

EXODUS

Chapter 34

Moses Makes New Tablets

The LORD said to Moses, “Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. 2 Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. 3 No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain.” 4 So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. 5 The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. 6 The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” 8 And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. 9 And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”

34:1 *two stone tablets ... I will write on them.* 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)

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. 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). (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)

iniquity...transgression...sin. 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)

The Covenant Renewed

10 And he said, "Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. 11 "Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 12 Take care, lest you make a covenant with

the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. 13 You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim 14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), 15 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. 17 “You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal. 18 “You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt. 19 All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. 20 The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty-handed. 21 “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. 22 You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end. 23 Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. 24 For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year. 25 “You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover remain until the morning. 26 The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.” 27 And the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” 28 So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

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. (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 *lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants*. Israel is not to make a treaty of peace with any of the people of Canaan to let them live in the land. (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)

34:15 *whore*. Israel was "married" to God. (TLSB)

eat of his sacrifice. 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 *not make...idols cast of metal*. As Aaron had done when he made the golden calf (see 32:4). (CSB)

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

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. (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 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. (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 Shining Face of Moses

29 When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. 30 Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. 32 Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. 33 And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. 34 Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, 35 the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

34:29 *face shone.* 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. (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)