

## Bible Study # 59 Exodus 33.1–11 04–15–2021

This next section flows on from the conclusion of chapter 32, as it is a continuation of the narrative of events at Mount Sinai. The time had come for Israel to move away from Mount Sinai and go to a place that had been promised to the people long before.

The sin of the people in connection with the golden bull was still to the forefront and special provisions had to be put in place both for their journeying and for their meetings with the LORD.

The command was given for the people of Israel to move away from Sinai towards the land that God had sworn to give them. This had been promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18–21), confirmed first to Isaac (26:3–5) and then to Jacob (Gen. 28:13–15).

The rebellion of the people almost brought about their destruction (vs. 3 and 5). Hence, instead of God going with them, He provided an angel to lead and to protect them. No suggestion is given in the text that this was the angel of the LORD. The description given of Canaan matches those given earlier, both in regard to the nations inhabiting it and also the reference to its being a land of milk and honey (see earlier comments on 3:8).

God's attitude to the people was a direct result of the fact that they were stiff-necked (see comments on the first use of this phrase in 32:9). Though God had promised that His presence would go with the people (23:23), yet because of the people's rebellion that promise was temporarily withdrawn.

In v. 3 God told Moses, he would not accompany the Israelites because if they were 'stiff-necked again he would consume them. Then when the people realize what God had said, they repented of their sin and displayed a deep grief of spirit. They mourned, and as an act of penitence (like putting on sackcloth) they did not put on any ornaments.

This description of people as 'stiff-necked' is found much later in the Old Testament (see Jer. 17:23; 2 Chron. 30:8; 36:13), and even in the New Testament (Acts 7:51). The threat is that if God went with the people even for a moment, (lit. 'a blinking of the eye') he might even destroy them. An outward display of inward repentance had to be shown by the removal of their ornaments (cf. also Ezek. 26:16).

The sin of the people was so serious, and the covenant having been broken (see 32:15–20), a special place of meeting had to be provided for them. It could not be the true Tent of Meeting because of the lack of holiness. What was provided was an alternative meeting place outside the camp. It was only when the covenant was renewed (see 34:10–28) that the real Tent of Meeting could be constructed and used (see 35:30–35; 40:1–33).

Moses' practice was to pitch a tent outside the camp whenever a new site was selected. This was to be far off from the main camp, emphasizing how estranged God and his people were at this time. The name given to it, 'the tent of meeting', contained an element of hope.

It suggested that God was still prepared to continue to deal with the people in spite of their willful sinfulness. When anyone had a particular matter on which guidance was needed, then they would go outside and receive help at the tent of meeting.

In vs. 8–10 spell out the procedure that took place whenever Moses went out to 'the tent of meeting'. The rest of the Israelites were spectators, not participants. They stood at the opening of their tents, watching until Moses entered into 'the tent of meeting'.

On each occasion, something happened that links in with the earlier reference in 13:21 regarding the pillar of cloud that went before Israel. While Moses was in the tent, the pillar of cloud descended during the time he was

speaking with the LORD. This was a symbolic happening to show that the LORD had condescended to meet with His servant Moses. The who were watched remained at the entrance of their tents and worshiped.

The friendship that Moses had with the LORD was special. The LORD spoke with him 'face to face', a statement that is repeated in slightly different words in Numbers 12:8. It was a unique relationship that Moses, the covenantal mediator, had with the LORD, one that could not be paralleled with anyone else.

He spoke with him 'as a man speaks with his friend', an expression that points both to the nearness of the fellowship but also to the freedom with which the communication took place. When the revelation was over, while Moses returned to the camp, Joshua stayed there. No explanation is given of Joshua's role, but it seems that he was there as a guardian of the tent of meeting.

Our study will continue with Exodus 33.12–23.