**Exodus 33**

**Outline**

Exodus 33:1-6: Withdraw of divine presence

Exodus 33:7-11: Tent of meeting

Exodus 33:12-16: Moses’ Request

Exodus 33:17-23: God’s response

THEME OF CHAPTER: Moses’ concern for the presence of God among the people.

**Exodus 33:1-6: Withdraw of divine presence**

**1-3** Depart (NASB; Heb. hâlak) is the same word that Pharaoh dismissed the nation from his presence (Ex 12:31-32). Pharaoh sent Israel out from his presence but he

God tells the people to depart and God’s angel will go before them in order to fulfill all of God’s promises to the forefathers. However, because they are a stiff-necked people God will not go up before them for fear that He will kill them all. As it turns out, that is exactly what happens (Num. 13-14).

**AN** angel (33:2) not **MY** angel (23:20-23; 32:34)

The people wanted build a god who “will go before us” (32:1), but God had already been leading the people (13:21-22; 23:26-27). Now due to their sin of idolatry, God states He will not go before them! “There was a tragic irony in the episode of the golden calf. The people wanted to provide themselves with the reassuring symbol of God’s continued presence in their midst; yet that very symbol became the instrument of their alienation from God.”[[1]](#footnote-1) It is much like the garden of Eden! Man wanted to become like God, so he ate the fruit! But instead of being like God, Adam and Eve are afraid to walk with Him!

**3-6** God is not going to lead them because the people are obstinate (33:3, 5) and He might destroy them on the way (33:3, 5). The people mourn at this news (33:4, 6).

**Mourn…** This word is often used to speak of mourning due to death (Gen 37:34; 1 Sam 6:19; 2 Sam 19:1; 1 Chron 7:22; 2 Chron 35:24) or intense mourning (Num 14:39; 1 Sam 15:35; 16:1; 2 Sam 13:37; Ezra 10:6; Neh 1:4).

**Stripped their jewelry off (33:4, 6)…** They stripped (NASB; Heb. nâtsal) off their jewelry as a sign of mourning. Their jewelry was used in the previous chapter to fashion an idol (32:2-4), but now they refuse to put it on because they are morning. The sin of the nation has undone the blessing of the Lord.

This is the same word (Heb. nâtsal) that is used to talk about Israel plundered the Egyptians (Ex 3:22; 12:36). It is also often translated “delivered” to speak of how God delivered Israel from the Egyptians (Ex 3:8; 6:6; 12:27; 18:4, 8-10; see also Ex 2:19). Rather than being able to rejoice in the deliverance of the Lord they mourn over the fact that God will punish them for their sins.

**Sad moment in context…** The purpose of the tabernacle was so that God would dwell among His people (25:8; 29:45-46). Moses got the plans to build the tabernacle in Exodus 25-31, but now God tells the people they are too stubborn for His presence. ***Sin separates us from God!*** Thus, Exodus 33-40 are God recommissioning the people for the task. God will dwell among them (Ex. 33) so God re-establishes the covenant with the people and re-gives the Law (Ex. 34). Israel must donate goods to the tabernacle (Ex. 35) and the two people who God selected will do much of the work (36:1-7). Finally, all of it is made (Ex. 36-40).

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| Ex. 13:21-22  | God will lead them | Ex. 33:12-23 |
| Ex. 19-24 | Covenant made, law given | Ex. 34-35 |
| Ex. 25:1-8 | Donate to Tabernacle | Ex. 35:5-29 |
| Ex. 31:1-11 | Bezalel and Oholiab | Ex. 35:30-36:7 |
| Ex. 25-31 | Build tabernacle | Ex. 36-40 |

**Exodus 33:7-11: Tent of meeting**

This section of verses seems to be rather out of place. At first we are talking about God going before Israel and then we switch to the tent of meeting only to switch back to Moses imploring God to go before Israel. Therefore, what is the reason for this break in the text? Does it indicate the text was edited later or was this purposely placed in order to bring out a point?

**7-8** Moses put tent of meeting (tent of meeting is different than the tabernacle) outside of the camp far from everyone. Normally, that which is unclean was taken outside the camp and yet, here, God is outside the camp! “The camp has become spiritually polluted by the impurity produced by the golden calf affair.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Sin has caused God to remove Himself from the people. Can God dwell among the people? These verses show there has been a separation and division that has been caused by the actions of the nation toward their relationship with God.

**9-11** God would temporally meet Moses at the tent (in contrast to continual dwelling that the tabernacle was supposed to represent) and the people would watch.

**God spoke with Moses face to face…** This is anthropomorphic language to describe the close relationship God has with Moses (Dt 34:10; see Num 12:8). The fact that is it clearly hyperbole is seen from by 33:23 when God says that no human can see His “face” and live.

**Exodus 33:12-17: Moses’ Request**

Note the flow of 33:12-23…

A. Moses wants to know who will lead the nation (God, angel, God’s angel)

B. If I (Moses) have found favor in your sight and Israel is your special people why not lead us?

C. Moses wants to understand and know God better (33:13)

D. God grants Moses request (33:14)

E. We need your presence; this makes us unique people; Promised Land is not same without God

F. Moses request: Show me Your (God’s) glory and God partly agrees

**12** Moses speaks with God and pours out his heart to God. You have given me the task of leading Israel to the Promised Land but…

a) Who will you send with me?

Moses knows he needs Divine guidance! We debate what is meant by angel maybe Moses had similar questions about how God was going to lead.

b) You say I (Moses) have found favor with You (God)

How have I found favor when you will not go with me and lead the people before me?

**If I have found favor…** Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord in Gen 6:8.

**13** **Let me know Your ways…** Moses requests to know God better so that he might serve God better. He wants to find favor in the eyes of the Lord. ***I pray this is all of our attitude: I want to know the Lord more so I can serve Him better!***

**14-16** God says He will lead the people like Moses requested. Moses tells the Lord not to take them from the wilderness if God is not going to lead them.

A. The promised land without God is not the Promised Land

B. God leading His people separates them from the other nations (33:16)

Rest (Gen. 2:1-3; 5:29)

**17** God grants Moses request because he found favor in the eyes of the Lord (33:13, 16-17).

**Exodus 33:18-23: God’s response**

**18-19** Moses request to see the glory of the Lord and God states He will allow all His goodness to pass before Moses. To learn about God is to learn about His goodness. At ever turn in life it might be helpful to remember that God is good.

**Proclaim name of Lord before you…** God has known Moses by name (33:12, 17) and now God will proclaim His name to Moses. While God has declared His name before (Ex 3:14) it is a way to show His intimate relationship with Moses. God is establishing to Moses that they do have a relationship (see Moses concerns in 33:12-17).

**20-23** **No one can see God’s face and live…** Moses will not see God in all His glory and goodness but only a part.

**Make my goodness pass before you (19), while My glory is passing by (22)…** This is covenant language (Gen 15:17; Jer 34:18-19). God is planning to renew the covenant with Israel.

**Cleft of the rock (22)…** The song “He Hideth My Soul” (#363 in Hymns for Worship) is based off of this verse. The point of the verse (and to some degree the song) is not about God’s protection of us (although He does protect us) but is to speak of learning about God’s nature.

1. JSP Torah: Exodus by Nahum Sarna, P.210 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sarna, P. 212 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)