

EXODUS

From Slavery to Service

References

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11. Conclusions

The LORD is gracious and merciful (Exodus 33:1—34:35)

Exodus 33:1—34:35

Overview

Overview Exodus 33:1—34:35

- After the great sin of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), the covenant between God and Israel has been broken, and their relationship is fragile and precarious
- *Exodus 33*: A new crises of God's Presence arises. Moses intercedes
- *Exodus 34*: The covenant between God and Israel is renewed

*The Crises of God's
Presence. Moses
Intercedes*

Exodus Chapter 33

The Crises of God's Presence. Moses Intercedes

- 1. Exodus 33:1-6. How Will God be Present to Israel?** 
- 2. Exodus 33:7-11.** Moses and God “face-to-face”
- 3. Exodus 33:12-17.** God decides to dwell with Israel
- 4. Exodus 33:18-23.** Moses asks to see God's glory

Exodus 33:1-6. How Will God be Present to Israel?

- The LORD still intends a future for Israel, and commands them to go up to the land promised them
 - Imperative “go” (*lek*) same verb addressed to Abram in Genesis 12:1
 - Speech otherwise dominated by the exodus verb “to go up” (*ala*)
 - Thus gathers together covenantal history from Abraham to the liberation and exodus from Egypt
 - An angel is promised to go before them
 - Enemies are named who will be driven off

Exodus 33:1-6. How Will God be Present to Israel?

- “But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.” (33:3 NIV)
 - Again, the exodus verb “to go up” used
- Israel will still “go up,” but its great sin of the Golden Calf has cost it the full presence of God

Exodus 33:1-6. How Will God be Present to Israel?

- Types of divine presence
 - God's general presence in the world
 - God's intensified presence in a **theophany** (an appearance of God to a person)
 - A continuum between the above extremes
 - God's accompanying presence with Israel
 - God's presence in the Tabernacle
- Because they built a Golden Calf instead of the Tabernacle ("portable temple"), God's promised to dwell among them in the Tabernacle will not be fulfilled

Exodus 33:1-6. How Will God be Present to Israel?

- God's refusal to dwell among them is a concern for their well-being
 - They are a people inclined to sin (“stiff-necked”); if they again worship a false god, God dwelling among them might destroy them out of wrath
 - Thus a “marvelous picture of divine reluctance!” (Fretheim)

Exodus 33:1-6. How Will God be Present to Israel?

- Command to remove “ornaments”
 - The materials used to make the Golden Calf
 - They must now “strip” themselves of the symbols of ostentatious wealth as they had stripped the Egyptians when they left
- Israel mourns and obeys, in the uncertain of limbo of God’s statement “I will decide what to do to you.”

The Crises of God's Presence. Moses Intercedes

1. **Exodus 33:1-6.** How Will God be Present to Israel?
2. **Exodus 33:7-11. Moses and God “face-to-face”** 
3. **Exodus 33:12-17.** God decides to dwell with Israel
4. **Exodus 33:18-23.** Moses asks to see God's glory

Exodus 33:7-11. Moses and God “face-to-face”

- An interlude telling us about a previous mode of God’s presence with Israel
- Tent was a place where the LORD came to speak to Moses “face-to-face”
 - “Face-to-face:” unmediated
 - The LORD came as a visible “pillar of cloud”
 - They communicated “as a man speaks with his friend”
- Mention of Joshua, son of Nun (v. 11) prepares us for his authority after Moses
- The people, although observers only, are portrayed positively, watching in awe and reverence

The Crises of God's Presence. Moses Intercedes

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Exodus 33:12-17. God decides to dwell with Israel

- Moses questions God on the crises of God's Presence, and asks who God will send
- God addresses Moses personally, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." (v.14 NIV)
- Moses not satisfied, and asks God who will go "with us," "your people" (vv.15-16)

Exodus 33:12-17. God decides to dwell with Israel

- Moses reminds God that he and the Israelites (“your people”) are unique only because of God’s presence among them
- God finally honors Moses’ request: “I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” (v.17 NIV)
 - Fretheim: “God will take into account what ... human beings think and say and incorporate that into a renewed shaping of the future.” (p. 298)

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Exodus 33:18-23. Moses asks to see God's glory

- Moses: “Now, show me your glory.”
- **God's Glory:**
 - “the face / presence of God no longer enveloped by the cloud.” “a request to see God's very self” (Fretheim, p. 299)
 - “bespeaks God's awesome, shrouded, magisterial presence, something like an overpowering light. It is ... to draw even closer, more dangerously, more intimately, to the very core of God's own self.”
(Brueggemann pp. 939-40)

Exodus 33:18-23. Moses asks to see God's glory

- God answers with four affirmations and one big negative (vv. 19-20 NIV)
 - 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.
 - But... you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.

Exodus 33:18-23. Moses asks to see God's glory

- **God's Goodness**
 - More abstract, but perhaps a more genuine sign of what kind of God this God is
- Moses will be able to *hear* God proclaim God's holy name
- Moses will be able to *see* a vision of God's self
 - God's own *hand* will prevent Moses from seeing God's *face*
 - Moses will be able to see God's *back*
 - “what one would see of a God leading the people on their journeys” (Fretheim p. 300)

Exodus 33:18-23. Moses asks to see God's glory

- Why does God deny Moses the vision of the face of God?
 - Moses' safety: God's face can be seen, but one cannot continue to live after such a vision
 - “For God to be fully present would be coercive; faith would be turned into sight, and humankind could not but believe. God's presence cannot be obvious; there must be an element of ambiguity, such that disbelief remains possible. A sense of God's mystery must be preserved.” (Fretheim p. 301)

Exodus 33:18-23. Moses asks to see God's glory

- The inscrutable holiness of God
 - “the keeping or holding of self belongs in tension with the giving of self” (Brueggemann)
 - This tension is visible and operative in any serious relationship
- Moses’ partial vision of God anticipates Paul: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12 NRSV)

The Crises of God's Presence. Moses Intercedes

Reflection: Survival and the Presence of God (Brueggemann)

- If there is no sense of God's Presence, no sense of a holy source of covenantal life in our midst:
 - Certain kinds of art of and literature become impossible (Gorge Steiner, *Real Presences*)
 - Social relationships become brutal and empty; fear becomes pervasive, human dignity diminished

The Crises of God's Presence. Moses Intercedes

Reflection: Specialness of a Community (Brueggemann)

- The uniqueness / specialness of a religious community (and derivatively to any national state or group) is *not* some particular intrinsic property of the community,
- but rather the way the **Presence of God** dwells and is allowed to operate within the group

The Crises of God's Presence. Moses Intercedes

Reflection: Moses' *hutzpah* before God as a Model for Daring, Insistent Prayer (Brueggemann)

- Piety of Christian prayers perhaps too deferential
- Moses prays with enormous *hutzpah*, insisting to *know* God's ways, insisting to *see* God's glory. He refuses to let God determine the limit of asking

*The Renewal of the
Covenant*

Exodus Chapter 34

The Renewal of the Covenant

- 1. Exodus 34:1-10. A God gracious and merciful** 📢
- 2. Exodus 34:11-28. The Covenant Renewed**
- 3. Exodus 34:29-35. Moses' Radiant Face**

Exodus 34:1-10. A God gracious and merciful

- God tells Moses to bring two blank stone tablets and present himself to God on Mount Sinai
- God proclaims to Moses God's unutterable, holy name (v.5)
- God then passes in front of Moses and in a remarkable speech (verses 6-7) reveals God's own sense of God's self
 - those fundamental characteristics of God which are "most powerful and definitional for God's own life." (Brueggemann, p. 946)

Exodus 34:1-10. A God gracious and merciful

- **1. Merciful / Compassionate (*raham*)**
 - *Rahum* related to noun *rehem* (womb)
 - The positive inclination of a mother for her child, a “womb-like mother-love”
- **2. Gracious (*hannum*)**
 - A completely gratuitous positive inclination, given freely
 - An unmerited favor

Exodus 34:1-10. A God gracious and merciful

- **3. Slow to Anger** (*erek apayim*)
 - Literally, “long-nosed”
 - Exodus 32:10: “Now let me alone, so that **my wrath may burn** not against them...” literally, the “**heat of my nostrils**”
 - Thus: “long-nosed:” the heat has time to cool in a long transit
- **4. Abounding in Steadfast Love** (rab-hesed)
 - *Hesed* = sustained covenantal solidarity

Exodus 34:1-10. A God gracious and merciful

- **5. Faithfulness (*emet*)**
 - Frequently used with *hesed* (*hesed we emet*)
 - Witnesses to the LORD's complete reliability
- **6. Keeping Steadfast Love (*hesed*)**
 - God's *hesed* will continue "for the thousandth generation"
- **7. Forgiving (*nasa*)**
 - Literally: lift
 - Lifts those who sin from the burden of their sin

Exodus 34:1-10. A God gracious and merciful

- “Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” (v.7b)
 - Fretheim:
 - Just judgment not neglected
 - Visitation of iniquity on the generations: a recognition of the moral order
 - Brueggemann:
 - God will not be mocked
 - Grace is not cheap
 - God has a long and powerful memory for being wronged

Exodus 34:1-10. A God gracious and merciful

- “there is in the very core existence of Yahweh a profound and durable incongruity: God inclines to be utterly *for the other*, and God characteristically is *for God’s own self*....”
- “That contradiction makes the God of the Bible interesting, credible, and dangerous.”
- “This God is interesting, because one does not know ahead of time who God will be or how God will act”

Exodus 34:1-10. A God gracious and merciful

- “This God is credible, because this contradiction corresponds fully to the way we find our own life with others being enacted.”
- “This God is dangerous, because, just when almost ‘deciphered’ and made predictable, this God surprises us and keeps us off balance.”
- “Serious biblical faith requires a readiness to live precisely with and in the midst of this terrible, double-minded danger...”

- Brueggemann, p. 947

The Renewal of the Covenant

1. **Exodus 34:1-10.** A God gracious and merciful
2. **Exodus 34:11-28. The Covenant Renewed** 📢
3. **Exodus 34:29-35.** Moses' Radiant Face

Exodus 34:11-28. The Covenant Renewed

- God renews God's covenant with Israel
- God lists a set of commands
 - List not intended to rival the Ten Commandments
 - May reflect particular temptations that had come out in the great sin of the Golden Calf
 - “Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (v. 14 NIV)
 - “Do not make cast idols” (v. 17 NIV)

Exodus 34:11-28. The Covenant Renewed

- Israel called to observed three public festivals (vv. 18-22)
 - **1. Feast of Unleavened Bread** (part of **Passover** feast)
 - **2. Feast of Weeks** and **3. Feast of Ingathering**
 - Observances of harvest
 - Witness that the LORD is the giver of the crops that sustain the life of the people

The Renewal of the Covenant

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Exodus 34:29-35. Moses' Radiant Face

- Moses comes down from Mount Sinai, the covenant renewed, carrying the new set of tablets of the Ten Commandments
 - A renewed covenant has been established with the “stiff-necked” people
- He returns as no ordinary person: his face is “radiant” or “shining,” and must be “toned down” with a “veil”
 - He has seen the back-side of God’s glory (33:22-23)
 - He has entered deeply into the life of God
 - His face reflects and communicates the glory of God

Exodus 34:29-35. Moses' Radiant Face

- Translation problems:
 - *qa ran* = shine, can also mean horn
 - Not used to mean “shine” anywhere else in Old Testament
 - Suggests a shaft of light like a horn?
 - Michelangelo painted Moses with horns
 - *masweh* = veil. Not used anywhere else in Old Testament

Exodus 34:29-35. Moses' Radiant Face

- Glory = the “awesome entry of heavenly, holy mystery”
- “...text is concerned with the power, significance, authority, and danger of God’s glory” (Brueggemann)
 - God’s glory both enlivens (shines) and threatens (requiring a veil) Israel
 - Moses is the human mediator of the glory of God to Israel

Exodus 34:29-35. Moses' Radiant Face

- New Testament parallel: The Transfiguration of Jesus (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36)
 - Jesus is now the mediator of God's glory to the disciples