

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 33:1-23

To understand more about God's promises and Moses' intercession.

Read the Text:

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. 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 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. 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."

(Exodus 33:1-23, ESV)

Study the Text:

Chapter 33 is on the heels of Abraham's descendants choosing to make a calf of gold to worship, the Levites (at the command of God) killing their brother, companion, and neighbor, and the Lord sending a plague. However, while God pours out a taste of his wrath, He does not consume them completely, but provides hope. Below is a breakdown of some of the key details.

Go

The chapter begins with a command of God to His people, "Go" (Ex. 33:1). This same type of command is given to Abraham (then called "Abram") when he was living in his father's house (Gen. 12:1). It is a call of faith. Abraham had what he needed while residing with his kindred in his father's house, but when the Lord said

‘Go’, he did not hesitate to listen to God over the comfort of his current situation. And the Lord gave Abraham a promise, which would be fulfilled many years later by his descendants, who are now standing at the foot of Sinai in our present text. If they will “go” in faith (as Abraham did), the promise will be realized in their lives.

To Your Offspring I Will Give It

This promise to Abraham is found in Genesis 12:6-7: “When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time, the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’” A little later, in Genesis 15, the Lord says, “they shall come back here (Abraham’s offspring) in the fourth generation (Moses’ time), for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” Despite the Israelites being a stiff-necked people who had just broken God’s commandment against idol worship, the Lord would still give them the land because of His promise to Abraham 400 years earlier. Our God is a promise keeper, even though we are not.

Lest I Consume You

The people wanted a divine presence, but had rejected the one true God who was with them. In seeking a sacred presence, they looked to the physical world and found an idol to worship, essentially trading God for a piece of wood and gold. Because of this, the Lord says an angel will lead them, “Lest I consume you”. But that means they have taken a step backwards in leadership from the creator of the universe and sustainer of life to the created and inanimate. Douglas Stuart writes that that which “[Israel] had so craved and had tried to manufacture—direct divine presence—was now even further removed from them than it had been. The rest of the journey would require even more faith, not less, and would be even more frightening because the people would be more on their own than they had been.”¹ This realization crushed Israel, at least for a little while. And when the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and Moses interceded. At these two responses (mostly Moses’ intercession) the Lord says, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

Face to Face

Verse 11 says, “Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” This verse may be confusing, considering it is a few sentences before “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” However, clarity is given to this statement in Numbers 12. “Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream” (Num. 12:6). The Lord speaks to many individuals throughout Scripture in visions and dreams, and they have confidence in the vision after what was spoken comes to pass (Jeremiah 32:6-8), but “not so with my servant Moses,” God continues, “With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord” (Num. 12:8). The Lord speaks clearly with Moses. Numbers 12:7 explains why: “He is faithful in all my house.” When Exodus notes that Moses spoke face to face with the Lord, it is communicating that Moses was continually faithful to the word of the Lord, and the Lord rewarded him by speaking plainly to him. Jesus, likewise, would speak in riddles and figures of speech. However, Mark notes that “he did not speak to them (the public) without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything” (Mk. 4:34). This is what it means to speak face to face. To Jesus’ disciples, he would speak clearly and not in riddles, just as the Lord would speak to Moses.

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 691.

Show Me Your Glory

This seems like an interesting request. But if we step back, we see Moses asking God to “show me now your ways, that I may know you to find favor in your sight.” The Lord confirms what Moses seems to know with his question. For the Lord says, “For you have found favor in my sight” to Moses. Then Moses gains a bit of boldness and asks the Lord to show His glory to Moses. Remember, the Lord is speaking plainly (face to face) with Moses, and Moses wants to gain confidence in his stance with God. This should not be seen as a lack of faith, but more similar to John the Baptist saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matt. 11:3). The Lord will grant what a man is capable of handling to Moses to show the favor Moses has with God. Still, the Lord responds, “You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” As much favor as Moses had with the Lord, he was still needed on earth to lead the people. However, unlike Moses, the disciples can see Jesus. To see Jesus is to see the Father (Jn. 14:9), for “He is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15); therefore, the disciples had a fuller realization of speaking with the Lord face to face than Moses.

What About Now?

Similar to the Israelites, we are told, “Go.” In Matthew 28, the so-called Great Commission commands us to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19). But unlike the Israelites in Sinai, because of the completed work of Jesus on the cross, we are now told that “I (Jesus) am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). We are still a stiff necked people, but what Moses and the priests through animal sacrifices were unable to do, Jesus once and for all accomplished on the cross. And now, instead of saying, “I will not go up among you, lest I consume you,” God says, “I will be with you always.” Therefore, with Jesus, who was consumed by God’s wrath on our behalf, we can confidently “go!”

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 33:1-2. Name the three patriarchs to whom God swore to give the land?

2. Who will God send before them, and which six nations will be driven out?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 33:3-6. Why would the Lord not go up among them?

2. Why would He consume them? How did the people respond when they heard the "disastrous word"?

Day Three

1. Read Exodus 33:8-10. Describe what happened when Moses went to the tent to meet. How did the people respond when they saw the pillar of cloud?

2. Who remained in the tent when Moses returned to camp?

Day Four

1. Read Exodus 33:14-17. What does God promise Moses in verse 14? According to Moses in verse 16, what will make Israel distinct from all other nations?

2. Read Exodus 33:21-23. Where will God place Moses while His glory passes by? What will Moses be allowed to see, and what will he not see?

Discuss the Text!

Week 83 Discussion: Go!

Throughout scripture, God tells His people to go. He tells Abram in Genesis to “go from your country”, Jonah to “go to Nineveh, that great city”, and Isaiah to “go, and say to this people...” We, likewise, are a sent people. We find in Matthew 28 the great commission telling us to “Go,” but we also find other places that let us know we are sent (Luke 24:49, John 20:21). Talk as a group about what it means to be sent.

1. Icebreaker: Do you feel sent? If so, to what end?
2. Read Luke 24:46-49. We are sent to proclaim what?
3. Read John 20:19-23. What should be with us as we are sent? Who should be with us as we are sent?
4. Read Matthew 28:16-20. What should we do while sent?
5. How can you do these things in your day-to-day life?
6. Kid Talk (For Home): Play a "Go!" game where you send your child on mini-missions around the house (go get a red toy, go hug someone, go find something soft). After playing, explain that Jesus tells His friends to "Go!" too - to go and tell others about God's love. Talk about how we are God's messengers. Ask them who they could share God's love with - maybe a friend or neighbor.

Takeaways:

1. The Lord will have an angel lead Israel away from Sinai so that He does not consume them as He sends them to the land He promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
2. Moses intercedes for the people so that they may continue to be distinct.
3. The Lord shows His glory to Moses, but only His back, for man shall not see the Lord's face and live.