EXODUS

Chapter 33

**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.” 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.**

**33:2** *angel.* Though God condemned their idolatry, He still protected and guided His people (cf v 3). (TLSB)

*Canaanites … Jebusites.* See note on 3:8. (CSB)

**33:3** *land flowing with milk and honey.* See note on 3:8. (CSB)

*I will not go with you.* The Lord’s presence, earlier assured to his people (see 23:21 and note), is now temporarily withdrawn because of sin. (CSB)

God certainly is present with His people but notes that their sin has consequences. They will not experience His blessings in the same way as if they had not committed idolatry. (TLSB)

*consume*. God’s holiness would destroy them in their sin. “This hereditary sin is such a deep corruption of nature that no reason can understand it. Rather, it must be believed from the revelation of Scripture” (SA III I 3) (TLSB)

*stiff-necked.* See note on 32:9. (CSB)

**33:4** *ornaments*. As a sign of sorrow, the Israelites did not wear festive clothing or jewelry. This is common practice in a time of mourning. (TLSB)

**33:6** *stripped off their ornaments.* As a sign of mourning (see Eze 26:16–17). (CSB)

Mourners and penitent people generally removed their ornaments for a limited time (see note, v 4). Here, it becomes an enduring response from Israel. (TLSB)

**33:1–6** Fully aware of their sin, the Israelites strip off their ornaments to show their repentance and sorrow. Our repentance may also be accompanied by outward signs, but these are not substitutes for a repentant heart. Each day, we confess our sins to God. Through the means of grace, we receive His forgiveness. How blessed we are that, because of Christ, God is “faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jn 1:9). • Thank You, Lord, for Your gracious forgiveness in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

*The Tent of Meeting*

**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 his tent. 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.**

**33:7** *tent of meeting outside the camp.* Not the tabernacle (contrast 27:21), which occupied a central location within the Israelite camp, but a temporary structure where the people could inquire of the Lord until the more durable tabernacle was completed. (CSB)

Not the tabernacle, which would be built later. (TLSB)

*sought the Lord*. Israel was learning to turn to God instead of to idols. (TLSB)

**33:8** *rise up* … *watch*. In expectation of God’s presence and to honor His presence. It is no small thing for God to come among His people. (TLSB)

**33:9** *pillar of cloud would come down.* Symbolizing God’s communication with Moses “as a man speaks with his friend” (v. 11). Later, a similar descent crowned the completion of the tabernacle (see 40:33–34; see also note on 13:21). (CSB)

*the Lord* *would speak with Moses*. When the pillar of cloud was over the tent, God spoke directly to Moses. Moses recorded some of these conversations in the Bible. (TLSB)

**33:10** *worship*. Lit, “bow down.” The people would prostrate themselves before the Lord, acknowledging His presence and identity. (TLSB)

**33:11** *The Lord would speak to Moses face to face.* As the OT mediator, Moses was unique among the prophets. (CSB)

Hbr expression for intimacy (cf Dt 5:4, applied to Israel). This experience was significantly different from the one mentioned in v 20. (TLSB)

*as a man speaks to his friend*. God spoke to Moses directly, not through visions or dreams. (TLSB)

*Joshua … did not leave the tent.* Probably his task was to guard the tent against intrusion by others. (CSB)

The Levitical priesthood had not yet been established. Joshua served as an attendant in the tent. He remained in the tent whenever Moses was not there, so that someone was always in the tent. (TLSB)

**33:7–11** Moses receives an extraordinary gift: God speaks to him face-to-face, as to a friend. Jesus Christ gives believers in the NT the same gift. He says, “I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15). He invites our prayers and has promised to hear us and answer. He works with us in His grace. How blessed are we to be called the friends of God. • Thank You, Jesus, for being my friend. May I always hear Your voice in faith. Amen. (TLSB)

*Moses and the Glory of the Lord*

**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?” 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.”**

**33:12–23** Though this passage speaks of future events on the mountain (cf 34:2), Moses was probably in the tent when this conversation occurred. (TLSB)

**33:12** *you have not let me know whom you will send with me.* See note on v. 3. Moses objects that a mere angel is no substitute for God’s own presence. (CSB)

God promised to send an angel before Israel (v 2). Moses sought assurance that God would bless them. (TLSB)

*I know you by name.* I have chosen you for my special purpose. (CSB)

God knew Moses personally, including the details of his life. (TLSB)

*favor*. God is pleased with Moses. This can only be because of God’s grace, not Moses’ personal characteristics, which were often deficient (cf 4:10, 13). (TLSB)

**33:13** *teach me your ways.* A prayer that is answered in 34:6–7. (CSB)

Moses wanted to know more about God, whose ways are higher than human ways. Moses had found favor in God’s sight but seems confused as to why. He wants to understand why and how God shows favor. (TLSB)

**33:14** *My Presence will go with you.* The Lord’s gracious response to Moses’ concern (see note on v. 12). (CSB)

God’s presence was sometimes seen in the pillar of cloud, but God was always present with Israel. (TLSB)

Israel was commanded to rest on the Sabbath. When they lived in God’s covenant, they could rest and enjoy peace—trusting Him to care for them. (TLSB)

**33:16** *distinct*. Lit, “lifted up” so they appear different. The presence and favor of God made Israel distinct from the rest of the nations. (TLSB)

**33:17** *because I am pleased with you.* How much more does God hear the prayers of his Son Jesus Christ (see Mt 17:5; Heb 3:1–6)! (CSB)

**33:18** *show me Your glory*. Moses boldly asked for a direct vision of God’s glory. Moses thought that the presence of God’s glory would prove that the promise would be fulfilled. (TLSB)

See v. 22. In a sense, Moses’ prayer was finally answered on the Mount of Transfiguration (Lk 9:30–32), where he shared a vision—however brief—of the Lord’s glory with Elijah and three of Jesus’ disciples. (CSB)

**33:19–23** God would appear visibly before Moses. The Lord took steps to protect him, lest the divine holiness destroy sinful Moses. (TLSB)

**33:19** *goodness.* God’s nature and character. (CSB)

Moses asked to see God’s glory, but God told him that He would send His goodness. God would reveal more in His character than in His glorious appearance. (TLSB)

*name.* A further revelation of God’s nature, character and person (see Ps 20:1; Jn 1:12; 17:6 and NIV text note). Here his name implies his mercy (grace) and his compassion (as it does also in 34:6). (CSB)

The Lord had already proclaimed and revealed His name to Moses (3:14) and Israel (20:2), but here the revelation is deeper, coupled with His goodness and declarations of His graciousness. (TLSB)

*gracious* … *and will show mercy*. Moses asked to understand God’s “ways” of Law and Gospel (v 13); God reveals the purity of His grace to Moses, which does not respond to people due to their merit but springs from God’s own goodness. (TLSB)

**33:20** See Jn 1:18; 6:46; 1Ti 1:17; 1Jn 4:12. (CSB)

Note the contrast between human sinfulness and divine holiness. A sinful human could not withstand the full revelation of God’s presence without being destroyed. Luther: “He says, ‘Man shall not see Me and live.’ Therefore He put before us an image of Himself, because He shows Himself to us in such a manner that we can grasp Him. In the New Testament we have Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, absolution, and the ministry of the Word” (AE 2:46) (TLSB)

**33:21–23** God speaks of himself in human language. See 34:5–7 for the fulfillment of his promise. (CSB)

**33:21** *place by Me*. In human terms, God told Moses how he would see the divine presence. (TLSB)

**33:22** Moses could see only a portion of God’s glory. (TLSB)

*glory*. Describes God as He is—perfect, wonderful, and holy. (TLSB)

*cover you with My hand*. God would conceal most of His presence from Moses for Moses’ own good. (TLSB)

**33:23** *see My back*. Cf v 22. Moses does not see God’s “face”—the full expression of His glory, but he does see a glimpse of the divine presence (cf 34:6–7). Tertullian: “It is not permitted us to contemplate the sun, in the full amount of [its] substance which is in the heavens, but we can only endure with our eyes a ray” (*ANF* 3:609).(TLSB)

**33:12–23** Moses asks to learn God’s ways and see God’s glory. He is permitted to see a glimpse of God’s presence. John tells us that no one has ever seen God’s full presence and glory, for it would be too much for a sinner to bear. Yet, we see God when Christ Jesus covered Himself in our flesh and lived among us (Jn 1:18). On the cross, He was glorified (Jn 17:5). • “The Law of God is good and wise And sets His will before our eyes, Shows us the way of righteousness And dooms to death when we transgress. The Gospel shows the Father’s grace, Who sent His Son to save our race, Proclaims how Jesus lived and died That we might thus be justified.” Amen. (*LSB* 579:1; 580:1).