



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for September 26, 2010
Released on Wednesday, September 22, 2010**

"God's Great Promise"

Lesson Text: Exodus 34:1, 4-10

Background Scripture: Exodus 34:1-10

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 31:3

Exodus 34:1-10

1 And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest.

2 And be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto mount Sinai, and present thyself there to me in the top of the mount.

3 And no man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount; neither let the flocks nor herds feed before that mount.

4 And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone.

5 And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

6 And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful

and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,

7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

8 And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.

9 And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.

10 And he said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the Lord: for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to show how God gave yet another copy of the tablets to Moses and renewed His covenant with Israel.

Principle: to demonstrate that God is merciful and gracious to all those who are willing to start afresh with Him.

Application: to assert that we must hold on to His promise to restore us and turn to Him in repentance.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Last week's printed text concluded with the Lord's declaration of His intention to destroy the Israelites as a result of their worship of the golden calf. Moses, however, interceded for the people and became (again) an instrument of their deliverance. Such was his passion for them that he even requested that the Lord blot his (Moses') name out of the Lord's book if that would result in the Israelites being spared punishment (Exodus 32:31,32; compare Romans 9:3,4). The Lord did not destroy the people. But He did tell Moses that those who had participated in the sin against Him would not escape punishment (Exodus 32:33).

The beginning of Exodus 33 records the Lord's instructions to Moses to proceed toward the promised land. The Lord's angel would go before the people to lead the way and drive out the land's inhabitants (vs. 1,2). The Lord himself, however, would not go lest He determine at some point to destroy the people for being "stiffnecked" (v. 3).

Once again Moses demonstrated his intercessory spirit. He expressed to the Lord his personal desire to know the Lord more fully, but added his concern for the people's welfare (Exodus 33:12,13). The Lord indicated that He would accompany Moses to the promised land (v. 14), but Moses was not satisfied with that response. He desired the presence of the Lord on behalf of *all* the people—not just Moses. The Lord answered, "I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name" (v. 17).

It was then that Moses voiced perhaps his boldest request of the Lord: "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory" (Exodus 33:18). The Lord promised that He would "proclaim the name of the Lord before" Moses (v. 19) and allow him to see a portion of His glory (vs. 20–23). The printed text for today records how the Lord granted Moses this very sacred encounter.

Moses had come a long way from the fear he showed when the Lord first appeared to him (Exodus 3:6). He had reached the same level of desiring God as expressed by the psalmist: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psalm 42:1).

Moses' Preparation (Exodus 34:1,4)

1. What did God tell Moses to do after His encounter with the Lord (Exodus 34:1)?

After Moses' special encounter with the Lord, he is to cut two new tablets of stone similar to the first two tablets. Moses had broken those first two tablets in his anger at the people's disobedience in building and worshiping the golden calf (Exodus 32:19). The Lord himself had provided the first set of tablets (31:18); but Moses is to supply this second set, most likely because he was responsible for breaking the first set. It is important to note that what the Lord will write on these new tablets will not be a new message. They will be the same words that were written on the first set of tablets—the Ten Commandments (34:28).

Moses had to do this job immediately because God then told him to ascend the mountain again the very next morning (Exod. 34:2). As before, he was to go alone, and nobody was to be in the vicinity of the mountain or even to touch it (v. 3). Moses

complies fully with the Lord's instructions (v. 4). It was obvious that God saw a need to start all over with His people. Once again we witness the great mercy that God repeatedly exercises toward His people. How often we too are recipients of that mercy. Should we not be constantly thankful that He is so good to us (Psalm 107:1,8)?

The Lord's Revelation and Proclamation (Exodus 34:5-7)

2. How did God reveal Himself to Moses this time after Moses arrived back at the top of the mountain (v. 5)?

Psalm 113:4-6 says, "The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!" When Moses arrived at the top of Mount Sinai, the Lord came down in the cloud and met with him. Is this not a reminder for us that God is always gracious and willing to meet with us whenever we obediently seek Him and want to hear from Him?

A cloud had been one indicator previously of the Lord's presence with the Israelites (Exodus 13:21, 22; 14:19, 20; 19:16; 24:15-18). Later, a cloud will envelop the tabernacle after Moses finishes setting it up (40:34-38).

3. What are some of the attributes that God proclaimed to Moses, and to what did they refer (vs. 6,7a)?

In the conversation that God and Moses had prior to this ascension (chap. 33:14), God promised that His presence would go with Moses and the people as they traveled to the Promised Land. Here in verse 6 of our lesson, the phrase "the Lord passed by before him" indicates the fulfillment of this promise. The visual revelation is combined with a verbal revelation of a listing of the Lord's characteristics. The combination of the visual and verbal revelations must be extraordinarily powerful to Moses.

The words in verses 6,7 of our text might be considered the Old Testament's "Good Confession," similar in importance to "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The fact that this description of the Lord is reflected elsewhere in the Old Testament indicates its significance (see Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2).

It is easy for Christians reading this passage today to miss the significance of this moment in the record of God's revelation of himself. The fact that the Lord is merciful, gracious, and forgiving is well known to us. But for Moses to hear the Lord speak of himself with these terms is a spiritual milestone. The Lord has not described himself in this manner before this point in time.

Moses had learned the Lord's identity when God spoke to him from the burning bush (Exodus 3:14,15). But to hear the Lord expand on this in the way Moses witnesses and hears Him do so is a singular privilege indeed. Such self-revelation by God will be surpassed only when the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us (John 1:14) and when the Lord's servants actually "see his face" in Heaven (Revelation 22:4).

4. Is there a balance of perfect justice expressed in the statements that God forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin without simply clearing those who are guilty (v. 7b)?

When we read the previous words about the Lord's mercy and compassion (v. 7a), some might wonder how to interpret them in light of how the Lord has just dealt with the Israelites. Following the sin of worshiping the golden calf, the Levites were

commanded to put to death some of the guilty. About 3,000 were slain (Exodus 32:25–29). A later plague results in more deaths (32:35).

Although the Lord is indeed a God of mercy and compassion, He also reveals himself to be a God of judgment. The holiness of the Lord demands that sin be punished. The Lord possesses the knowledge to determine when judgment must be administered. Even in the case of the idolatry at Mount Sinai, we recognize God's mercy when we recall that His first intention was to destroy the entire nation (Exodus 32:9,10).

The fact that Lord visits "the iniquity of the fathers ... unto the third and to the fourth generation" is similar to the language used in Exodus 20:4–6. We discussed this passage in our lesson for September 12, 2010.

When people turn to idolatry, the proper worship of God is jeopardized. When one generation turns from God, the generations that follow will be affected. Whatever children see their parents and other influential adults do, they will be inclined to imitate.

Deuteronomy 24:16 states, "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." God's pronouncement about "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Exod. 20:5) is not an announcement of direct punishment but a warning concerning the natural influence that parents have on children.

"It's a Good Idea, but ..."

Since making a right turn after stopping for a red light was made legal many years ago, the "rolling stop" has become a common occurrence. The attitude of many seems to be, "This law is a good thing, but I'm free to 'interpret' it for my situation." That "interpretation" often results in outright disobedience.

Few would actually express that attitude so blatantly, but many live by that creed nonetheless. They like the law when it keeps others from crashing into them. They just don't like limits to be placed on their own freedom. Within each of us is the tendency to act selfishly at the expense of others. The law places limits on all of us so that society can function for the general good.

How interesting it is that God's proclamation of His mercy, grace, and forgiveness comes in the context of giving His law! Does the reality of God's grace move us to do any better in the area of obedience than it did the ancient Israelites? —C. R. B.

Moses' Prayer (Exodus 34:8,9)

5. What was Moses' response to God's revelation of himself (v. 8)?

No doubt Moses drew encouragement just speaking with God face-to-face. But how much more encouraged Moses was when he began to discover just what kind of God he served. He was not the impersonal deity of the surrounding nations but a personal God who held Israel as the object of His affection...Armed with this new discovery of the knowledge of God, Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped" (Anders, gen. ed., *Holman Old Testament Commentary*, Broadman and Holman).

The more we come to know about God, the more inclined we are to bow before Him and worship. When we recall the days of our youth, we realize that even if we were believers, we had a shallow understanding of God at that age. As we have grown older—and hopefully wiser in our comprehension—our respect and adoration of Him have increased immensely. If you cannot identify with that last statement, it is never too

late to become serious about knowing God. It is a matter of taking quality time with Him in His Word and prayer.

6. What did Moses acknowledge in his prayer (v. 9)?

Moses brings before the Lord two realities: the people's nature (they are *stiffnecked*) and the Lord's nature (He is one who is willing to *pardon our iniquity and our sin*). Moses is keenly aware that the people cannot inherit the promised land unless the Lord accepts them as His and blesses their future endeavors. Thus Moses pleads with God to "take us for thine inheritance."

God had just proclaimed Himself as being abundant in mercy, so Moses felt he could ask Him for forgiveness for these people now. He could not effectively get the people of Israel to the land of their inheritance on his own; he desperately needed God to take them there.

The Lord's Promise (Exodus 34:10)

7. How would the people know that God had established His covenant again (v. 10)?

The Lord's response to Moses' request for pardon is stated in terms of a promised covenant. It is through this covenant that the Lord intends to grant His blessing to Moses and the people. The Lord's leading in this regard will be unmistakable, because the Lord will confirm His covenant with marvels, or wonders, that have never been done anywhere else (v. 10a).

The Lord also calls what He will do with Moses "a terrible thing" (v. 10b). The Hebrew word translated *terrible* comes from a word meaning "to fear." It conveys the idea of "something causing terror" or "awe" in the response of those who witness it.

What is this work that the Lord declares that He will do through Moses? In Exodus 34:11 (not in today's text), the Lord promises to drive out the inhabitants of the land where the Israelites are going. He also warns the people not to be seduced by the gods those people worship (vs. 12–14); this is counsel that they should take to heart, based on what has just happened with the golden calf!

Moses, however, is not the one who guides the Israelites into the promised land. Because of his later disobedience, he is not permitted to do that (Numbers 20:1–13). It will be left to Joshua, his successor, to lead the people in crossing the Jordan River and carrying out the promise given in Exodus 34:11. But Moses does begin the process of conquest. Under his leadership, the Israelites take territory east of the Jordan River, which is then allotted to some of the tribes of Israel (Numbers 21:21–35; 32:1–33).

Those victories leave their mark on the thinking of people such as Rahab of Jericho, who acknowledges to the two Israelite spies that "your terror is fallen upon us" (Joshua 2:9). She also recounts to them the victories of the Israelites "on the other side [of the] Jordan" (v. 10) and testifies that when she and her people heard of these events their "hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (v. 11).

Clearly, Moses leaves a legacy that is unsurpassed by any future leader of God's people except Jesus. The closing verses of Deuteronomy note that "there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, ... in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel" (Deuteronomy 34:10, 12). The man who once asked, "Who am I, that I

should go unto Pharaoh?" (Exodus 3:11) will leave this world with no doubt of who he is and, more importantly, who his God is.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. There is always a remedy for sins, for God is always willing to forgive (Exodus 34:1,4).
2. We should be more concerned with God's character than with His appearance (vs. 5,6).
3. We must acknowledge God's justice and wrath even as we take comfort in His mercy (v. 7).
4. The very attributes of God demand our worship (v. 8).
5. Remembering that our relationship with God is based solely on His grace will keep us humble before Him (v. 9).
6. God's work in us will be evident to others, even if we ourselves fail to see it (v. 10).

CONCLUSION

Inescapable Evidence

That God is "inescapable" can be either comforting or frightening, because as today's study has noted He is a God of both mercy and judgment. David took great encouragement from knowing that the Lord had "beset me behind and before, and laid [His] hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (Psalm 139:5,6). Jonah found out that it is a good thing that God is inescapable! Though the reluctant prophet was tossed into the sea, the Lord knew exactly where he was.

On the other hand, the thought of standing in judgment before God should fill us with a sense of foreboding. Revelation 6:15–17 describes the anguish of those who are filled with terror at the wrath of the Lamb, "for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

Thank God that in Jesus we see the mercy and the judgment of God displayed in a way that only God himself could have arranged! Paul summarizes the combination as follows: "For [God] hath made [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). God's mercy toward sinners is made available because Jesus took humanity's judgment upon himself at the cross.

The cross is inescapable evidence of God's passion to demonstrate grace. If we ignore that evidence, judgment is inescapable.

PRAYER

Father, thank You for revealing yourself to us as You have, especially in Jesus—the Word who became flesh and gave His life for us. May we offer ourselves to You each day in a lifestyle of grateful and reverent worship. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

All that the Lord revealed himself to be to Moses is seen in Jesus.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson takes us into a new unit where we start by exploring "God's Majesty." In preparation, study Psalm 8:1-9.

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