

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

12-23-20

Exodus 33

God tells them to depart to the Promised Land - Verses 1-3

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.' ² I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 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."

33:1 God now commanded the people to depart their camp and start heading for the Promised Land. Keep in mind that God hadn't yet banned them from it for 40 years. That would come later. Although God was angry with the people and punished them for their sins, He didn't forget the promises He had made to their ancestors. These were promises that He would not break no matter what happened. It is important to remember when interpreting the Bible, that all of the promises God made to the Israelites He will fulfill.

33:2-3 God still intended to send His angel before them as promised in Exodus 23:20, but He expressed His intention that He would not go up in their midst with them. The reason that God didn't want to go in their midst was their sin. This shows us once again of God's holiness. He hates sin. He cannot tolerate it, especially when it is shown in such heinous, rebellious, and filthy ways as what they had just done. Since we are in the world, we don't have the option to just leave, but we should be careful to avoid to hate sin wherever it exists and be sensitive (not apathetic) towards it.

The people respond to God's statement - Verses 4-6

⁴ When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments. 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.'" ⁶ So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb.

33:1 Mourning over sin is the correct response. We see that their mourning was shown by their plain appearance (no ornaments). True sorrow over sin will always accompany true repentance. You can't repent without feeling sorry that you sinned. However, sorrow doesn't necessarily guarantee repentance either. Why not? They could be sorry that they were caught, sorry they were rebuked, and sorry that they lost some benefits because of their sin. In other words, they might be mourning over their own loss instead of mourning at the hurt they caused God.

33:5-6 This was not a permanent ban on all jewelry. It was a temporary sign of repentance and mourning. Taking off their ornaments was God's idea as a visible symbol of their mourning. It is kind of like a widow wearing a black dress. There are some times in our lives when it is appropriate to visibly show our mourning out in order to let others know of our grief. Notice that they obeyed God's way to mourn. This is also a good sign that they were doing it His way, and not their own.

The Tent of Meeting - Verses 7-11

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. 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. 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. 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 their tent. ¹¹ The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

33:11 God and Moses talked face to face in the Tent of Meeting, just as friends do. Why did Moses find such favor with God? It certainly was not because he was perfect, gifted, or powerful. Rather, it was because God chose Moses, and Moses in turn relied wholeheartedly on God's wisdom and direction. Friendship with God was a true privilege for Moses, out of reach for the other Hebrews. But it is not out of reach for us today. Jesus called his disciples—and, by extension, all of his followers—his friends (John 15:15). He has called you to be his friend. Will you accept his invitation to openly communicate with him? He desires this kind of relationship with you.

33:11 We see that Joshua stayed in the tent even when Moses went back to the camp. This is the second time he is mentioned and it is becoming more and more evident that God has special plans for him. It could almost be viewed as an apprenticeship. God was preparing Joshua to take over Moses' position when Moses died.

Moses intercedes for the people again - Verses 12-16

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.' 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." ¹⁴ The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." ¹⁵ Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. 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?"

33:12 Moses boldly entered into to God's presence. When reading this text it is almost as if he is arguing with God. At the very least he is like a lawyer strongly arguing his case to the judge. We see that many of the great men of faith like Abraham and David and Moses talk to God in this type of way. God never blames them for this, but instead normally listens to their prayers. Why?

They have a close relationship with God. They have established this relationship over a long period of time. In a sense, they feel comfortable with each other. Also, God doesn't mind because their motives are right and pure.

33:13-16 Perhaps God was once again testing Moses' resolve. Moses responded with firm commitment and dedication to the people. In verse 15 he straightforwardly tells God not to lead them forward unless He is going to go up WITH them. He is unwilling to move forward without God's presence among them. Moses clearly knew the importance of God being with them. It was so paramount that if God would not be in their midst, then nothing else even mattered. He further argues that this is what makes the Israelites be set apart from other nations. This is what distinguishes them from all of the pagan nations. God being with them is like their mark.

God answers Moses' request and allows Moses to see His partial glory - Verses 17-23

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." ¹⁸ Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." 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. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." ²¹ Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. 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. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

33:18-23 Moses wanted to see God's glory. He wanted assurance of God's presence with him, Aaron, and Joshua, and also he desired to know that presence experientially. Because we are finite and morally imperfect, we cannot exist and see God as he is. To see God from behind means we can only see where God has passed by. We can only know him by what he does and how he acts. We cannot comprehend God as he really is apart from Jesus Christ (John 14:9). Jesus promised to show himself to those who love and believe in him (John 14:21).