

Even After
Exodus 34:1-9
Pierre Cannings

I. Prep Work vs. 1-4

a. Cut

- i. The tension is then wound tighter still by the narrative of Moses' obedience of Yahweh's instructions, moved forward by a sequence of imperfect verbs connected by special *waw*, verbs translated above as a tightly connected staccato sequence
- ii. Since Moses broke them, Moses is directed to make new ones. The point is a mild, sarcastic rebuke to Moses. It may have been an excessive reaction on Moses' part to break tablets that contained words written "by the finger of God" (31:18), however much smashing the two tablets effectively symbolized what Israel had done
- iii. The tablets were to be done that day. Moses again ascended the mountain (cf. 24:12), this time to have Yahweh write upon the new tablets he had made. "Station yourself beside me" repeats the instructions in 33:21.
- iv. Yahweh can restore a broken relationship and grant his word again. God's command to "carve out for yourself" (פָּסַל־לְךָ) two tablets of stone recalls the use of פָּסַל in 20:4 forbidding the making of an idol (cf. v. 4 below), but in this case the ten invisible words of Yahweh will be carved out. The form of the stone tablets are not idolatrous or objects resembling anything in creation to be falsely worshiped. Israel's פָּסַל were the words that directed them toward Yahweh and toward their fellow human beings. His words reflect his mind and will, his heart, not some prohibited object mentioned in the second commandment. Israel's religious attention focuses on these words and hence on the will of their God and his character.
- v. God's instruction to Moses to prepare two new stone tablets and his promise to write the Ten Words/Commandments on these new tablets just as he had on the former ones conveys a most welcome message: God had decided to forgive the Israelites and accept them once again as his covenant people, and he would renew his covenant with them, through which all sorts of blessings would once again be theirs
- vi. The new tablets were to be exactly like the old: stone tablets written on personally by God and containing the same wording as the originals (cf. 20:2–17; 24:12; 31:18; 32:15–16). In the narrative about the original tablets, God personally provided the tablets (32:16). Here Moses would chisel them out of stone, so he was assigned the job of providing the tablets. God took upon himself only the job of writing on them.

b. Be ready

- i. Come up
- ii. Present Yourself

1. God's presentation of "all my goodness" (טוב) was a private affair for Moses' benefit (Exod 34:6–7), but it became a public declaration to all of Israel and eventually to humanity through this inspired text. It is granted within the covenant renewal recorded in 34:1–28. Ironically, the sociological setting that called forth this momentous declaration of Yahweh's character was the moral, ethical, and religious failure of Yahweh's people. There could be no new relationship with Yahweh unless there was a reinstatement of the broken covenant
 2. Yahweh would cause "all of his goodness" (v. 19, טוב) to pass before Moses. It is of utmost importance, therefore, to note what he presents to Moses. The revelation of himself to Moses serves as a *new prologue* to this covenant that features Yahweh's character. It is not in conflict with the first prologue (20:2), for that displayed his actions and implied his character. This prologue presents not the action of Yahweh for his people, but the character and person who lies behind the actions on behalf of his people. If Moses/Israel had doubted the goodness (טוב) of their God, they could take heart now. If his historical actions were ambiguous, his words would give meaning to the character behind his actions, giving them intent and purpose.
- c. Nobody with you
- i. Seen anywhere near
 1. The instructions given here recall the directions given in the first covenant process in 19:10–13, 20–25, but unless this is an abbreviated account, which it seems to be in some places, no one, not even Aaron (19:24) or Joshua (24:13; 32:17), was permitted to ascend Mount Sinai. The absence of Aaron is undoubtedly because of his involvement in making the golden calf. The uniqueness of Moses is stressed. He is *sui generis* (in a class by himself) in this covenant process
 2. Not even flocks and Herds may graze
 - a. God's holiness is a threat to the unholy, so nothing and no one he does not specifically declare acceptable may safely approach him. Accordingly, to protect his holiness and to protect those who might be struck dead by coming too close to him, he once again issued a warning against people and animals going anywhere on Mount Sinai. The special mention of "flocks and herds" is necessary because Sinai contained grassy grazing areas the people might find irresistible without specific warning. In other words, the flocks and herds could not graze around the back, as opposed to the *front* of the mountain, nor in fact anywhere at the base.
- d. He did as Commanded

II. Lord Comes vs. 5-9

a. Descended

i. Stood as he called

1. The language “came down ... and stood” represents a standard way of describing what otherwise is not easily comprehended by humans, that is, that God manifested himself specially and personally in Moses’ presence. Thereby Moses could perceive that a real personal being had come to him and not just a concept, or a feeling, or a numinous impression. As before, he employed a cloud (not just any but the cloud of his glory

ii. Passed in front

b. Proclaimed v.6-7

i. The Lord

1. The Lord God

2. There seems to be no serious difficulty understanding Yahweh as the one who speaks his own name twice, given the stress on the name of Yahweh as the key that unlocks the content of who he is in act and word. [The repetition of the name is for emphasis, just as Pharaoh’s dream in Joseph’s day had been given twice to establish that it was set, determined \(Gen 41:32\). God had called to his servant, “Moses, Moses!” \(Exod 3:4\), emphasizing Moses’ identity and indicating that he knew him by name](#)

3. The words of Yahweh that define him in these verses are another key to the unveiling of his name. The entire “definition” of who he is relationally functional. He is the God who is there (3:13–15), and he/his character determines how he will be there for/against his people/creation. Before he now defines himself he has previously demonstrated who he is by his acts/words. This is not a negative (apophatic) definition of God, but a very positive, life-giving description. It does not compete with his omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, but augments and gives those qualities material, relational, and personal significance.

4. twice in this verse (literally “my Lord”) to indicate both respect and deep intimacy, as a human slave might address his human master, but also recognizing him for his lordship over all things.

5. Yahweh’s confession of his nature is a powerful exegesis of the meaning of “Yahweh! Yahweh!,” one brilliantly matched to (or by) the narrative of which it is a part and one that summarizes dramatically that Yahweh will not accommodate his nature to the vagaries of his people’s commitment. He is willing to give himself to them, but they must take him as he is, exactly as he is. He will not compromise, and therefore *they* must not. Such a confession not only makes all the more clear what a rebellion the disobedience with the calf was, it also anticipates what the next step simply *must* be: the people must renew their commitment, both by reviewing what it is and also by making it all over again. Thus the next sequence in

the narrative of Exod 32–34 is introduced: once more the people must hear what they are to obey; once more Yahweh, favorably disposed and full of unchanging love, is opening himself to them.

- ii. Compassionate probably sympathy, compassion
 - iii. Gracious—merciful to be kindly disposed or to show favor and mercy to someone In the Bible, it is above all God who is gracious toward human beings, as stated in the ancient liturgical formula: ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’ (Exod. 34:6; see also Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8). This is one of the few doctrinal statements about God in the OT in adjectival form.
 - iv. Slow to Anger
 - 1. Slow- indulgent
 - v. Abounding in Lovingkindness
 - 1. Abounding - rich in extortions, meaning who heaps up extortions
 - 2. Lovingkindness - to keep faithfulness
 - vi. Truth - firmness, **trustworthiness** continual favour
 - 1. Next he described himself as “[abounding in] truth,” meaning that whatever he says is correct and reliable and may be trusted even to the extent of life and death issues, or indeed *eternal* life and death issues.
 - vii. Keeps lovingkindness for thousands
 - 1. in light of the fuller wording of this attribute in 20:5–6, must be understood to be a slightly elliptical wording of the great promise that God will continue his covenant blessings to his people indefinitely—to thousands of generations, not merely thousands of people—as long as they do not break his covenant and thereby force him to unleash its sanctions
 - viii. Who forgives iniquities
 - 1. Transgressions and sins
 - ix. Won’t leave guilty unpunished
 - 1. Third or fourth generation.
 - 2. Rather, it describes God’s just punishment of a given type of sin in each new generation as that sin *continues* to be repeated down through the generations. In other words, God here reminded his people that they could not rightly think something like “we can probably get away with doing this in our generation because God punished an earlier generation for doing it, so the punishment for it has already been given, and *we* don’t have to worry about it
- c. The description of Yahweh set forth here is an apt one for the narrative of Israel’s first disobedience and Yahweh’s judgment. Yahweh’s compassion had just been demonstrated (32:14), and his tendency to be favorable was in the process of exercise (33:12–17). His slowness to grow angry had been attested from the moment of Israel’s complaint at the sea (14:11–12), and his unchanging love and reliability were the reason Moses had still been able to plead after the terrible cancellation made by the people’s disobedience with the calf. His keeping of

unchanging love to the thousands and the removal of their guilt, their transgression and their sin (the multiplication of terms is a deliberate attempt at comprehensive statement) were in process. And his serious view of obligation and commitment was the very basis of the crisis provoked by the worship of the calf and the reason that Israel's fate had hung so precariously in the balance.

- d. Thus the New Testament doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, on which the promise of eternal life so decidedly depends, flows from the very nature of God. He does not reluctantly forgive sins against himself and others; he does so eagerly, as a manifestation of his character, by which he delights in doing so. In the list “wickedness, rebellion and sin,” the final term, “sin,” is the most inclusive. These are not three distinct kinds of behaviors but three vocabulary words used together to indicate what any of them might convey; and since they are used together, they combine to indicate what Jesus meant when he said, “Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven” (Matt 12:31)
- e. In this verse God cited five attributes that characterize him—all of which would be welcome to Moses and the Israelites, who needed very much to count on his compassion toward them in light of their having previously angered him by their behavior. The first attribute of Yahweh listed is that he is a “compassionate” God, meaning that he genuinely cares about humans and holds toward them a tender attitude of concern and mercy. Second, he called himself “gracious,” meaning that he does things for people they do not deserve and goes beyond what might be expected to grant truly kind favor toward people, favor of which they are not necessarily worthy. Third, he described himself as “slow to anger,” meaning that his patience with people's less-than-satisfactory behavior and/or failures in any realm, including the moral, is very great. Fourth, he declared himself to be “abounding” (lit., great) in covenant “love [loyalty].” Careful studies of the Hebrew word, *hesed*, translated as “love” by the NIV here demonstrate that it connotes long-term, reliable loyalty of one member of a covenant relationship to another. However fickle and unreliable humans may be in their relationship to God, he is nothing of the sort but can be counted on in every situation and at all times to be completely faithful to his promises for his people.

III. Moses Worshipped vs. 8-9

- a. Made Hast
 - i. Haste
 1. Before looking at these words and declarations, observe Moses' reaction in v. 8—one of immediate worship. “He hastened” (וַיַּמְהַר) stands at the beginning of the sentence, and since “Moses” is not repeated for the other verbs, the implication of haste is carried over to the following two verbs of worship, “he bowed his head” (v. 8) and “prostrated himself in homage” (v. 9). However Moses understood the technicalities of the words, his immediate response was an act of worship without words. Moses himself worshiped

Yahweh “on the top of this mountain” (cf. 3:12) in fulfillment of God’s purposes.

2. Moses hastily prostrated himself in worship. No other response was appropriate. Then, when Moses did speak, he could only plead repetitiously for what Yahweh had already granted, acknowledging the people’s guilt and sin, including himself with them, and ask for what Israel had not deserved and could never earn—that they should be Yahweh’s own, his inheritance, his possession (נַחֲלָה). The rhetorical link of this response of Moses with Yahweh’s invitation to Israel in 19:5 is staggering.
- ii. To Bow - to **bow, kneel down** in homage
 - iii. Worship - Expression of reverence and adoration of God
 1. Modern people tend to restrict worship to what happens in church on Sunday. Ancient Israel had a much broader concept of worship, offering worship in the home as well as in the temple several times a day, not merely on the sabbath and at great festivals. Worship involved both the individual family and the whole nation
 2. The writer records this worshipful response of the people of Israel four times before the record of Moses’ action here. In 4:31; 12:27; and 14:29–31 the people respond in worship or a worshipful attitude at the mighty act of deliverance God promised or had performed for them, for his presence and character was evident in what he did. In 33:10 the people worship Yahweh as he is present in the tent of appointed meeting. Here Moses *alone* worships in the presence of Yahweh on Mount Sinai, for he has just learned what he desired to know about his God—he is merciful, he is gracious, he does judge, but he forgives, he is faithful, he is good. Such a worthy God has demonstrated who he is; the only proper response toward a God who is totally good (טוֹב) is to worship. The rabbis discussed what made Moses hastily bow down toward the earth and worship. One answer stresses that it was Moses’ recognition of the divine patience and forbearance that had preserved the nation and Moses.
 3. Second, note that for Moses worship preceded appeal. He would certainly again press his deep desire for God’s presence on the journey to Canaan, but first he showed God his priorities: adoration ahead of supplication.
 4. Third, worship is an act that exalts the one being worshiped but seeks to draw no favorable attention to the worshiper. Moses “bowed to the ground” following the standard way of his culture: reducing his profile and placing himself at the mercy of the one above him, that is, indicating his unworthiness and submission. Worship that draws attention to self, in either the Old or the New Covenant, is flawed.
- b. Favor- **grace, charm** (pleasant, agreeable qualities): טוֹבַת הָיָה with distinctive grace
 - i. Go Along
 - ii. Even though People are obstinate

1. Obstinate - with hardened heart, literally hardened of heart
- iii. Pardon our iniquity and our sin
1. Pardon - to **be indulgent towards**
 2. Moses added a confession of guilt, for Yahweh does not clear the guilty (see Exod 20:5–6; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9–10; 7:9–10; Jer 32:18), but Yahweh had not responded. The people are still a stiff-necked people (32:9; 33:3, 5, its last use in Exodus), but, if Yahweh is who he has just declared he is, Moses *should* petition for God’s presence among them anyway—for he can “forgive iniquity and sin” (v. 7). The people have no basis to expect their acceptance by Yahweh. This repetition by Yahweh of his instructions, with expansions, is not a doublet, but a dramatic heightening of the tension already set up so skillfully by 33:20–23.
- iv. Take us our your Possession