

Exodus 33
December 21, 2014

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Let me open with Matt 6:6 where Jesus is instructing His disciples: “But you, when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Q: How does Jesus portray the prayer life of the believer? [Isolative – remove yourself to go to a room, shut the door, and commune with God]

Q: Why is it important to keep the door shut? [to keep the world outside so we can talk with God undisturbed]

The setting we choose for prayer either enhances our prayer life with God, or it can detract from our prayer life with God.

Q: Do any of you have a special place in your home or outside so that you can have uninterrupted time with God in prayer? If so, where?

I wish I could say I have a place where I can go and be completely undisturbed. You would think as a single person that I could accomplish this most anywhere in the house. The problem is that I have cat. I could go to my room and close the door, only to listen to Hook'em meow wanting to be let in. Or I could sit on the couch and pray, while Hookem interrupts me for attention.

Then there's the electronics. There's a TV, an iPhone, an iPad, and a computer. It takes discipline to turn everything OFF just to make sure you're not interrupted. If I don't exercise self-control and turn them off, then as I am in praying, I will hear the “ding” telling me an email has arrived. Then I will hear a tri-tone letting me know I have a text message waiting for me.

I said earlier that our setting for prayer either enhances our prayer life or it detracts from it. Though I pray daily and often throughout the day, I believe my setting in my home allows too many distractions.

Q: Do any of you identify with this?

Transition: Our spiritual growth depends in great measure on prayer. And as we spend more alone time with our Father, we deepen our relationship with Him. Today we will watch how Moses spends time with the Lord. Let's allow Moses to be our mentor in the area of prayer. Let's look at where he goes for prayer and the content of his prayer. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

Observations/Process Qs-

V.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.’”

V.2:

- I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

V.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.”

V.4:

- When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments. [The people were so overwhelmed with sorrow by this evil word, that they all put off their ornaments, and showed by this outward sign the trouble of their heart]

V.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.’”

V.6:

- So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb. (See Ex 12:36) [the people obeyed this commandment, renouncing all that pleased the eye]

V.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.

V.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. [the whole nation looked with the deepest reverence when Moses went out to the tent, and bowed in adoration before the Lord, everyone in front of his tent, when they saw the pillar of cloud come down upon the tent and stand before the door.]

V.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.

V.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.

V.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.

Process Questions/Observations:

Q (v.3): Why is the Lord choosing not to go with His people to the promised Land? [because they are stiff-necked and He “might destroy them on the way.”] The Lord appears to be self-aware of His anger!

Q (v.4): Why do you think the Israelites mourned? [because of discipline of sin, or because God was distancing Himself from them] Which scenario would be scarier to you? [God distancing]

Q (v.7): Where did Moses go when he wanted to spend time alone with God? [Tent of Meeting]

Q (v.7): Where was the Tent of Meeting located? [outside the camp a distance away- it is understood that the camp was defiled because of the golden calf]

Q (v.9): What happened as Moses went into the Tent? [the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance while the Lord spoke with Moses]

Q: What similarities do you see between Matt 6:6 and these first eleven verses? [Moses went to another place to spend alone time with God; whenever Moses prayed, the Lord came down to be present with him]

Q: Since we're looking at Moses as our mentor in the area of prayer, what are some takeaways that we can use to strengthen our own prayer life? [Find our "tent of meeting!"]

Q: Can some of you share where your "tent of meeting" is?

Read Ex 33:12-23

V.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.'

V.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." [The meaning is this: If I have found grace in your sight, and you have recognized me as your servant, and called me to be the leader of this people, do not leave me with uncertainty as to your intentions concerning the people, or as to the angel whom you will give us as a guide to me and the nation, that I may know you, that is to say, that my finding grace in your eyes may become a reality; and if you will lead the people up to Canaan, consider that it is your own people, to whom you must acknowledge yourself as their God]

V.14:

- The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

V.15:

- Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.

V.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?"

V.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.”

V.18:

- Then Moses said, “Now show me your glory.”

V.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.”

V.20:

- But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.”

V.21:

- Then the LORD said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.

V.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.

V.23:

- Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”

Process Questions/Observations:

Q (v.12-13): How do you think Moses felt when he heard that the Lord wasn’t going with them? [unsettled, discontent]

Q: So while Moses was praying in the Tent of Meeting, he really laid out his heart to the Lord. Let’s see what we can learn from him during his prayer time. What concerns does Moses share with the Lord?

- Moses wanted to know who would be going with him (v.12). Q: Why was he concerned?
 - The Lord had told him to “lead these people”
 - He reminded the Lord that he had found favor with Him. Therefore, “Help me!”
- Moses still wanted the Lord to teach him His ways so that he may know Him and continue to find favor with Him (v.13). He reminds the Lord that the Israelites are His nation.
- Moses openly expressed his concern – “If your Presence doesn’t go with us, don’t send us from here.” Moses understands the obvious implications if God removes His presence!

Q (v.14): How did the Lord respond? [He assured Moses that His presence would go with him and the people and give them rest.]

Q: Look at his questions to the Lord in v.16. These are great questions!

- Moses is saying when you’re present with us, it means you’re pleased with us.
- Moses is saying that what distinguishes God’s children from those who don’t know God is His presence.

Q: Again, we’re looking to Moses as our prayer mentor. If we had to tag a “technique” as to how Moses appeals to God, what did you see him do that we could implement in our own prayer life? [Remind God of His promises to us! Remind Him of His Word to us.]

Q (v.17): How did the Lord respond? [He did what Moses asked of Him]

Q (v.17): On what basis did the Lord answer favorably to Moses? ["I am pleased with you and I know you by name."]

Q (v.18): What was Moses's last request? [Show him His glory]

LOOK:

Q: In light of this text, what did we learn today that would improve our own prayer life?

- Remind God of His promises
- It's okay to pray boldly
- Openly share your concerns
- Request His presence in all that we do
- Ask for Him to show us His glory

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Ex 33:1-34:35)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

II. Moses the Mediator (33:1–17)

As intercessor, Moses stood between the nation and their past sins. As mediator, he stood between the nation and their future blessings. Moses was not content just to have the nation forgiven; he wanted to be sure that God would go with them as they continued their march to the Promised Land. When the people heard that God would not go with them, they humbled themselves and mourned. It is one thing to mourn because of God's discipline of our sins and quite something else to mourn because of God's distance resulting from our pride. "An afflicted people is an object of grace," wrote C. H. Macintosh, "but a stiff-necked people must be humbled."

The tent described in vv. 7–11 is not the tabernacle, for the tabernacle had not yet been constructed. This was the tent where God met with Moses and shared His plans with him (Num. 12:6–8; Deut. 34:10). As a symbolic gesture to show Israel how wicked they had been, Moses moved the tent outside the camp. Some of the people went out to meet with God while others merely watched as Moses went out. Joshua was one who stayed with Moses and kept vigil at the tent of meeting. "Every one of us is as close to God as he has chosen to be," said J. Oswald Sanders; and this is true.

Moses asked for God's grace to bless the people and God's presence to go with the people, and the Lord granted his request. After all, it was the glorious presence of God that distinguished Israel from all the other nations. Other nations had laws, priests, and sacrifices. Only Israel had the presence of God among them.

III. Moses the Worshiper (33:18–34:35)

A. Seeing the glory (33:18–34:9).

Moses knew what many in the church today have forgotten—that the most important activity of God's people is the worship of God. Moses had been given a guarantee of God's presence with His people, but that was not enough; he wanted a new vision of the glory of God. God's "goodness" (33:19) means His character and attributes. The word "back" (33:23) carries the idea of "what remains," that is, the afterglow of the glory of God—what was "left over" after God passed by. Since God is spirit, He does not have a body as humans do. These are only human representations of divine truths about God.

Moses returned for another forty days with God on the mountain (34:28; Deut. 9:18, 25), and God gave him new tables of Law. The Lord's proclamation in 34:6–7 became a standard "statement of faith" for the Jews (Num. 14:18; 2 Chron. 30:9; Neh. 9:17; Jonah 4:2). The earlier declaration in Ex. 20:5 states that God sends judgment "unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Children and grandchildren are not condemned for the sins of their ancestors (see Ezek. 18:1–4), but they may suffer because of those sins. Once again, Moses bowed and worshiped as he communed with the Lord.

Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. (Vol. 1, p. 157). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

e. The humiliation of the people (33:1–6)

33:1–6. God then told **Moses** that he **and the people** should go on toward the Promised **Land**. This was in response to Moses' prayer (32:13). By **an angel** (cf. 32:34 and comments on 23:23) God would defeat their enemies (see comments on those groups in 3:8) and they would proceed **to the land flowing with milk and honey** (see comments on 3:8). The people were distressed that God had said, **I will not go with you**. They were promised His protection and guidance by an angel, but not His personal presence. Otherwise, God said, He would be inclined to **destroy** them. However, based on Moses' prayer in 33:12–16, God did agree to go with them (v. 17). In remorse **the people** did not wear their **ornaments** (rings, necklaces, bracelets, anklets, etc.).

2. THE RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT BY GOD (33:7–34:35)

a. The privileged position of Moses (33:7–23)

In contrast with the strained relationship between Israel and the Lord, Moses experienced intimacy with Him. These verses evidence that unique relationship in two connected sections.

33:7–11. Moses was intimate with God in the **tent** he erected **outside the camp**. There people could go to inquire **of the LORD**, apparently for spiritual guidance. This tent, though it was not the tabernacle, was also called **the tent of meeting**. When **Moses** entered **the tent, the pillar of cloud** (cf. 13:21) hovered at its **entrance**. The size and contents of this tent are not known, but it reminded **the people** that their sin was an alienating force in their relationship with God. They could worship God but from a distance (33:10); He was outside their community.

God **would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend** (v. 11), that is, clearly and openly. **Moses' speaking "face to face" with God does not contradict the fact that he was not allowed to see God's face (v. 20) as "face to face" is a figurative expression suggesting openness and friendship** (cf. Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10; and comments on John 1:18). **Joshua** stayed in **the tent**, perhaps to care for it in some way when **Moses would return to the camp**.

33:12–23. Moses also evidenced an intimate fellowship with God through His spiritual concerns. These verses may be divided into three sections each introduced by the words **Moses said** (vv. 12, 15, 18). Moses first wanted to know the Lord's intentions for His people. God had told Moses to **lead the people**, but without God's presence **Moses** was concerned. God knew Moses **by name**, that is, Moses belonged to God. So Moses wanted to continue to learn God's **ways** and enjoy God's grace (**favor**). Moses interceded on behalf of the **nation** by reminding God that they were His **people** (cf. vv. 13, 16; 32:11). In response the Lord reversed His threat not to **go with** them (cf. 33:3, 5) and to **give** them **rest** (v. 14).

Moses' second request was for confirmation that the Lord would indeed go with His **people** (vv. 15–17). Absence of God's **presence** with them in their journey to the Promised Land would pose serious problems for their and God's reputations. So again God agreed to Moses' request, assuring Moses that He was **pleased with him** (v. 17; cf. v. 16).

Third, **Moses** asked to see the **glory** of God (v. 18). This request was fulfilled as God allowed Moses to have a deeper vision of His **glory** (33:19–23). Proclaiming God's **name** (v. 19, His revealed character) to Moses, God allowed him to see His **goodness** (v. 19) and His **back**,

but not His **face** (cf. 3:6 and see comments on 33:11; John 1:18). This passage demonstrates that while people truly can know God, they can never know Him exhaustively.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 89, 140). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

33:11 If the Lord spoke face to face with Moses, why does the book later suggest that Moses never saw His face (33:20–23)? On three occasions the Bible states that God spoke “face to face” with Moses (33:11; Nm 12:8; Dt 5:4). However, it is also clear that this expression was not meant to be taken literally; in the book of Numbers, “speaking face to face” is equated with “openly, and not in riddles” (Nm 12:8). For a discussion of Moses’ seeing God, **see note on 3:6.**

3:6 If God cannot be seen, why was Moses afraid to look upon Him? The Bible states that God is invisible (1 Tm 1:17; 6:16) and that no one has ever seen Him (Jn 1:18; 1 Jn 4:12, 20). But biblical narrative also makes it clear that God personally visited human beings at various times, and did so in awesome and mysterious ways. The divine disclosure might take the form of a phenomenon of nature—a storm (Job 38:1), a fire (Dt 4:12), a fiery cloud (Ex 13:21), or a burning bush (vv. 2–4)—or the revelation could be human in appearance (Gn 18:1–33). But the Bible suggests that these self-expressions of God were mediated and partial, not the direct appearance of God in His fullness. The Israelites saw the fire of God, but they did not see Him; they heard God’s voice, but they never saw His mouth speaking (Dt 4:12). Moses saw God’s form (Nm 12:8), but never saw His face (Ex 33:20–23). When Moses became aware that the bush was burning because God’s presence was within it, he showed reverent submission by practicing the timeless Asiatic custom of avoiding eye contact with a superior. To have gazed directly upon God would have been to show contemptuous pride, and risk destruction.

Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). Commentary on the Old Testament (Vol. 1, pp. 472–477). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

Ex. 33:1–6. Moses’ negotiations with the people, for the purpose of bringing them to sorrow and repentance, commenced with the announcement of what Jehovah had said. The words of Jehovah in vv. 1–3, which are only a still further expansion of the assurance contained in Ex. 32:34, commence in a similar manner to the covenant promise in Ex. 23:20, 23; but there is this great difference, that whereas the name, i.e., the presence of Jehovah Himself, was to have gone before the Israelites in the angel promised to the people as a leader in Ex. 23:20, now, though Jehovah would still send an angel before Moses and Israel, He Himself would not go up to Canaan (a land flowing, etc., see at 3:8) in the midst of Israel, lest He should destroy the people by the way, because they were stiff-necked (אֲבִלְעָם for אֲבִלְעָם, see *Ges.* § 27, 3, *Anm.* 2).

Ex. 33:4. The people were so overwhelmed with sorrow by this evil word, that they all put off their ornaments, and showed by this outward sign the trouble of their heart,

Ex. 33:5. That this good beginning of repentance might lead to a true and permanent change of heart, Jehovah repeated His threat in a most emphatic manner: “*Thou art a stiff-necked people; if I go a moment in the midst of thee, I destroy thee:*” i.e., if I were to go up in the midst of thee for only a single moment, I should be compelled to destroy thee because of thine

obduracy. He then issued this command: *“Throw thine ornament away from thee, and I shall know (by that) what to do to thee.”*

Ex. 33:6. And the people obeyed this commandment, renouncing all that pleased the eye. *“The children of Israel spoiled themselves (see at Ex. 12:36) of their ornament from Mount Horeb onwards.”* Thus they entered formally into a penitential condition. The expression, “from Mount Horeb onwards,” can hardly be paraphrased as it is by *Seb. Schmidt*, viz., “going from Mount Horeb into the camp,” but in all probability expresses this idea, that from that time forward, i.e., after the occurrence of this event at Horeb, they laid aside the ornaments which they had hitherto worn, and assumed the outward appearance of perpetual penitence.

Ex. 33:7–11. Moses then took a tent, and pitched it outside the camp, at some distance off, and called it *“tent of meeting.”* The “tent” is neither the sanctuary of the tabernacle described in Ex. 25ff., which was not made till after the perfect restoration of the covenant (Ex. 35ff.), nor another sanctuary that had come down from their forefathers and was used before the tabernacle was built, as *Clericus, J. D. Michaelis, Rosenmüller*, and others suppose; but a tent belonging to Moses, which was made into a temporary sanctuary by the fact that the pillar of cloud came down upon it, and Jehovah talked with Moses there, and which was called by the same name as the tabernacle, viz., אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (see at Ex. 27:21), because Jehovah revealed Himself there, and everyone who sought Him had to go to this tent outside the camp. There were two reasons for this: in the first place, Moses desired thereby to lead the people to a fuller recognition of their separation from their God, that their penitence might be deepened in consequence; and in the second place, he wished to provide such means of intercourse with Jehovah as would not only awaken in the minds of the people a longing for the renewal of the covenant, but render the restoration of the covenant possible. And this end was answered. Not only did everyone who sought Jehovah go out to the tent, but the whole nation looked with the deepest reverence when Moses went out to the tent, and bowed in adoration before the Lord, everyone in front of his tent, when they saw the pillar of cloud come down upon the tent and stand before the door. Out of this cloud Jehovah talked with Moses (vv. 7–10) *“face to face, as a man talks with his friend”* (v. 11); that is to say, not from the distance of heaven, through any kind of medium whatever, but “mouth to mouth,” as it is called in Num. 12:8, as closely and directly as friends talk to one another. “These words indicate, therefore, a familiar conversation, just as much as if it had been said, that God appeared to Moses in some peculiar form of manifestation. If anyone objects to this, that it is at variance with the assertion which we shall come to presently, ‘Thou canst not see My face,’ the answer is a very simple one. Although Jehovah showed Himself to Moses in some peculiar form of manifestation, He never appeared in His own essential glory, but only in such a mode as human weakness could bear. This solution contains a tacit comparison, viz., that there never was any one equal to Moses, or who had attained to the same dignity as he” (*Calvin*). When Moses returned to the tent, his servant Joshua remained behind as guard.—This condescension on the part of Jehovah towards Moses could not fail to strengthen the people in their reliance upon their leader, as the confidant of Jehovah. And Moses himself was encouraged thereby to endeavour to effect a perfect restoration of the covenant bond that had been destroyed.

Ex. 33:12–23. Jehovah had commanded Moses to lead the people to Canaan, and promised him the guidance of an angel; but He had expressly distinguished this angel from His own personal presence (vv. 1–3). Moreover, though it has not been mentioned before, Jehovah had said to Moses, *“I have known thee by name,”*—i.e., I have recognized thee as Mine, and chosen and called thee to execute My will (cf. Isa. 43:1; 49:1), or put thee into “a specifically personal relation to God, which was peculiar to Moses, and therefore was associated with his name”

(Oehler);—“*and thou hast also found grace in My eyes,*” inasmuch as God had granted a hearing to his former intercession. Moses now reminded the Lord of this divine assurance with such courage as can only be produced by faith, which wrestles with God and will not let Him go without a blessing (Gen. 32:27); and upon the strength of this he presented the petition (v. 13), “*Let me know Thy way (the way which Thou wilt take with me and with this people), that I may know Thee, in order that I may find grace in Thine eyes, and see that this people is Thy people.*” The meaning is this: If I have found grace in Thy sight, and Thou hast recognised me as Thy servant, and called me to be the leader of this people, do not leave me in uncertainty as to Thine intentions concerning the people, or as to the angel whom Thou wilt give as a guide to me and the nation, that I may know Thee, that is to say, that my finding grace in Thine eyes may become a reality; and if Thou wilt lead the people up to Canaan, consider that it is Thine own people, to whom Thou must acknowledge Thyself as its God. Such boldness of undoubting faith presses to the heart of God, and brings away the blessing. Jehovah replied (v. 14), “*My face will go, and I shall give thee rest,*”—that is to say, shall bring thee and all this people into the land, where ye will find rest (Deut. 3:20). The “face” of Jehovah is Jehovah in His own personal presence, and is identical with the “angel” in whom the name of Jehovah was (Ex. 23:20, 21), and who is therefore called in Isa. 63:9 “the angel of His face.”

With this assurance on the part of God, the covenant bond was completely restored. But to make more sure of it. Moses replied (vv. 15, 16), “*If Thy face is not going (with us), lead us not up hence. And whereby shall it be known that I have found grace in thine eyes, I and Thy people, if not (lit., is it not known) in Thy going with us, that we, I and Thy people, are distinguished (see at Ex. 8:18) before every nation upon the face of the earth?*” These words do not express any doubt as to the truth of the divine assurance, “but a certain feeling of the insufficiency of the assurance,” inasmuch as even with the restoration of the former condition of things there still remained “the fear lest the evil root of the people’s rebellion, which had once manifested itself, should break forth again at any moment” (*Baumgarten*). For this reason Jehovah assured him that this request also should be granted (v. 17). “There was nothing extraordinary in the fact that Moses desired for himself and his people that they might be distinguished before every nation upon the face of the earth; this was merely the firm hold of faith upon the calling and election of God (Ex. 19:5, 6).”

Ex. 33:18. Moses was emboldened by this, and now prayed to the Lord, “*Let me see Thy glory.*” What Moses desired to see, as the answer of God clearly shows, must have been something surpassing all former revelations of the glory of Jehovah (Ex. 16:7, 10; 24:16, 17), and even going beyond Jehovah’s talking with him face to face (v. 11). When God talked with him face to face, or mouth to mouth, he merely saw a “similitude of Jehovah” (Num. 12:8), a form which rendered the invisible being of God visible to the human eye, i.e., a manifestation of the divine glory in a certain form, and not the direct or essential glory of Jehovah, whilst the people saw this glory under the veil of a dark cloud, rendered luminous by fire, that is to say, they only saw its splendour as it shone through the cloud; and even the elders, at the time when the covenant was made, only saw the God of Israel in a certain form which hid from their eyes the essential being of God (Ex. 24:10, 11). What Moses desired, therefore, was a sight of the glory or essential being of God, without any figure, and without a veil.

Moses was urged to offer this prayer, as *Calvin* truly says, not by “*stulta curiositas, quae ut plurimum titillat hominum mentes, ut audacter penetrare tentent usque ad ultima caelorum arcana,*” but by “a desire to cross the chasm which had been made by the apostasy of the nation, that for the future he might have a firmer footing than the previous history had given him. As so

great a stress had been laid upon his own person in his present task of mediation between the offended Jehovah and the apostate nation, he felt that the separation, which existed between himself and Jehovah, introduced a disturbing element into his office. For if his own personal fellowship with Jehovah was not fully established, and raised above all possibility of disturbance, there could be no eternal foundation for the perpetuity of his mediation” (*Baumgarten*). As a man called by God to be His servant, he was not yet the perfect mediator; but although he was faithful in all his house, it was only as a servant, called εἰς μαρτύριον τῶν λαληθησομένων (Heb. 3:5), i.e., as a herald of the saving revelations of God, preparing the way for the coming of the perfect Mediator. Jehovah therefore granted his request, but only so far as the limit existing between the infinite and holy God and finite and sinful man allowed. “*I will make all My goodness pass before thy face, and proclaim the name of Jehovah before thee* (קָרָא בְּשֵׁם see at Gen. 4:26), *and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. Thou canst not see My face, for man cannot see Me and live.*” The words וַיַּחַנְתִּי וְגוֹ, although only connected with the previous clause by the cop. ו, are to be understood in a causative sense, as expressing the reason why Moses’ request was granted, viz., that it was an act of unconditional grace and compassion on the part of God, to which no man, not even Moses, could lay any just claim. The apostle Paul uses the words in the same sense in Rom. 9:15, for the purpose of overthrowing the claims of self-righteous Jews to participate in the Messianic salvation.—No mortal man can see the face of God and remain alive; for not only is the holy God a consuming fire to unholy man, but a limit has been set, in and with the σῶμα χοϊκόν and ψυχικόν (the earthly and psychical body) of man, between the infinite God, the absolute Spirit, and the human spirit clothed in an earthly body, which will only be removed by the “redemption of our body,” and our being clothed in a “spiritual body,” and which, so long as it lasts, renders a direct sight of the glory of God impossible. As our bodily eye is dazzled, and its power of vision destroyed, by looking directly at the brightness of the sun, so would our whole nature be destroyed by an unveiled sight of the brilliancy of the glory of God. So long as we are clothed with this body, which was destined, indeed, from the very first to be transformed into the glorified state of the immortality of the spirit, but has become through the fall a prey to the corruption of death, we can only walk in faith, and only see God with the eye of faith, so far as He has revealed His glory to us in His works and His word. When we have become like God, and have been transformed into the “divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), then, and not till then, shall we see Him as He is; then we shall see His glory without a veil, and live before Him for ever. For this reason Moses had to content himself with the passing by of the glory of God before his face, and with the revelation of the name of Jehovah through the medium of the word, in which God discloses His inmost being, and, so to speak, His whole heart to faith. In v. 22 “My glory” is used for “all My goodness,” and in Ex. 34:6 it is stated that *Jehovah* passed by before the face of Moses. טוֹב is not to be understood in the sense of beautiful, or beauty, but signifies goodness; not the brilliancy which strikes the senses, but the spiritual and ethical nature of the Divine Being. For the manifestation of Jehovah, which passed before Moses, was intended unquestionably to reveal nothing else than what Jehovah expressed in the proclamation of His name.

The manifested glory of the Lord would so surely be followed by the destruction of man, that even Moses needed to be protected before it (vv. 21, 22). Whilst Jehovah, therefore, allowed him

to come to a place upon the rock near Him, i.e., upon the summit of Sinai (Ex. 34:2), He said that He would put him in a cleft of the rock whilst He was passing by, and cover him with His hand when He had gone by, that he might see His back, because His face could not be seen. The back, as contrasted with the face, signifies the reflection of the glory of God that had just passed by. The words are transferred anthropomorphically from man to God, because human language and human thought can only conceive of the nature of the absolute Spirit according to the analogy of the human form. As the inward nature of man manifests itself in his face, and the sight of his back gives only an imperfect and outward view of him, so Moses saw only the back and not the face of Jehovah. It is impossible to put more into human words concerning this unparalleled vision, which far surpasses all human thought and comprehension. According to Ex. 34:2, the place where Moses stood by the Lord was at the top (the head) of Sinai, and no more can be determined with certainty concerning it. The cleft in the rock (v. 22) has been supposed by some to be the same place as the “cave” in which Elijah lodged at Horeb, and where the Lord appeared to him in the still small voice (1 Kings 19:9ff.). The real summit of the Jebel Musa consists of “a small area of huge rocks, about 80 feet in diameter,” upon which there is now a chapel that has almost fallen down, and about 40 feet to the south-west a dilapidated mosque (*Robinson, Palestine, vol. i. p. 153*). Below this mosque, according to *Seetzen (Reise iii. pp. 83, 84)*, there is a very small grotto, into which you descend by several steps, and to which a large block of granite, about a fathom and a half long and six spans in height, serves as a roof. According to the Mussulman tradition, which the Greek monks also accept, it was in this small grotto that Moses received the law; though other monks point out a “hole, just large enough for a man,” near the altar of the Elijah chapel, on the small plain upon the ridge of Sinai, above which the loftier peak rises about 700 feet, as the cave in which Elijah lodged on Horeb (*Robinson, Pal. ut supra*).¹

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¹ Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, pp. 472–477). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.