the trek from Egypt to Canaan have already been done.
- Verse 3 The Israelites probably misunderstand this statement. If they continue to sin or if they do not repent of their sin, God will not abide with them; if they get their act together, He will be with them. At Sinai, God has been very visible to the Israelites. He has spoken to the entire community. He has shown Himself in some way to the Elders, and He has worked closely with Moses. While all of God's presence

will not be withdrawn, they have diminished His visibility to them by not wanting God to speak directly to them and then by them sinning in the Golden Calf incident. (Does a Christian's sin ever separate him from God, thereby resulting in God being silent to him?)

Verse 4 Mourning is always a prerequisite to redemption or rededication.

Verse 5 Does God know what He will do with the Israelites? Hint: "Know" (or "decide" in NIV) is the knowing that comes from experience.

III. Knowing God

Ex 33:7-11

7 Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. **8** And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. **9** As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. **10** Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. **11** The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent. NIV

Verse 7 A reminder that the Lord does go with them, but in a limited way.

Verse 7 In the rebellions so far and especially that of Chapter 32, people were rebelling as groups. Now, if someone wanted to communicate with God, they had to walk outside the camp to the tent of meeting. By so doing, they would separate themselves from the community and do it in a way that was visible to the community.

Verse 8 The rising of the people and the standing at the entrance of their tents show the respect that the community had for Moses.

Verse 11 "Face to face" means that they were speaking as friends, which is with familiarity and plainly. Notice the tension with verse 20.

IV. God Grants a Request

Ex 33:12-14

12 Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' **13** If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." **14** The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." NIV

Verse 12 In verse 2, the LORD had stated that He would send an angel before the Moses and Israelites. However, this is not exactly what Moses

asks now as he is asking for God directly to go with them. Basically, the events of the last chapter...the rebellion, sin, death, punishment, etc. have piled up on Moses, and he realizes that he does not understand God's nature. He is asking about this nature now. Moses is very insecure.

Verse 14 How will God give rest?

V. God Grants a Request...Again

Ex 33:15-17

15 Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. 16 How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

17 And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

NIV

Verse 15 Moses is so fretful that He might lose the LORD, he repeats Himself. Remember that Moses is not rebelling against God. He is questioning his understanding of the LORD. He is confused.

Verse 17 For the fifth time in this chapter, we see "find favor" or "am pleased" which are the same words in Hebrew. Do you think that God might have a message for Moses?

VI. "Show Me Your Glory"

Ex 33:18-23

18 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

19 And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." 21 Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. 22 When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

NIV

Verse 18 What is God's glory? Why does Moses want to see it? (Hint: See next verse)

Verse 19 Since God has no badness in Him, by His announcement that all His goodness will pass in front of Moses, God is saying that He will show Moses Himself.

- Verse 19 When He shows His goodness, Moses will understand God's mercy and compassion better. Given that He has seen the aspect of God dealing with His justice, knowing that God is merciful and compassionate has become important to Moses.
- Verse 22 If Moses had peaked, what would he have seen? If God had put Moses' hands on his face, could Moses peak?
- Verse 23 Moses will only be allowed to see God's backside. What does it mean to see God's backside?
- Verse 24 Why is Moses not allowed to see God's front side?

VII. Knowing God

The chapter starts with the possibility of Moses losing the LORD's presence altogether. It ends with him being promised a chance to see the LORD more clearly than ever before.

How can we know where God is taking us? We know when we get there.

VIII. Knowing God Today (or how can we win in spiritual warfare?)

James 4:7-10

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.
NIV

Knowing God is dependent on us submitting to God and getting the sin out of our lives. This allows us to approach God, and He will come near to us. We need God's help to do this, but we must also be willing.