

EXODUS

Chapter 33

The Command to Leave Sinai

The LORD said to Moses, “Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give it.’ 2 I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.” 4 When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. 5 For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, ‘You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.’” 6 Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

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

33:3 *I will not go among you.* The Lord’s presence, earlier assured to his people, is now temporarily withdrawn because of sin.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)

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 themselves of 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 the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. 8 Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the

tent. 9 When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD[a] would speak with Moses. 10 And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. 11 Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

33:7 *tent of meeting.* 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 descend.* 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. (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 depart from 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' Intercession

12 Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also

found favor in my sight.’ 13 Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” 14 And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” 15 And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. 16 For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?” 17 And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” 18 Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” 19 And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20 But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” 21 And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall 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.* 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)

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 *show me now 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. (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 *you have found favor in my sight.* 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. 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 be gracious. 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 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).