

Ministry of Grace Church

Exodus 34 – Speaker Notes

The last time we were together we looked at chapter 33 of the book of Exodus. There we saw that because of the idolatry of the children of Israel, *Yahweh* was ready to destroy them. Barely a little more than a month earlier the children of Israel had made a covenant with *Yahweh* promising to worship Him only and promising to never make an idol.

But because the Israelites had not kept their end of the agreement, *Yahweh* referred to them as “stiff-necked.” This is a direct reference to an ox who refuses to be trained by a yoke; an animal who refuses to give in to his owner. He wants to be in control of his own life instead of submitting to his master. This sounds like many Christians today who want to worship God their own way. They reject the “old ways” of worshipping God in favor of the latest fads. These people try to be “world friendly,” but they refer to it as “seeker friendly.” ...

Meanwhile, back to the Exodus ...

In order to meet with *Yahweh* without having to go up to the top of Mt. Sinai, Moses erected a tent outside the encampment and called it the Tent of Meeting. It was during one of these “meetings” with *Yahweh* that the following conversation took place.

Exodus 34:1-4

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. 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. 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.” 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.

There is a distinct deference between the first two tablets, referred to in both [Exodus 24:12](#) and [Exodus 31:18](#), and the “tablets of stone” referred to here in verse one.

Although much has been made of this distinction, all we can surmise is that Moses cut these two tablets out of stone and, although it appears that *Yahweh* cut the original stone tablets, we don’t know for sure because we are not told.

Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction." ([Exodus 24:12](#))

What we do know clearly is that *Yahweh* is the scribe who actually wrote the 10 Commandments on the stone tablets in both instances.

Moses’ 6th ascent of Mt. Sinai

After this meeting with *Yahweh*, Moses prepared the two tablets of stone and the following day, he went up the mountain. This is Moses sixth and final ascent up Mt. Sinai.

Exodus 34:5-7

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. 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, 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.”

Having previously descended and having stood at the door of the Tent of Meeting where He talked with Moses face to face, *Yahweh* now descends again to stand and talk to Moses. This time, it is on top of Mt. Sinai. Let's not miss the point that Moses has to climb up the mountain in order to know Him more completely. Not only that, but Moses had to climb the mountain carrying the two heavy stone tablets. The climbing of the mountain would have been an arduous task by itself. Carrying two heavy stone tablets, making sure not to break either one of them, would have been a torturous undertaking. At the same time, we see *Yahweh* descending from heaven, meeting Moses in the middle.

Once more, we see Moses portraying the mediator between God and man. He carried himself up to a place of mediation with God just as Jesus was torturously lifted up before God as the mediator between our sinfulness and God's holiness. This action of mediation is carried even further on Moses part when, after beholding God's glory and hearing the proclamation of His being, Moses fell down before *Yahweh* and pleaded for God's presence among His people, in spite of their sinfulness. In effect, Moses was pleading for a blanket pardon for the people knowing that they would continue to display their sinfulness.

In fulfillment of the promise made in the previous chapter, *Yahweh* passed before Moses. The cloud and the fact that no one else was permitted to even approach the mountain prevented any of the other Israelites from beholding this magnificent glory.

We are told, “**The LORD passed before him and proclaimed.**” It is this proclamation that reveals to us much of the unseen, but not unknown, glory of our God. Let's look at some of these attributes of God.

The LORD:

As we have discussed before, whenever you see “LORD” or “GOD” in the English translation it is YHVH in the original Hebrew. In English it is most often spelled as Jehovah, or *Yahweh*. No matter how it is spelled, it is a statement of His eternal being. It proclaims that God is self-existent and eternal. He is, simply because He is. There is no greater being who created Him because he was not created. He simply is. He possesses life in Himself and gives life to whomever He pleases.

A God

In this translation, *Yahweh* proclaims Himself to be “**The LORD, a God**” Some translations say, “The LORD God.” God repeats His most important attribute, his eternal self-existence (*Yahweh*), and couples it with the fact that He is “*El*,” the strong one or “Almighty.” *El* refers to “the one who has power and demonstrates that power.”

merciful

The Hebrew word translated “merciful” means “full of compassion and mercy.” By this statement God is not saying that he has compassion and mercy but that He IS compassion and mercy. It is part of His very being.

gracious

He is the One who bestows favor on those who don’t deserve it. He is the very definition of graciousness.

slow to anger

This is translated from *arech appayim*. The word *arech* means, “long” and *appayim* means “nostrils or nose.” So, literally this expression means “long nosed.” This is a Hebraism meaning to take a long time before showing wrath. Therefore, it is often translated “longsuffering” or “slow to show wrath.” Again, this is not something that describes what God is like, it is what He is.

abounding in steadfast love

This is translated from *rab kheshed*. The word *rab* is an adjective meaning “many, much, great, or mighty” and *kheshed* means “kindness, goodness, mercy, and love.” In **Psalms 136** this word (translated “mercy”) is repeated twenty-six times to proclaim God’s kindness and mercy as being eternal.

faithfulness

This is from the Hebrew word that means “certainty” or “truth.” God is here proclaiming that He is truth, or The Truthful One. That is, He can neither deceive nor be deceived. Christ, when asked by Thomas how the disciples might know the way, said:

I am the way, the truth, and the life. ... (John 14:6)

Thus, Christ, like the Father, claimed to be the truth and The Truthful One.

keeping steadfast love for thousands

This is translated from *notzer kheshed*. The word, *notzer* means “to guard, to protect, or to keep,” *Kheshed*, as we just saw, means “kindness, goodness, mercy, or love.”

forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin

This could also be translated as: “forgiving evil, rebellion, and habitual sinfulness.” This expression, in itself, should be a significant comfort to all Christians!

who will by no means clear the guilty

This could be translated as “not cleaning the unclean.” This seems to be inconsistent with the attributes previously mentioned, “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” Nonetheless, this demonstrates that our God chooses who He will be merciful and gracious toward and who He will leave unclean. Notice that He does not make anyone unclean, “for there is none righteous, no not one.” But by His very description to Moses of who He is, God proclaims that He does not show mercy to all and He holds all men (and women) accountable for their sinful uncleanness.

visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

Upon first inspection this seems to be unfair, that children should suffer for the sins of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. This is actually a restatement of what God audibly declared in the hearing of all the Israelites when the Ten Commandments were given.

... for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, (Exodus 20:5)

The sense of this seems to be that God will not find the guilty guiltless but will allow them to see the results of their actions upon those descendants of theirs who they are likely to see in their lifetime.

The proclamation by God of His attributes clearly shows that He is, first of all, the Eternal, Self-existent, Almighty God. Secondly, that He is merciful, gracious and longsuffering toward mankind. Without this part of God's being, He would have destroyed the entire human race because we are all sinful and impure. Next, God proclaims the fact that He is good and true. Without both of these attributes, it would be impossible for any being to have a relationship with Him. It is, in fact, an indication that He wants to have a personal relationship with mankind; a relationship which is built on goodness and truth. God then declares the effect of His mercy and graciousness, whereby He provides us a way to have that personal relationship because He provided a way for us to be forgiven of our sins. But, ultimately, God also declares that He will also judge those who reject His mercy and grace. After all, God's holiness requires that He judge sin!

Exodus 34:8, 9

And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. 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."

Moses's reaction to the afterglow of God's presence, and the proclamation of who He is, was to immediately humble himself before Almighty God. In recognizing the eternal greatness and holiness of *Yahweh*, Moses simultaneously realized his own mortality, weakness, and sinfulness along with that of the entire Israelite population under his care, Moses throws himself to the ground. This physical manifestation of the attitude of his heart is the only appropriate action of sinful man in the presence of our Holy God. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Christians in Rome, quotes the Prophet Isaiah in declaring the truth that someday all of mankind shall bow before their creator:

for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (Romans 14:11)

And, in his letter to the Christians at Philippi, the Apostle Paul declares that the name of Jesus will produce the same humble action on the part of all creatures:

so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:10, 11)

Moses also recognizes the great honor that has been shown him and immediately uses the opportunity to make a request for the entire Israelite nation. He asks for the presence of God to

remain among the people, he confesses the sinfulness of the people, he asks for pardon of the sins of the people, and he asks that the people of Israel might be taken to be God's heirs.

Exodus 34:10, 11

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. "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.

In response to Moses' humble supplication, God renews His covenant with the children of Israel and also proclaims that He will continue to do marvels before the people as a demonstration of that covenant relationship. The greatest of these marvels will be to drive out the current occupants of the land that God has sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Exodus 34:12-16

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. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), 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, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.

Yahweh now gives a grave warning about occupying the land. He had promised to clear the land of the Canaanite tribes but the execution of this action was to take place by the Israelites themselves. As they were to enter the land, the children of Israel were to demonstrate not only their obedience to their God but a familial allegiance to *Yahweh* by remaining separate and distinct from the current occupants of the land. The main purpose of this complete separation seems to be so that the Israelites would not become like the people of the land, particularly in their idol worship. Remember in the Exodus 20 verse quoted above that God declared Himself to be a jealous God (which He repeats here in verse fourteen). He was joining Himself to the Israelites in a covenant equivalent to a marriage covenant and He was demanding faithfulness on the part of His bride to her husband. Worship of anyone or anything other than *Yahweh* Himself was equivalent to infidelity and harlotry.

Exodus 34:17

"You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal.

God now repeats the prohibition of idolatry which was stated in the Ten Commandments. Remember that *Yahweh* was making a marriage covenant with the Israelites and demanded complete faithfulness on their part.

Exodus 34:18- 26

"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. All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. 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. “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. 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. “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. 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.”

Having just instructed Moses to teach the Israelites to separate themselves from other nations and their Gods and to avoid all idol worship, He now reviews with Moses the basic tenants of the Jewish religion. The people were used to having feasts and celebrations as part of worship and *Yahweh* does not condemn the feasting and celebrating. In fact, He provides several opportunities for the Israelites to have religious feasts and celebrations. These are all reminders of the things that God instructed Moses about while he was on the mountain at the time that the children of Israel were feasting and celebrating before the golden calf.

Exodus 34:27, 28

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.” 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.

Moses was now commanded to write the words of the renewed covenant so that the people could review them in the course of time and learn them completely.

Once again, Moses remained with God for forty days and forty nights. This may have been a test for the children of Israel to see if they would remain faithful during this extended time or if they would revert to their previous demonstration of weakened faith. During this forty day endeavor it is declared that Moses did not eat or drink. We know today that a person can exist for forty days without food but not more than a week or ten days without water. Yet, we see here that Moses had neither and was preserved alive by the grace of God.

From the context it would be easy to assume that it was Moses who wrote on the tablets this time. However, verse one, where it says, “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.” This makes it clear that the “he” in verse 28 is referring to God, not to Moses,

Exodus 34:29, 30

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. 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.

During his first forty-day session with God, Moses was unaware of the infidelity of the children of Israel until he came down and saw for himself. During this forty day session, Moses was

unaware that the skin of his face glowed. There is no indication that this “glory of God” rubbed off on him during the first forty days, but having experienced the glory of *Yahweh* this time, it seems to have had an effect on Him. It is a well known fact that we tend to become like those with whom we spend a lot of time. This seems to be the case with Moses. We, too, when we spend a lot of time with God through His word and through prayer, tend to become godlier in our appearance and actions. As a result of this strange facial phenomenon, Aaron and the other children of Israel were afraid to approach Moses.

Exodus 34:31-35

But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. 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, 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.

Moses has to persuade the Israelites to return to him in spite of the glowing effect of his face. He now relates to the children of Israel what God had laid out for them during both sessions on Mt. Sinai. He apparently never shared this information with them the first time because of the idolatry and the repentance that had to take place afterwards. This time, however, Moses is able to share with them all the details of the covenant along with the descriptions of the tabernacle and all the religious ordinances that the Israelites were to follow.

We then see that Moses is required to put the veil back on every time he leaves the presence of the LORD because the people were afraid. This veil also represents an inability to see the true glory of God. Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, shows this veil to represent an infliction of mental blindness on the part of natural man which prevents him from seeing the truth about God.

not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:13-18)

And, as Paul points out, when we, who have submitted our wills to that of the Father, look into His Word we see our God as face to face and we are gradually transformed into His image.

So What?

Who is this God of ours? Really!

Throughout the New Testament (at least up until the Book of Revelation) we are shown a God of love and compassion, a God of mercy and grace. We see Jesus as the humble God-man who has hidden His glory and has taken on human flesh. He is the Messiah who came to perfectly fulfill

the Law so that His life could be offered up as a substitution of the life that we have forfeited through our own sinfulness. Jesus is portrayed as meek, caring, and loving. We seldom see His anger, and when we do, it is shown as a justified, righteous anger against those who desecrate the temple and who trample the holiness of God in exchange for personal profit. Although He clearly is not powerless, Jesus uses his power only for doing good and demonstrating that He truly is the “anointed one” of God. But, in spite of His miracles, many did not believe because He was not the conquering Messiah they had hoped for. And as we see in the writing of the Apostle John, love is one of the defining characteristics of God:

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (1 John 4:16)

We get so focused on the idea that God is love that we completely miss the fact that God is holy and cannot tolerate sin in any form. And He is a jealous God who wants our love exclusively! In the Book of Revelation we see the Lamb of God. You will recall that in Revelation the word translated “lamb” actually refers to a little baby lambkin. What more peaceful, loving image could there possibly be for the Son of God. And yet the actions of this little baby lambkin are anything but peaceful. It is this lambkin who executes the wrath of Almighty God against those who are dwelling on the earth. It is He who inflicts pain, death, and eternal torment on those who have rejected Him.

He simply is, and He is eternal

When Moses ascended the height of Mt. Sinai carrying the two tables that he had personally cut out of stones, he was privileged to behold at least the afterglow of the glory of Almighty *Yahweh*. At the same time, he was treated to one of the most complete, yet succinct, descriptions of this God whom we worship. We first learn from this proclamation that our God is self-existent and eternal. *Yahweh*, I AM that I AM. He has always existed and He will always exist. Before anything else existed, He exists, simply because He does. Every thing else is created, and was created by Him. He was not created, He simply is! We find out later in the New Testament that not only has God always existed and will always exist, but He exists at all points in time simultaneously. Not only is He everywhere present, He is at all times present. Jesus alluded to this in John’s gospel account:

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58)

Not, “before Abraham was, I was,” but “before Abraham was, I AM.” When the Jews heard Him say this they immediately took up stones to stone Him because He claimed to be eternal. He claimed to exist not only “in the now” but before the time of Abraham. He claimed to exist at all points in time, simultaneously. He claimed to be *Yahweh*!

Think about this for a minute. Not only does our God know the future, He is there right now! And because of that, He currently sees us in our glorious, perfected state (which we won’t know until the rapture when we will be changed in the twinkling of an eye). He is also present right now for every sin we have ever committed and for every sin we will ever commit. And, at the same time, right now, He sees the freshly shed blood of our Savior as it washes away our sins; past, present, and future.

He is God

The next thing we learn about *Yahweh* is that He is God, the powerful one, the Almighty, the God above all gods, the Supreme One. There is only one God and He is *Yahweh*. Though others

may claim to be gods and others claim to worship a god other than our Creator, there is only one true God. How do we know? Because the Self-existing, Eternal One proclaimed Himself to be the one and only God. As we pointed out in the notes above, the word translated God implies the One who has power and the one who demonstrates that power. Since there is no one else who can demonstrate any power outside the realm of God's creation, there is no other God.

He is merciful, gracious, and longsuffering

This is the loving God we all know about. This is the essence of what Jesus portrays Himself to be. These are the attributes of God that the Christian faith has proclaimed since the day that Jesus arose from the grave. This is the God that we want to know; a God who can look past our faults and forgive us when we focus on ourselves and what we want instead of what He wants from us. We want a God who will be merciful to us; a God who will not show His wrath against us and our unholy sins. We want a gracious God who will be kind and good to us even when we're unkind and evil; a God who is willing to sacrifice His perfect Son through a most torturous death to pay the debt that we owe and can't pay. And, we want a longsuffering God, a God who will not strike us immediately when we do something that makes Him furious. We want a God who will count to ten (perhaps ten gazillion) before showing his anger at our unrighteous deeds.

And this is the God that we have (or rather, who has us... in the palm of His hand).

He is kindness and truth

As we saw in the translation of the Hebrew word *khosed* in verse six, God's kindness ("goodness" in some translations), mercy, and love are all wrapped-up together. Can you imagine what life would be like if God were evil rather than loving, kind, and merciful? Life would not be worth living. Life would be death. But God **is** good and merciful and loving. According to the Apostle Paul, it is this very goodness of God which draws us to Him, causing us to repent:

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

Our God is also truth. Everything He says can be trusted because He can't give us anything but truth. His Holy Bible, His written Word, can be trusted as well because it is truth. Because God **is** truth, we can believe everything He says. We can believe everything that is written in the Bible.

He is a forgiving God

Back in verse seven we saw that God shows His mercy for a thousand generations by "**forgiving evil, rebellion, and habitual sinfulness.**" Have you ever committed any of those things? Of course you have. We all have! Oh, how grateful we should be for God's mercy! Which one of us could survive for a moment, were it not for this mercy expressed in His forgiveness? And those of us who are aware of how much we have been forgiven can be fully grateful. According to our Lord, the one who has been forgiven more has a greater capacity to love the God who has forgiven him:

"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." (Luke 7:41-43)

How much do you love God today? Do you realize how much has been forgiven you?

He is a God of wrath, not excusing the guilty

We now discover the side of God that most Christians don't want to know. Or, if they do know it, they want to forget it. I find it amazing that God declares Himself to be a God who will judge the guilty right after He declares Himself to be a forgiving God. I think the point to recognize is that we who have believed His message and have humbled ourselves before Him will see His forgiveness. Those who have rejected His message and who have rejected the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ have rejected God and will not see His forgiveness. Instead, they will receive the full penalty for their rejection of a merciful God. Instead of receiving His love and grace, these God haters openly shake their fists at Him, even denying that He exists. They openly express their hatred for Him and His people. But one day they will stand before the one they have rejected and He will shake His fist at them. They will be cast into the Lake of Fire to suffer eternally for their rejection. Only after it is too late will they realize what fools they have been.

This is the hardest part of God for many Christians to understand. We freely accept the love of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God, His longsuffering, and His forgiveness. We don't want to recognize that He is a jealous God who will harshly judge anyone who rejects Him and His generous offer of salvation. We want God to be good and kind to everyone. But that would not be consistent with who He is. We learned earlier that God is the powerful one. Anyone who rejects Him and His offer is, in effect, claiming that He has no power over them. Only when it is too late will they realize that there is only one God and He is the Judge of all mankind, and He is a jealous God!

Thank you, God for who you are. Thank you for your mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

Thank you, God for offering up your only Son, Jesus!

Thank you that through His blood all of our sins are washed away and are now as far away as the East is from the West.

We love you, LORD!