EXODUS

Chapter 34

*The New Stone Tablets*

**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. 2 Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. 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.” 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. 5 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. 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, 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.” 8 Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. 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.” 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. 11 Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 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. 13 Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. 14 Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. 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. 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. 17 “Do not make cast idols. 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. 19 “The first offspring of every womb belongs to me, including all the firstborn males of your livestock, whether from herd or flock. 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. 21 “Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest. 22 “Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year. 23 Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord, the God of Israel. 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. 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. 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.” 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.” 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.**

**34:1** *two stone tablets … I will write on them.* See note on 31:18. (CSB)

Moses wrote on the tablets, but it is God who inspires the words, guides Moses, and guarantees the content and accuracy of His Word. (TLSB)

*words.* See note on 20:1. (CSB)

**34:2** *present yourself*. A formal summons of Moses to come before God on Sinai. (TLSB)

**34:3** *No one shall come up with you*. Even Joshua, Moses’ assistant (24:13), was to stay away. (TLSB)

*graze opposite*. No animals were allowed to graze on the slopes of the mountain while God was revealing Himself. (TLSB)

**34:5** *descended* … *and stood with him*. God is omnipresent, but here His presence was localized and partially visible to Moses. (TLSB)

*name.* See note on 33:19. (CSB)

God identified Himself by name. This is a personal encounter. (TLSB)

**34:6–7** See 33:19 and note. The Lord’s proclamation of the meaning and implications of his name in these verses became a classic exposition that was frequently recalled elsewhere in the OT (see Nu 14:18; Ne 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jnh 4:2). See also notes on 3:14–15; 6:2–3. (CSB)

Fulfilling His promise of 33:19, God appears to Moses and reveals His name. He also reveals His “ways,” which are divided into mercy (vv 6–7a) and punishment (v 7b). God reveals that He works through Law and Gospel. These two ways stem from His very being and show how He has worked and will work with humankind through all covenants and eras of history. This passage is the “Jn 3:16” of the OT, cited repeatedly hereafter, which demonstrates the unity of Scripture. Cf Dt 5:9; 7:9; Ne 9:31; Jer 32:18; Dn 9:4; Jl 2:13; Mi 7:18–20. (TLSB)

**34:6** *The Lord, the Lord*. Formal and majestic proclamation of God’s name and identity, followed by a proclamation of some of His attributes. (TLSB)

*merciful*. Not giving people the due penalty for their sin. (TLSB)

*gracious*. Giving people undeserved blessings, which are given only for Christ’s sake. (TLSB)

*slow to anger*. Patient and long-suffering with His people. (TLSB)

*steadfast love and faithfulness*. “Wherever we escape from disaster or danger, we ought to remember that it is God who gives and does all these things. In these escapes we sense and see His fatherly heart and His surpassing love toward us” (LC II 23). (TLSB)

**34:7** *thousands.* Or “a thousand generations” (see 20:6). (CSB)

Or, “for thousands of generations.” God’s love and grace never end. (TLSB)

*forgiving*. God removed and forgot sin because of Christ, the coming Messiah. (TLSB)

*wickedness, rebellion and sin.* See Isa 59:12 and note. (CSB)

These overlapping words for sin showed that this description referred to all human sin. Guilt that accompanied sin. *transgression*. Rebellion against God. *sin*. Any violation of God’s Law. (TLSB)

*clear the guilty*. God did not simply forget sin. Its penalty was to be paid by either the sinner or by a sacrifice.(TLSB)

*visiting the iniquity*. Sin affected more than the individual; its consequences also affected others, including descendants. (TLSB)

*to the third and the fourth generation*. Hbr expression for a continuing effect. (TLSB)

**34:8** *bowed* … *and worshiped*. Moses appropriately acknowledged God’s presence and identity by responding to His glory and self-revelation. (TLSB)

**34:9** *pardon*. Moses asked God to declare forgiveness of Israel’s guilt.(TLSB)

*inheritance*. Moses prayed for God to make Israel His children children and heirs of His kingdom. (TLSB)

**34:1–9** Sinful hearts stumble over God’s verdict that the effects of sin may harm anyone other than the sinner. Could it be fair that the fathers’ sin affects the third and fourth generation (v 7)? But the results of sin in one person’s life often do impact others. We learn patterns of sin from our parents and often suffer the effects of others’ sin. But the Lord’s steadfast love, mercy, and grace are greater than any sin, because He has atoned for our sin. His mercy abounds for thousands of generations (v 7), far more than the effects of sin. • Merciful Lord, I confess my sin and plead for future generations. Grant me forgiveness; make me Your heir for Jesus’ sake. Amen. (TLSB)

**34:10–28** The Lord repeats various promises and commands related to worship and interaction with non-Israelites. This emphasis may stem from the recent disobedience in matters of worship, which included adoption of foreign gods and practices (ch 32). The Lord would revisit these matters in the rest of the Books of Moses. (TLSB)

**34:10** *making a covenant.* Renewing the covenant he had made earlier (chs. 19–24). Verses 10–26, many of which are quoted almost verbatim from previous sections of Exodus (compare especially vv. 18–26 with 23:14–19), are sometimes referred to as the Ritual Decalogue since they can be convincingly divided into ten sections (see, e.g., the NIV paragraphing of vv. 15–26). (CSB)

Israel broke the covenant in idolatry (ch 32). Since they could not repair the damage of their sin, God restored the covenant. (TLSB)

*marvels*. Signs of God’s almighty power. (TLSB)

*the work of the Lord*. They would see that God caused these events to happen. (TLSB)

**34:12** *not to make a treaty with those who live in the land.* Israel is not to make a treaty of peace with any of the people of Canaan to let them live in the land. (CSB)

*treaty.* The Hebrew for this word is the same as that for “covenant” in v. 10 (see also v. 15). (CSB)

God made a covenant with Israel, which was to be exclusive. (TLSB)

**34:13** *Asherah poles.* Asherah was the name of the consort (wife) of El, the chief Canaanite god. Wooden poles, perhaps carved in her image, were often set up in her honor and placed near other pagan objects of worship (see, e.g., Jdg 6:25). (CSB)

Representations of Asherah, the most important Canaanite goddess. She was commonly the sister-wife to the storm god Baal. At Ugarit, she was consort to the god El and mother of other gods, including Baal. (An inscription at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud names her as a consort to “Yahweh of Samaria,” illustrating the mixing of religions in the Northern Kingdom.) Asherah was associated with the sea but was honored most as goddess of fertility. Asherah (Ashtoreth) is also associated with Babylonian Ishtar. See note, Est 2:7. The Bible notes that Asherah was worshiped in association with trees, groves, and wooden poles. She was often portrayed in carved wooden figurines with her female characteristics featured prominently. Archaeologists associate Asherah with the numerous fertility figurines discovered throughout Canaan. Most Near Eastern religions had a male deity and a female deity as a couple; worship practices for Baal and Asherah were sexual in nature. Later, the cult was so popular, Judean artisans developed their own style in depicting such fertility goddesses. The only era when such figurines are not found is the period after the return from exile, illustrating how effective the religious reforms were under Ezra and Nehemiah. (TLSB)

**34:14** *whose name is Jealous.* See note on 20:5. (CSB)

**34:15** *prostitute themselves.* See Jdg 2:17 and note. (CSB)

Israel was “married” to God. (TLSB)

*eat their sacrifices.* Partaking of food sacrificed to a pagan deity invites compromise (cf. 1Co 8; 10:18–21). (CSB)

In certain sacrifices, gods were given some of the offering and worshipers ate the rest to show their union with that god. Participation in such meals was also idolatrous. (TLSB)

**34:16** Israelites were not to marry Canaanites; such unions would almost certainly lead to idolatry and breaking God’s covenant. (TLSB)

**34:17** *Do not make cast idols.* As Aaron had done when he made the golden calf (see 32:4). (CSB)

Images were not forbidden, but idols were. (TLSB)

**34:18–26** See notes on 23:14–19. (CSB)

**34:18** *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. The Passover, during which Israel was to remember annually God’s deliverance from Egypt and to tell the story to their children.(TLSB)

*month Abib*. Began shortly after the vernal equinox. (TLSB)

**34:21** *even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.* Just as they were also to rest while building the tabernacle (see notes on 31:13, 16–17). (CSB)

**34:23** Men of Israel were commanded to worship together for these festivals. These were not to be mere family remembrances, but worship from a nation. (TLSB)

**34:24** *no one shall covet* … *three times in the year*. God’s promise here is contingent on obedience. If Israel was united and faithful to God, no one would attempt to take their land, even when they were worshiping at these festivals. (TLSB)

**34:25** *leavened*. Bread made with yeast. *Feast of the Passover*. Annual remembrance of God’s deliverance. (TLSB)

**34:26** *best of the firstfruits*. Offerings to God were not an afterthought; He was to receive the first and the best. (TLSB)

**34:27** *Write down these words.* As he had earlier written down similar words (see 24:4). (CSB)

The commands just given (vv 10–26). (TLSB)

**34:28** *He neither ate bread nor drank water*. Only with God’s miraculous help. (TLSB)

*he wrote.* Here the Lord, rather than Moses, is probably the subject (see v. 1). (CSB)

Could refer to the Lord or to Moses; most likely, Moses acted as God’s scribe and wrote the words from God (v 1). (TLSB)

*the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.* The two phrases are synonymous (see note on 20:1). (CSB)

Lit, “the covenant of the 10 words,” which summarized the commands of the entire covenant. Chemnitz: “So great is the brevity in the individual precepts of the Decalog that Moses called them ‘words’ (*verba*), Deut. 4:12; 10:4; Ex. 34:28. Yet within this brevity is included whatever pertains to loving God and our neighbor, and these brief statements should be the rule and measure by which we recognize what sins are, Rom. 3:20” (*LTh* 2:356). (TLSB)

**34:10–28** Sinners are unable to keep God’s holy commands perfectly. We rebel against them in our thoughts, words, and deeds. If left up to us, we could not live in God’s covenant. Here, in the middle of the worship provisions of the covenant, God foreshadows His solution: redemption through sacrifice (v 20). The blood of the Lamb redeems those who continually break the covenant. He died for us that we might live. • Lord Jesus, Lamb of God, I am grateful for Your sacrifice. Strengthen me by Your Spirit to worship You properly. Amen. (TLSB)

*The Radiant Face of Moses*

**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. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. 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, 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.**

**34:29** *Testimony.* See notes on 16:34; 25:16. (CSB)

*was radiant.* He who had asked to see God’s glory (33:18) now, quite unawares, reflects the divine glory. The Hebrew for “was radiant” is related to the Hebrew noun for “horn.” The meaning of the phrase was therefore misunderstood by the Vulgate (the Latin translation), and thus European medieval art often showed horns sprouting from Moses’ head. (CSB)

Moses’ face was literally radiant, reflecting the glory of the Lord. (TLSB)

The reflection of the glory of the Lord upon the face of Moses was to serve as a sign to the people that the covenant had been reinstated. The glory of the Lord was again present among his people through Moses. (PBC)

**34:30** *afraid*. Even a reflection of the divine glory was too much for sinful people to bear. This is beyond all human experience. (TLSB)

Moses, however, was not even aware that his face was shining. But Aaron and the Israelites were afraid to go near Moses because of the brightness of his face. (PBC)

**34:31** *leaders of the congregation*. (TLSB)

**34:32** *commanded*. Moses proclaimed the things that God had revealed and told the people to follow them. (TLSB)

**34:33** *he put a veil over his face.* So that the Israelites would not see the fading away of the radiance but would continue to honor Moses as the one who represented God. For a NT reflection on Moses’ action see 2Co 3:7–18 and notes. (CSB)

Term is different from the veil (wrapping or shawl) used by a woman in Gn 38:19. Since Moses’ appearance frightened the people, he covered his face. (TLSB)

**34:34** *remove the veil*. Moses would not conceal his face from God. Likewise, when he was speaking God’s Word to the people, he would remove the veil. This reminded the people that Moses had seen God face-to-face. (TLSB)

Moses’ face reflected the glory of the Sinaitic law. That glory, as Paul calls our attention in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, was a fading glory. “In Christ it is taken away,” Paul declares. The glory of our NT ministry, Paul emphasizes with this comparison, is greater than that of Moses. The NT ministry, centered in Christ who fulfilled the law, is a ministry of the Spirit that will never fade away. It is a ministry which reflects the glory of the gospel, which has no conditions or limitations, and which endures forever. (PBC)

**34:35** Moses does not mention whether his face ever ceased to be radiant. (TLSB)

**34:29–35** Moses veils himself because the Israelites, in their sinfulness, are terrified to see a manifestation of God’s glory. Today, our sin also separates us from God’s glory and presence, but St Paul reminds us that “when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed … and we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image” (2Co 3:16, 18). Because of Christ, we see the Lord and live in His glorious grace. • O Lord my God, let me see You in Christ under the veil of the incarnation. Amen. (TLSB)