

## Bible Study # 61 Exodus 34.1–9 04–17–2021

Before coming to the verse-by-verse exegesis of this chapter some orientation is needed for this significant section, especially as it deals with the renewed covenant at Sinai and highlights the theme of God's presence with His people.

1. The background has been set in the description of the rebellion and apostasy of Israel, resulting in the breaking of the covenantal document, the two tablets written with the finger of God (32:16). In preparation for the renewed covenantal bond, Moses had to prepare two new stone tablets, which he carried to the top of Mount Sinai (34:1–2, 4).

2. Moses' pleas for his people resulted in the LORD dealing with them graciously, not because of merit on their part, but because of Moses' mediatorial actions. God's character was revealed in the manifestation of his glory (see Moses' request in 33:18), and the declaration of himself as the compassionate and gracious God (34:6–7). This declaration became a virtual creed for Israel, and it is cited in many later Old Testament passages (see, e.g., Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13–14; Jonah 4:2).

3. Moses pled for the continued presence of God, even though he acknowledged that Israel was 'a stiff-necked people' (34:9), the fourth time this expression is used in chapters 32–34 (32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9). This expression is only used elsewhere in Deuteronomy 9:6, 13 in a passage reflecting on the golden bull incident.

4. The regular formula for making covenants ('to cut a covenant') is used of this renewed relationship (34:10, 27). In addition, the content of the covenantal document is given the same designation as in the first covenant at Sinai, 'the Words' rather than 'the commandments' (cf. 20:1 with 34:27), though here the fuller designation is used, 'the Ten Words' (34:28).

5. The renewed covenant contained instructions regarding the provision God was going to make of the land for them and the need for the people of Israel to keep themselves separate from Gentile nations (cf. 23:23–30 with 34:10–16). Heathen idols had to be shunned, and no cast images were permitted (34:15–17). This latter instruction is a pointed reference back to the bull the people had made (32:4).

6. The section setting out the required feasts (34:18–26) outlines the divinely ordained festivals, not like the substitute one that Aaron had created (32:5).

7. The thought of God's presence that dominates chapters 32–34 comes to a climax in 34:29–35. Moses' face reflected the glory of God 'as he spoke to the people all the commands that the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai' (34:32). The restored presence of God could then be further symbolized by the building and use of the Tent of Meeting (as recorded in chapters 35–40). The temporary tent (33:7–11) was no longer necessary, for God could now symbolically dwell in the midst of His people. The Tent was placed at the very centre of the camp, with the Levites' tents surrounding it (Num. 1:51–53).

[We continue now with the examination of our Scripture for today.]

Before the revelation of God's glory could take place, certain preparations were necessary. Hence Moses was instructed to chisel out fresh stone tablets to replace the ones he had broken (32:19). On these God recorded the same words that had appeared on the first tablets. There is no discrepancy with the statement in verse 28 that simply says, 'he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Words'.

The subject in the Masoretic Text is 'he', but in the context, 'the LORD', who had just been mentioned in the earlier part of the verse, must be in view. On the next morning, Moses alone was to ascend Mount Sinai again (for at least the seventh time) and stand before the LORD.

This differed from the earlier experience, when the elders, along with Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, together with Joshua, went a certain way up the mount, probably to the edge of the cloud (24:9–14). The proscription of any animal being on the mountain is a repetition of what was forbidden in 19:12–13.

The final verse recounts the obedience of Moses to the divine directions. He cut the new tablets, and early in the morning took them in his hand as he ascended the mountain. The theme of faithful adherence to the

LORD's commands runs through the remaining narrative in this book (see 35:1, 4, 10; 36:1, 5; 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 31, 32, 43; 40:16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32). God was to be worshipped and served only in the way He appointed.

As he did previously (see 24:15–16), God appeared in a cloud on the mountain. The following words do not indicate who is the subject of the verbs 'stood' and 'proclaimed'. While there are grammatical features that suggest both subjects should be Moses, yet it is probably best to take these verbs as referring to 'the LORD'.

The verb 'stood' is the same verb that has already been used of Moses in 33:21 and 34:2, though here it appears in a different verbal form. This change of theme suggests that it is the LORD who is described in this action. If that is so, then the next verb is also to be understood as having 'the LORD' as its subject.

While the expression used is 'to proclaim in the name of the LORD', which is one more commonly used of humans making a declaration in the LORD's name, yet here the context does suggest that it was the Lord himself who made this declaration. This then can be considered a summary statement of what follows in verses 6–7.

In a wonderful way, God passed by in front of Moses so that he only became aware of 'the after-effects' of this divine revelation. The declaration of His character began with the repeated 'LORD, LORD' (yhwh yhwh). The repetition was unusual, yet concentrated attention on the fact that this was the covenantal God of Israel who was making known his own character to Moses.

He was both merciful and gracious, terms that highlighted God's unfailing compassion. The following phrases spell out these initial characteristics by saying that the LORD is 'slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness'.

He does not react quickly to the transgressions of His people, but manifests extravagant love, while remaining utterly faithful to his promises. One of the best ways to help understand these expressions is to see how they are used in Psalms such as 86:5, 15 and 103:8–10. Passages such as those amplify the significance of the phrases here in Exodus 34.

Recollections of the Second Word (20:4–6) occur in verse 7. Firstly, though the wording is slightly different, the idea of continuing to love to the thousandth generation was again part of God's revelation of his own character. The duration of his love is without a limit.

Secondly, as a jealous God, the Lord ensures that the guilty are not allowed to escape the consequences of their sin, and this punishment will extend to the third and fourth generations. In between these two thoughts is the statement that God will forgive 'wickedness, rebellion, and sin'.

These three expressions form a comprehensive summary of sin, as they view it from the perspectives of willful transgression, treachery against God, and missing the mark. The same combination of terms for sin occurs in Psalm 32:1–2, as does the same assurance of the possibility of forgiveness.

The expression here for 'forgiveness' is not the most common one but it does appear elsewhere with God as the subject (cf. Num. 14:18; Pss. 32:5; 85:2; Hosea 14:2).

Moses' response was speedy, as he bowed to the ground and worshipped. He then made further intercession for the people, the fourth occasion on which he had done so (see 32:11, 31; 33:13). It is somewhat surprising that he addresses God as 'LORD' ('adonay), not as 'LORD (yhwh). The non-use of the covenantal name may be because Moses' perception of God was now focused on his great mercy.

His first request was for the divine presence to accompany the people, providing God's grace had been extended to him ('if I have found favor'). His second request was a plea for God's forgiving grace to come to a 'stiff-necked people', using the same description of them as already used in 32:9, and 33:3, 5. It is significant that Moses identifies with the people, for he refers to 'our wickedness and our sin'.

Although he had not taken part in the rebellion, he still prayed as if he was one of those who had participated in making the golden bull. This same attitude continued in his final petition, asking that God would make 'us', that is, Moses and the whole community of Israel, his inheritance.

This concept had already been stated in different words in 19:5, when God had assured his people that they were his 'treasured possession'. Inheritance conveyed the thought of continued possession, and it became part of Israel's confident belief that God would not abandon his inheritance (Ps. 94:14).

After the disaster at Sinai when the people of Israel turned to the worship of the idol they built, the Golden Young Bull, now we come to the renewal of the Covenant relationship between God and his children in the renewal of the Covenant.

How quickly Israel turned to the god they created after leaving Egypt and having seen the power of God who had delivered them from slavery. Yet now, quicker still, God restored them through his grace. Look forward to the study of the renewal of the Covenant.

**PERSONAL COMMENTS:** People wonder why Moses spoke of the sins of the people of Israel as his sins. It is because he recognized his own sinful nature. You do not find in the Bible a list of sins which places you under condemnation. Any sin, all sin, places us under condemnation. God does speak of degrees of punishment, but not degrees of condemnation. We can escape the eternal condemnation through the grace and mercy of God and like Moses we can pray for fellow sinners, children, grandchildren, mate, friends and plead their cause before the throne of grace. It will not always succeed, but many times it does. Fellow sinners, pray for fellow sinners!

We will journey through Exodus 34:10–28 next in our study.