

Exodus 34
December 28, 2014

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Have you ever sinned against God in such a big way that you questioned your standing with Him – even after you confessed it to Him and asked His forgiveness? Do you live with a seed of doubt that maybe you've lost His favor and that your relationship to God will never be the same because of it?

It's only a guess on my part that all of us have sinned or rebelled against God during some chapters of our lives that not only grieved God, but grieved us. I bet most, if not all, of us have looked upon our past choices and with a flood of tears ask ourselves, "What were we thinking?! I can't believe I made that choice?"

And then how we processed it complicated things. Before we chose to fall into sin, we didn't worry about God's unconditional love for us. We felt secure in it – until we made some choices that caused us to think less of ourselves. And then we decided that if we think less of ourselves, then God must really think less of me. And in our own pain of what we did, our heads kept trying to assure us that God's love for us was intact and not based on our performance, but our hearts said, "He can't possibly love me. I don't think our relationship will ever be the same."

And then it got even more complicated. When bad things happened to us, instead of processing it as "bad things happen to all people," we gravitated to "God must be punishing me because He's still unhappy with me." Instead of accepting that God metes out His consequences fairly, we keep internalizing that every time something bad happens, we are still paying the price for something that happened years ago. We joke about it, but this theology seems to be alive and well.

Transition: Don't feel alone. The Israelites questioned where they stood with God. If you were with us last week, Moses was interceding for them and pleading with God to go with him and the nation of Israel. The Lord told the Israelites, "You are stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you." That's pretty strong language. The Lord commanded them to "take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you next." If there was any group of people who didn't feel secure in their relationship to God, it was the Israelites. I realize we're only in Ex 34, and it appears the Israelites have only messed up once, but here's a "spoiler alert." The Israelites will mess up many more times to come, just like us!

It is my prayer this morning that this chapter will clean up any poor theology that has crept into our hearts over the years. This passage reveals that God's abundant grace is alive and well. But here's a key point we should not miss as we begin today's study: the beginning point for restoring our relationship with God is *repentance*. In Chp 33, the Israelites demonstrated their repentance by taking off their ornaments – even before God asked them to do it. See 33:4.

As we go through today's passage, I want you to watch how God restores them. It's actually a beautiful picture of His grace. Let's watch the process of restoration unfold and look at each of the STEPS that God incorporates to bring the Israelites back in favor with God. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Exodus 34:1-9]

Observations/Process Qs-

V.1:

- The LORD said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.

V.2:

- Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain.

V.3:

- No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain; not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain."

V.4:

- So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands.

V.5:

- Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD.

V.6:

- And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,

V.7:

- maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. 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." [Wiersbe - 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]

V.8:

- Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped.

V.9:

- "O Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes," he said, "then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance."

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What STEPS do you see the Lord take to begin the restoration process with His people?

- He had Moses chisel two stone tablets so that He could re-write the Ten Commandments
- The Lord proclaimed His name and reminded Moses of whom He was.
- Q v.6-7: What attributes did the Lord attribute to Himself? [Compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love, faithful, forgiving]
- Q: Why do you think it was important to the Lord to proclaim Himself before Moses? [He wanted to assure Moses of His benevolent character]

- The Lord reminds Moses of His nature of being holy and just. He’s not just a benevolent God, but one who fairly deals with sin.
- Moses takes the step to intercede for the Israelites and seek forgiveness on their behalf.

Read Exodus 34:10-17

V.10:

- Then the LORD said: “I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you.

V.11:

- Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

V.12:

- Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you.

V.13:

- Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles.

V.14:

- Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

V.15:

- “Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices.

V.16:

- And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.

V.17:

- “Do not make cast idols.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What STEPS do you see the Lord take to continue the restoration process with His people?

- Upon forgiving the Israelites, he **renews** His covenant.
- Q v.10-11: What does the Lord agree to do? [He will do wonders before them never seen; He will drive out the enemies]
- Q v.11-14: What was required of the Israelites in this renewed covenant? [Obey what God commands; maintain purity by not making treaties with idolaters; break down their altars, smash their sacred stones; cut down their Asherah poles; don’t worship any other gods. Notice: He doesn’t tell them to “avoid” these altars. He wants them to **destroy** them!]
- The Lord gives Moses the “why” behind these instructions. What was it? [The Lord’s name is Jealous, for He is a jealous God.]
- Q v.15-17: What other requirements does God have of His children? [Don’t make treaties with idolaters in the land b/c their worship of idols will lead your daughters and sons to do the same; don’t make cast idols.]

Read Exodus 34:18-26

V.18:

- “Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt.

V.19:

- “The first offspring of every womb belongs to me, including all the firstborn males of your livestock, whether from herd or flock.

V.20:

- Redeem the firstborn donkey with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem all your firstborn sons.
- “No one is to appear before me empty-handed.

V.21:

- “Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.

V.22:

- “Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year.

V.23:

- Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD, the God of Israel.

V.24:

- I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory, and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the LORD your God.

V.25:

- “Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast, and do not let any of the sacrifice from the Passover Feast remain until morning.

V.26:

- “Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God.
- “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.” [The prohibition against cooking **a young goat in its mother’s milk** (23:19; cf. 34:26; Deut. 14:21) may have been because of religious practices in which the Canaanites cooked goats in their mother’s milk in a fertility rite. God did not want His people to partake of anything related to idolatrous worship]

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What STEPS do you see the Lord take to continue the restoration process with His people?

- God **repeats the requirements** of worship
- Q: What were the requirements specifically? [Celebrate Feast of Unleavened Bread; Rest on the seventh day – even during plowing season; He wants the firstfruits – ALWAYS (firstborn sons, firstborn animals, wheat harvest, any firstfruit of the soil)]
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Read Exodus 34:27-35

V.27:

- Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.”

V.28:

- Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.

V.29:

- When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD.

V.30:

- When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him.

V.31:

- But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them.

V.32:

- Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai.

V.33:

- When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face.

V.34:

- But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded,

V.35:

- they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD. [Moses only reflected God's glory and had to wear a veil so the people could not see the glory disappear]

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What STEPS do you see the Lord take to continue the restoration process with His people?

- The Lord models getting things in writing when there is a covenant involved! He instructs Moses to “write down these words to reflect the covenant.”
- Q v.30: How did the Israelites know that Moses was in the presence of God? [His face was radiant!]
- Q v.30: How did the Israelites react to a radiant face? [They were afraid to come near him]
- Observation: I find it interesting that ever since Moses asked God to show him His glory to show His presence, Moses now shows that he was in the presence of God because his face is radiant, which is a reflection of God's glory. I'm not sure this was coincidental.]
- If time permits, x-ref 2 Cor 3. [Wiersbe - The glory of the OT Law was temporary and finally faded away, but the glory of new covenant grace grows brighter and brighter. Moses only reflected God's glory and had to wear a veil so the people could not see the glory disappear, but God's people today radiate God's glory from within as they see Jesus Christ in the Word (the mirror) and become more like Him (2 Cor. 3:18). Ours is to be a constant “transfiguration” experience as we walk with the Lord. (“Transformed” in Rom. 12:2, and “changed” in 2 Cor. 3:18 are both the Gk. word “transfigured” as used in Matt. 17:2.)]

LOOK:

I hope you saw a beautiful picture of God's grace today. Here is a summary of the process God used to restore His children:

- The trigger event for God to restore us is our **REPENTANCE**.
- Once He sees our broken and contrite heart, God desires to **RESTORE** the relationship.
- Once He decides to restore us, He's ALL IN. He renews His covenant of love with us by:
 - **REVEALING** His compassion, grace, and abounding love by forgiving us
 - **RENEWING** His covenant with His people
 - His part is to do wonders and drive out the enemies
 - Our part is to obey what the Lord commands us.
 - Don't make a treaty with those who are idolaters
 - Smash their sacred stones and Asherah poles
 - Don't worship any other god
 - If you intermarry, don't prostitute yourselves to their gods
 - Don't make cast idols.
 - **REPEATS** the requirements of worship
 - Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - Don't come to Him empty-handed. Give Him the firstfruits
 - Rest on the seventh day, even during plowing season
- God **REINFORCES** the "why" behind His requirements – He is a HOLY God and wants us to have an unadulterated relationship with Him by maintaining purity in our own relationships with others.

In case you think God is still displeased with you and that you could never be forgiven or be back in His good graces, I hope that this passage reveals that God's grace is alive and well and for us. His standards won't change. He won't lower the bar for us because He expects us to have respect for Him by obeying what He tells us to do. And there is nothing that He's asked of us that He hasn't empowered us to do!

A healthy theology says let go of your past sins. That means come to God with your broken heart because you know you grieved Him – not because you have to face the consequences. When God restores favor, that does not equate to "no consequences" for bad behavior! He is a just God, so He will not leave the guilty unpunished. If we will simply admit that we rebelled and sinned against Him, then watch God's compassion, grace, and abounding love for us just wash over us. Watch Him cleanse you. Rest in His unconditional love for you. Enjoy finding favor with Him, but with a commitment to obey Him.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Ex 33:18-34:35). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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.

B. Protecting the glory (34:10–28).

God reminded Moses that the people of Israel were to be different from the people living in the land of Canaan, and He warned Moses against the sin of idolatry. What is idolatry? It is exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for an image (Rom. 1:23) and worshiping and serving the creature instead of the Creator (Rom. 1:25). God gave Israel His Law so that they might live godly lives and manifest His glory.

C. Reflecting the glory (34:29–35).

You will want to read 2 Cor. 3 to get the spiritual lessons for today. The glory of the OT Law was temporary and finally faded away, but the glory of new covenant grace grows brighter and brighter. Moses only reflected God's glory and had to wear a veil so the people could not see the glory disappear, but God's people today radiate God's glory from within as they see Jesus Christ in the Word (the mirror) and become more like Him (2 Cor. 3:18). Ours is to be a constant "transfiguration" experience as we walk with the Lord. ("Transformed" in Rom. 12:2, and "changed" in 2 Cor. 3:18 are both the Gk. word "transfigured" as used in Matt. 17:2.)

Toussaint, S. D. (1985). *Acts*. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. (Vol. 1, pp. 157–159). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

b. The renewal of the covenant (chap. 34)

The Lord gave Moses new stone tablets of the Decalogue, declared His glory to Moses as the inaugurator of the Mosaic Covenant, and enumerated the demands that stem from the covenant

relationship. Other covenant renewals are recorded in Deuteronomy 5:2–3; 29:1; Joshua 24:25; 2 Kings 23:21–27.

(1) The second tablets of stone.

34:1–4. The tangible token of God’s unique relationship with Israel was **the two stone tablets** with the Ten Commandments, which **Moses** had broken (32:19). Once again **Moses** was to ascend **Mount Sinai**, taking with him two tablets **chiseled ... like the first ones**. As before, he was to go alone. This obviously indicates that God was about to renew His covenant with Israel.

(2) The revelation of God to Moses.

34:5–9. On the mountain **Moses** experienced a new vision of the glory of God as Testator of the covenant. In fulfillment of His promise (33:19), God revealed **His name** (His character) to Moses. God told Moses that His name Yahweh (**the LORD**) means that He is a God of compassion, grace, loyalty (*hesed*, **love**, twice in vv. 6–7), **faithfulness** (*’emet*, “reliability”), and forgiveness. This information adds to what was said earlier about His name (cf. comments on 3:13–14). Yahweh is the name that suggests God’s relationship with His people. Some or all of these attributes of God are cited seven other times in the Old Testament (Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2).

Within the display of His grand benevolence is the attribute of justice that necessitates His punishing any person who violates His righteous character (**He punishes**, Ex. 34:7). On God’s punishing **children ... to the third and fourth generation** see comments on 20:5.

In response to this disclosure of God’s character **Moses ... worshiped** Him, then pleaded for His mercy for such **a stiff-necked people**, as God had called them (32:9; 33:3, 5). Moses also asked that God again promise to **go with** them (cf. 33:3, 12, 14), thereby renewing His promise to dwell among His people and own them as His **inheritance** (cf. Deut. 4:20).

(3) The renewal of the covenant (34:10–28).

34:10–11. These verses are a preamble or introduction to the terms of the covenant which follow in verses 12–28. God promised to renew the Mosaic Covenant and to work mightily through them, to display **wonders** (cf. “wonders in” 3:20) so that other **people** would see **how awesome** are God and His **work**. Those wonders would include His driving out the people living in Palestine (see comments on those groups in 3:8). But this Conquest was conditioned on Israel’s obedience to God.

34:12–17. God had revealed His character (vv. 5–7) and promised His presence and power (vv. 10–11). The covenant obligation to obey, given in detail in chapters 21–23, was now (34:12–18) given in summary form. This code is essentially what was previously given in the “Book of the Covenant” (24:7) though 34:12–28 is more harsh than the first because of Israel’s recent sin (chap. 32).

One of the major purposes of these regulations was to keep Israel from idolatry, an unthinkable practice in a theocracy. Israel, however, had already fallen into idolatry. To **make a treaty** (cf. 23:32) with a people implies the acceptance of **their gods**, and this was to be avoided. Strong action was to be taken against idols: **altars** were to be broken, **sacred stones** (cf. Deut. 7:5; 12:3), possibly male fertility symbols, smashed, and **Asherah poles** cut **down**. In their pagan worship Canaanites erected poles in honor of the goddess Asherah, consort of Baal (also see comments on 2 Chron. 14:3). Because Israel had fallen into idolatry (Ex. 32) the instructions here (34:12–13) were more inclusive than those in 23:24.

The Mosaic Covenant was the basis of God’s theocratic rule over His people. Therefore since He alone is God He tolerates no rivals (cf. 20:3). It is in this sense that **God is jealous** (cf. 20:5).

Making a **treaty** with idolaters would lead to involvement in their sacrificial communal meals (34:15), to intermarrying their **daughters** (many of whom were spiritual and/or physical prostitutes **to their gods**; cf. Hosea 4:13–14), and even to making molten images (Ex. 34:17; cf. 20:4) as they had already done with the gold calf (32:4). Tragically Israel did not heed these warnings and they did in fact become involved in worshipping the Canaanites' and others' false **gods**. Ultimately this led to Israel being exiled.

34:18–26. Having described the forms of worship Israel must avoid (vv. 12–17), God reminded Israel to worship Him actively through the designated holy feasts. The three major feasts are enumerated (vv. 18, 22) with the promise that celebrating them properly would result in God's giving them the **land** of promise and keeping it safe (v. 24).

The seven-day **Feast of Unleavened Bread** was to be observed (cf. 12:15–20; 23:15) in **Abib** (March–April), the month of the Exodus, and **the firstborn** were to be dedicated to the Lord (34:19–20; cf. 13:12–13; 22:29–30). These two were associated because of the link between the 10th plague (death of the Egyptians' **firstborn**) and the Exodus.

Before mentioning the second and third feasts (34:22), God reminded Israel of her obligation to **rest** on the Sabbath (cf. 20:8) even including Sabbaths in the busiest times of the year (**plowing season and harvest**). The harvesting season was mentioned because it led naturally to the next two annual feasts, both pertaining to harvests. **The Feast of Weeks**, also called the Feast of Harvest (23:16) and the Feast of Pentecost, was to be celebrated 50 days after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This second feast was at the beginning **of the wheat harvest**.

The Feast of Ingathering, also an agriculturally related feast, was to be celebrated at harvesttime **at the turn of the year** (cf. comments on 23:16). **All the men** of Israel were supposed **to appear before the ... LORD** (34:23) for these three feasts (which later meant traveling to Jerusalem to the tabernacle or the temple). These pilgrimage feasts bound the nation together in religious worship. God promised that while the men were away from home worshipping the Lord, He would protect their **land**.

This passage includes other instructions: two additional regulations about the Feast of Unleavened Bread—the avoidance of **yeast** and the consumption of the entire **Passover** meal (34:25; cf. 23:18)—the law of **the firstfruits** (related to the Feast of Weeks), and the prohibition against cooking **a young goat in its mother's milk** (see comments on 23:19 **The prohibition against cooking a young goat in its mother's milk** (23:19; cf. 34:26; Deut. 14:21) may have been because of religious practices in which the Canaanites cooked goats in their mother's milk in a fertility rite. God did not want His people to partake of anything related to idolatrous worship).

34:27–28. As with the giving of the Book of the Covenant the first time, **Moses** was to **write down** the commands (cf. 24:4). After **40 days**, the length of the first sojourn on Mount Sinai (24:18), **Moses** received **the tablets** of stone containing **the Ten Commandments**, the sign of **the covenant**. The Ten Commandments (34:28) were in addition to **these words** (v. 27). Unlike the previous 40 days, the people this time did not become infatuated with idolatry.

(4) The glory of God on Moses.

34:29–35. In contrast with the anger and holy indignation that **Moses** evidenced when he returned with the first set of **tablets** (32:19), this time **his face** radiated with the glory of God (cf. 2 Cor. 3:7), but he was unaware of it. This made the people **afraid of him**, but he encouraged them to listen as he told them the stipulations of the renewed covenant.

Apparently the people told **Moses** his face shone because he then covered it with a **veil** (*masweh*, a word used only here—in Ex. 34:33–35—in the OT; cf. 2 Cor. 3:13). But in **the LORD’s presence** Moses took off **the veil** (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18).

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. 141 – 142). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

34:6–7 For a discussion of God’s punishing the descendants of a person who sins, see note on **20:5** Although this verse seems to say that God punishes children for the sins of their parents, that is not the case. God does not condemn children because of their parents’ misbehavior (see Dt 24:16; Ezk 18:20). However, children suffer the consequences of their parents’ sinful choices. A parent’s adultery, substance abuse, manipulation or other dysfunctional behavior establishes a pattern that children model as they mature. The result can be a repetition of their parents’ emotional brokenness leading to conflict, divorce, poverty or other conditions that make their children’s, and even their grandchildren’s, lives difficult.

In this verse God suggests that one reason we should obey Him is for the sake of our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Like ripples spreading across a pool of calm water, our actions have consequences for generations to come. We can create waves of difficulty or blessing (v. 6), according to the choices we make.

34:14 The Hebrew word *qanna*’, translated in many versions as “jealous,” can also be translated as “zealous.” The term describes God’s expectation that human beings will make Him their highest priority in life, loving Him with all their heart, soul, and strength (Dt 6:4). As Creator of the universe and all life, God has the right to expect people to value Him most highly. This type of “jealousy” is not a bad thing. It is proper in a marriage; a wife or husband expects the spouse to be faithful in thought, word, and deed, and would be rightfully upset should the spouse prove unfaithful. The Israelite prophets sometimes compare God’s relationship to His people, in His covenant, to a marriage (Jr 3:20; 31:32; Hs 2:16).

34:29–35 Does the Bible state that Moses’ face glowed, or that it grew horns? The Hebrew word translated in most versions as “shone” or “glowed” is based on a root which means “horn.” The Latin Vulgate translation depicted Moses as growing horns; as a result, the Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo carved a statue of Moses with horns. In the NT Paul stated that Moses’ encounter with God caused his face to become glorious (2 Co 3:7); this suggests that Moses’ face glowed (cp. Ps 119:130).