

UNIT 62

THE GLORIOUS PRESENCE

(Exodus 33:7-23)

This unit could include verses 1-6 of the chapter, giving the point of the LORD's withdrawal of His presence. But if that section is not included here, it will at least form part of the introductory background--which will have to go back farther to include the sin of idolatry.

I. Sinfulness hinders the active presence of the Lord (1-6)

So, if included, the first section would establish that as a result of the people's rebellion, God restricts His presence among them, prompting the people to mourn. A new departure is here since there has been such a great violation of the covenant. God will now lead them indirectly--through an angel. This would mean that they would not have the direct access to the LORD dwelling in their midst, the sign of his pillar leading them, and the source of all their confidence available.

II. The LORD reveals himself to the people through a mediator (7-11).

The second part (or first, depending on how you do this) establishes that as a temporary measure, the LORD met with Moses outside the camp and talked with him face to face, prompting the people to bow in reverence (7-11). Naturally the contrast here needs to be clarified: The Tent of Meeting is moved far away from the people (their sin made this necessary), but Moses, the faithful mediator, speaks to God face to face, "as a man speaks to a friend." This tent seems to be a different, temporary tabernacle, since they have yet to make the real tent. But when people needed an oracle they would go out to Moses at the Tent. Moses, because obedient, had greater concourse with the LORD.

III. Intercession by the mediator guarantees the active presence of the Lord (12-17).

Third, then, is the section that tells how Moses entreats the LORD to reinstate His promised presence with the nation because of the favor he has with the LORD (33:12-17). Moses complains that God has given him an impossible

task, and asks that if he has found favor that God will restore his promised presence in leading them to rest. Once again intercession is essential to the sustaining of God's presence.

Naturally, we would assume that God had announced the removal of His presence for the purpose of inspiring this plea for it. God wants His people to recognize that if He is not “with them” they should not go.

***IV. The LORD's presence with his people
is signified through special revelation (18-23).***

Finally, Moses asks for a sign of God's presence and receives confirmation (33:18-23). The next chapter will fulfill this request. But here it is promised. Moses wants to see God's glory. He had seen all the signs, the fire, the pillar, the cloud, and all. So we have to work on the word “glory” (*kabod*). E. Jacob in his *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 88, has some helpful material here. He shows that the word can mean the soul, that is, the real person, the essential life. In this sense *kabod* is what gives a person importance. Everyone has this *kabod*, this inner glory or importance, but God has a quality of it infinitely superior to everyone else. The Old Greek translated this word very well, not with *doxa*, but the pronoun *seautou*—“show me the real you.”

God would make His goodness pass by and would proclaim His “name,” i.e., His character, to Moses in a hidden way, allowing him only to see the afterglow, as it were. Even this, however, would suggest to Moses the full brilliance of His nature. He will be able to see His “goodness.” This word too needs some careful study. Why is it singled out among all the attributes. To start with, Jesus said that no one is good except God. The word describes the one who creates life, protects life, sustains life, enhances life, and fulfills life. He is a God who always does everything right, and that includes forgiveness and restoration to life. These are some of the ideas that come to mind with the use of the word.

We may write a summary theological and expository message of this passage in a number of ways. This one is workable:

***By His goodness through the intercession of the mediator,
the LORD renews the promise of his presence by special revelation.***

The passage is one of divine favor, for God will not forsake His faltering people. But He desires that they pray for His blessing, recognizing their

insufficiency without Him. Likewise in the New Testament we must have the active presence of the Lord in our lives and ministries, through His Spirit whom he sent to continue His presence with His people. But we can quench the Spirit so that we are left to our own devices, and will fail. But when we repent and confess our sins, we have a mediator, this same Jesus Christ, who forgives and restores by his goodness, so that we, like Israel of old, can behold his power and his glory, not only in the sanctuary, but in our spiritual lives in general.