



## Exodus - Chapter Thirty Four

### **II. Exodus 19:1-40:38 - The Covenant at Sinai (continues)**

#### **II.f Exodus 32:1-34:35 - Covenant Breach, Intercession, and Renewal (continues/concludes)**

##### Summary of Chapter Thirty Four

The Lord calls Moses back up to Mount Sinai and proclaims further his covenant name and character (vv.1-10) before reaffirming some of the stipulations related to worship and renewing the covenant with Moses and Israel (vv.11-28).

When Moses comes down to speak the words of the covenant to the people, he does not know that his role as the one through whom the Lord will speak is also reaffirmed through his shining face (vv.29-35).

#### **II.f.iii Exodus 34:1-35 - Covenant Renewal: New Tablets**

Refer to the summary chapter.

##### **II.f.iii.1 Exodus 34:1-9 - Moses Makes New Tablets**

Moses is instructed to prepare two more tablets of stone to replace those containing the covenant and to come up onto the mountain alone so that God could rewrite the commandments in his own hand. Moses obeyed.

God then passes before Moses, confirms his covenant name and makes it clear what keeping or failing to keep the covenant will mean for all generations to come. Moses again intercedes with God on behalf of the people and requests that God go with them.

<sup>1</sup> The Lord said to Moses, 'Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke. <sup>2</sup> Be ready in the morning, and come up in

the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to me, on the top of the mountain. <sup>3</sup> No one shall come up with you, and do not let anyone be seen throughout all the mountain; and do not let flocks or herds graze in front of that mountain.’ <sup>4</sup> So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the former ones; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tablets of stone.

#### Exodus 34:1-4

Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones. Moses broke the first set of stone tablets, the ones written with the finger of God (32:19). He broke the tablets because Israel broke the covenant.

I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke. After their great sin with the golden calf, Moses interceded for Israel, Israel repented, and God restored. It was appropriate to give them new stone tablets so that they had physical evidence of the covenant they had promised to keep.

No one shall come up with you, do not let flocks or herds graze in front of that mountain. When God first spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel at Mount Sinai, he commanded that they not come near the mountain (19:12-13). At this second giving of the commandments they were also to stay away, all except Moses. Moses again acted as a mediator between God and the people. The people could not deal with God directly because of their own sin and rebellion, so Moses bridged the gap between the people and God.

This brief statement of restrictions focuses on the fact that Moses alone is to be seen throughout all the mountain, which seems a more strict warning than when the law was initially given.

<sup>5</sup> The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, ‘The Lord.’ <sup>6a</sup> The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed,

#### Exodus 34:5-6a

The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there. The cloud mentioned was no doubt the cloud of glory known as the *Shekinah*. This cloud is mentioned many times in the Bible:

- It covered Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16).
- It went with Israel by day (Exodus 13:21-22).
- It stood at the tent of meeting (Exodus 33:9-10).
- It filled Solomon’s temple with glory (2 Chronicles 7:2).

- It overshadowed Mary at the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:35).
- It was present at the transfiguration of Jesus (Luke 9:34-35).
- It was likely the cloud that hid Jesus as he ascended (Acts 1:9).
- It will be present at the return of Jesus (Revelation 1:7).

And stood with him there. In some way, God appeared to Moses in the cloud at Sinai. This was what Moses asked for when he said: <<*Show me your glory, I pray*>> (33:18).

And proclaimed the name, 'The Lord.' This means that God revealed his character to Moses. The specific aspects of his character are mentioned in this passage, yet this was far more than a lecture on the nature of God. Moses experienced the character of God in a dramatic way.

The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed. As Moses did what God told him to do in 33:21-23, he experienced what God said he would. Hidden in the cleft of the rock, Moses saw 'behind' the Lord, as much of God's glory as he could possibly take in. In Exodus 33:18 Moses boldly asked: <<*Show me your glory, I pray*>>. After that, God promised to reveal his presence to Moses (33:19-23), or as much as his presence as Moses could bear to experience. God said this to Moses, revealing his character to Moses by words; he proclaimed it to Moses. As this happened Moses had a powerful spiritual experience, rich with feeling and emotion. Yet God did not want his revelation to only be in feeling and emotion, but connecting to the whole person through his Word.

<sup>6b</sup> 'The Lord, the Lord,  
 a God merciful and gracious,  
 slow to anger,  
 and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,  
<sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation,  
 forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,  
 yet by no means clearing the guilty,  
 but visiting the iniquity of the parents  
 upon the children  
 and the children's children,  
 to the third and the fourth generation.'

## Exodus 34:6b-7

The Lord's proclamation of his name and the declaration of his character becomes a central confessional passage for the OT, e.g. *<<they refused to obey, and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them; but they stiffened their necks and determined to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them>> (Nehemiah 9:17), <<But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness>> (Psalm 86:15), <<Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing>> (Joel 2:13b), and: <<He prayed to the Lord and said, 'O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing>> (Jonah 4:2). This confession describes the Lord's gracious character in preserving Israel as a whole for the sake of God's overall purpose and in sparing those individuals who look to him in true faith, a theme taken up in Psalm 32:1-5. Moses will argue these very words back to the Lord when he intercedes for the people after their rebellion following the spies' report on Canaan: *<<The Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation>> (Numbers 14:18-19).**

The Lord, the Lord. This name Yahweh was the same name for God that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew; this was no new revelation of God. God presented himself as the eternal, immutable God.

The description emphasises the merciful and gracious character of the Lord, whose steadfast love and forgiveness extends to thousands, probably of generations in contrast to the few generations upon whom he visits iniquity, as confirmed by Deuteronomy 7:9; refer also to the comments made on Exodus 20:5-6. Moses will appeal to Israel's need for the Lord's gracious and merciful presence so that he might forgive them and take them as his inheritance (v.9).

Merciful is better translated, full of compassion. In five of the thirteen times it is used, this word is translated full of compassion in the NKJV. F.B. Meyer wrote, 'the word means tenderly pitiful.' The same word was also used regarding Israel and the Exodus in: *<<Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; often he restrained his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath>> (Psalm 78:38).* This is compassion in action.

The word translated gracious comes from the idea 'to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to favour, or to bestow. It is grace, giving to the undeserving.

Slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The idea behind the words slow to anger means that God is longsuffering. He does not have a short fuse and is patient with everyone for a purpose: <<*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance*>> (2 Peter 3:9). Many know what it is like to deal with people who have a short fuse, offended or even outraged at the slightest offense, or the slightest perceived wrong. God is not like that. He is longsuffering and slow to anger.

Keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. God shows his goodness towards everyone in his forgiving character. Iniquity and transgression and sin are all mentioned so that no one would think there were some types of sin God is unable to forgive. This revelation of the character of God to Moses forever puts away the idea there is a bad God of the OT in contrast to the good God of the NT. God's character of love and mercy and grace is present in the OT as well as in the NT. Psalm 86:15 repeats this exact same revelation of God: <<*But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*>>.

Yet by no means clearing the guilty. If his love and forgiveness are rejected, God will punish and that punishment will have repercussions through the generations that hate him (20:5). His loving, gracious, and giving character do not cancel out his righteousness. Because of the work of Jesus, the righteousness of God is satisfied and the grace and mercy of God are righteously given.

On visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children. Later, Moses will expand on this when he quotes God: <<*You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments*>> (Deuteronomy 5:9-10). This is not God punishing innocent children for up to four generations. Rather, up to four generations of those who hate God may suffer the effects of their ancestors' sins or even continue in the same sins. The view that innocent children suffer for their parents' sins is opposed in: <<*In those days they shall no longer say: 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge*>> (Jeremiah 31:29-30), and: <<*What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die*>> (Ezekiel 18:2-4). This contrasts God's treatment of those who hate him with his treatment of those who love him. God's steadfast love far outlasts the effects of sin on subsequent generations.

<sup>8</sup> And Moses quickly bowed his head towards the earth, and worshipped. <sup>9</sup> He said, 'If now I have found favour in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.'

#### Exodus 34:8-9

Moses quickly bowed his head towards the earth, and worshipped. The first and primary reaction of Moses was to simply worship. When a person comes to know who God is and all his great love for them, the most practical thing it causes them to do is to worship him more than ever. Indeed, Moses made haste to worship. He was compelled to worship God when he saw so clearly whom God was. When believers do not have a compelling drive to worship God, it is clear evidence they do not really appreciate who he is.

If now I have found favour in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Moses asked for the goodness, grace, and mercy of God to be extended to him and the nation. Moses knew they did not deserve it (this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin), but he asked for God's grace and not his justice. When the goodness of God is seen for what it is, people should not hesitate to ask that it be extended to them. If they know God is good, they should ask him to be good to them. If they know he is forgiving, they should ask him to forgive them. The knowledge of God is therefore not a passive exercise. When they know him it leads them to receive from him. Moses went even a step further than this, going beyond only asking these things for himself. He also asked for them on behalf of the nation of Israel.

**Such cries for God to forgive are commonplace in the Bible:** <<Forgive the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have pardoned this people, from Egypt even until now>> (Numbers 14:19), <<Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling-place; heed and forgive>> (1 Kings 8:30), <<And hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray towards this place; may you hear from heaven your dwelling-place; hear and forgive>> (2 Chronicles 6:21), <<For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great>> (Psalm 25:11), <<Take words with you and return to the Lord; say to him, 'Take away all guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips>> (Hosea 14:2), <<And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors>> (Matthew 6:12), and: <<If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness>> (1 John 1:9).

This is a stiff-necked people. It is because of the people's very stubbornness toward God that Moses makes this request.

## II.f.iii.2 Exodus 34:10-28 - The Covenant Renewed

God makes a remarkable promise to the Israelites to lead them into the Promised Land and to ensure their perpetual well-being. However, there are conditions. Firstly, the Israelites are to rid the land of all pagan peoples and their beliefs, worshipping only the Lord. Secondly, they are to observe the festivals and keep the law that God is giving to them. The covenant was then written on the two stone tablets.

<sup>10</sup> He said: I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform marvels, such as have not been performed in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you live shall see the work of the Lord; for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.

### Exodus 34:10

I hereby make a covenant. This was God's covenant, that Israel was invited to join. He did not negotiate the terms with Israel. Instead he dictated the terms to the people of Israel through Moses.

I will perform marvels, all the people among whom you live shall see the work of the Lord. God's plan was to glorify himself to all the nations, all the people among whom you live, through Israel, and to show his glory through the great things he did among them. Israel had a choice regarding those great things. Either the great things would be blessings so impressive that every nation would know that God alone had blessed Israel, as was the case with Solomon. Or, the great things would be curses so horrible that every nation would know God had chastised Israel and yet kept them a nation, as was the case with the exile. Either way, God would glorify himself through Israel among the nations.

Surely, that was an awesome thing that God promised to do with Israel. For their own good it was essential that they obey God, i.e. observe what I command you today (v.11), and enjoy the blessings of covenant obedience.

<sup>11</sup> Observe what I command you today. See, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>12</sup> Take care not to make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are going, or it will become a snare among you. <sup>13</sup> You shall tear down their altars, break their pillars, and cut down their sacred poles <sup>14</sup> (for you shall worship no other god, because the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God). <sup>15</sup> You shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, someone among them will invite you, and you will eat of the

sacrifice. <sup>16</sup> And you will take wives from among their daughters for your sons, and their daughters who prostitute themselves to their gods will make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods.

### Exodus 34:11-16

Observe what I command you today. God is not bargaining with the people, or entering into a debate, but is giving them commands that must be obeyed. These commands were to be passed on: <<*As the Lord had commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses*>> (Joshua 11:15). Jesus, too, issued commands of his own: <<*He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, 'The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised'*>> (Luke 9:21-22), and: <<*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another'*>> (John 13:34-35). Paul had the authority as an apostle to also issue commands on behalf of the Lord: <<*For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right*>> (2 Thessalonians 3:10-13).

See, I will drive out before you. God promised to do what Israel could not do by itself, drive out the nations of Canaan, allowing Israel to take possession of what God promised to give them.

You shall tear down their altars, break their pillars, and cut down their sacred poles. This was previously stated in 23:24, showing that the culture of the Canaanites was so corrupt that it was beyond redemption. God did not want Israel to assume any of the sinful practices found in the culture of the Canaanites.

The instructions here in relation to the inhabitants of the land reinforce the earlier command of 23:23-33 and emphasise that Israel shall worship no other god. The instructions are particularly relevant in the light of the manufacture and worship of the golden calf, which has just happened.

When they prostitute themselves to their gods, someone among them will invite you. God had chosen to raise up the Hebrew nation in Egypt because of the isolation from other people this afforded them. The people of Canaan would welcome the Israelites into their own practices and this would draw them away from God. There was a definite connection between the worship of the Canaanite gods and sexual immorality. Many of the Canaanite gods were fertility gods and

were worshipped with ritual prostitutes and sex. Sexual immorality is highlighted in the Bible, not because it is a greater sin than others, but because it is so devastating to both the sinner and the ones sinned against.

<sup>17</sup> You shall not make cast idols.

#### Exodus 34:17

**Idols** is the same Hebrew word used of the golden calf. The command comes from: <<*You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth*>> (Exodus 20:4).

<sup>18</sup> You shall keep the festival of unleavened bread. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib; for in the month of Abib you came out from Egypt.

#### Exodus 34:18

**You shall keep the festival of unleavened bread.** First mentioned in 12:14-20, this festival spoke of the purity God desired among Israel before him, when all leaven, a symbol of sin, was put away and Israel walked in a symbolic purity. This festival was the background to the Last Supper and Jesus' crucifixion: <<*On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?'*>> (Matthew 26:17).

<sup>19</sup> All that first opens the womb is mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. <sup>20</sup> The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. No one shall appear before me empty-handed.

#### Exodus 34:19-20

**All that first opens the womb is mine.** Here God repeated the laws regarding the firstborn and their dedication to him, first stated in 13:11-13 and 22:29-30.

**No one shall appear before me empty-handed.** God gave this command in the context of daily work and festival observance. The idea is that everyone should have some work and something to give unto the Lord. It is simply appropriate for the creature to honour the Creator by giving unto him. It is even more appropriate for the redeemed to honour their Redeemer this way.

<sup>21</sup> For six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even in ploughing time and in harvest time you shall rest. <sup>22</sup> You shall observe the festival of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year. <sup>23</sup> Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel. <sup>24</sup> For I will cast out nations before you, and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year.

#### Exodus 34:21-24

For six days you shall work. God reaffirms his Sabbath law and the need to rest on the seventh day.

Even in ploughing time and in harvest time you shall rest. There were to be no exceptions and the benefits were clear, especially during times when the work was most intense: <<*Happy is the mortal who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and refrains from doing any evil*>> (Isaiah 56:2), and: <<*If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs*>> (Isaiah 58:13). Yet, even those who had returned from exile failed to obey God's command: <<*In those days I saw in Judah people treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys; and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day; and I warned them at that time against selling food*>> (Nehemiah 13:15).

Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God. God commanded that at three festivals each year, Passover, Pentecost, and the Festival of Tabernacles, each Israelite man should gather before the Lord (23:14-17). Here God even promised a supernatural protection for an obedient Israel when they went to the festivals, i.e. no one shall covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year.

<sup>25</sup> You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven, and the sacrifice of the festival of the passover shall not be left until the morning.

#### Exodus 34:25

You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven. Leaven, sometimes translated as yeast, is often a picture of sin and false teaching in the Bible: <<*And he cautioned them, saying, 'Watch out – beware of the yeast of the Pharisees*

*and the yeast of Herod'*>> (Mark 8:15). Therefore, it was forbidden to include any kind of leaven in a blood sacrifice, as previously stated in 23:18.

<sup>26a</sup> The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God.

#### Exodus 34:26a

When Israel came into Canaan, they had a special responsibility to make a first fruits offering to God, in addition to their regular first fruits offering (23:16). Giving God the first and the best honoured him as the good provider of all things.

<sup>26b</sup> You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

#### Exodus 34:26b

This command is repeated from Exodus 23:19. It was a command to not imitate the cruel pagan fertility rituals practiced among the Canaanites.

<sup>27</sup> The Lord said to Moses: Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. <sup>28</sup> He was there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

#### Exodus 34:27-28

Write these words. Since God's covenant with Israel was based on these and other words, it was important for Moses to write them. They should not only be left to memory but were written for the current and all future generations.

He was there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. It is definitely possible, yet quite remarkable, for someone to live without food for forty days, but by any account it is a miracle to go without water for this long. This kind of fasting is never repeated or recommended in the Scriptures until the temptation of Jesus told in Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13.

**Fasting without food and water was commonplace:** <<*Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God, and went to the chamber of Jehohanan son of Eliashib, where he spent the night. He did not eat bread or drink water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles*>> (Ezra 10:6). However, **total abstinence for long periods is not recommended for everyone and medical advice should be sought by those who may suffer adverse effects.**

And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. These tablets were eventually placed in the Ark of the Covenant.

### II.f.iii.3 Exodus 34:29-35 - The Shining Face of Moses

These verses are the background for Paul's contrast in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 between the effects of Moses' ministry, which produced death because of the people's unbelief, and of his own ministry, which produced life because the Spirit made it effectual. Paul adapted Exodus v.34 in 2 Corinthians 3:16; and in 2 Corinthians 3:17 he was probably explaining that the Lord of the Exodus passage is the Spirit, who brings freedom.

<sup>29</sup> Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. <sup>30</sup> When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him.

#### Exodus 34:29-30

Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone. Close communion with God physically affected Moses. His face had a shining appearance that was so noticeable that both the leaders and the people of Israel were afraid to come near him. After such a remarkable fast, one might expect Moses to look pale and sickly. Apparently not; instead his face shone with a radiance and glory so great that it made others hesitant to come near him. It is true that a life lived with God affects physical appearance, especially the face. The peace, joy, love, and goodness of God should be evident on the face of the one who follows Jesus. Yet what Moses experienced seems beyond that general principle and a direct result from his remarkable communication with God. He was unaware of the greatness of his own spiritual radiance. This was because Moses was a genuinely and deeply humble man: <<*Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth*>> (Numbers 12:3).

They were afraid to come near him. The people respond to the effect of Moses' meeting with the Lord in a manner similar to when they heard God speak from Mount Sinai (20:19). However, it is the glory of the Lord in their midst that is meant to sanctify both the tabernacle and the people (29:43), which is how Paul later describes the work of the Spirit in the life of one who has turned to the Lord; refer to 2 Corinthians 3:16-18.

<sup>31</sup> But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them.

<sup>32</sup> Afterwards all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai.

## Exodus 34:31-32

But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him. They had all gone away from Moses because the radiance of his face so greatly intimidated them. He had to persuade them to come back, first his brother and the other leaders, and then all the Israelites came near.

He gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. Moses experienced glorious, transforming communion with God on Sinai. Yet as he came down to the people, he once again involved himself directly in the work of governing and leading.

<sup>33</sup> When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; <sup>34</sup> but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, <sup>35</sup> the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

## Exodus 34:33-35

When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. In the presence of God, presumably at his own tent which, it seems, had become the tabernacle of meeting according to 33:7, Moses took the veil off. Yet among the people he put a veil on his face.

Like the pillar of cloud over the temporary tent of meeting (33:7-11), the skin of Moses' face shining is a sign to the people that it is the Lord who is speaking with Moses, just as he did on Mount Sinai.

It is easy to think that Moses wore the veil so the people would not be afraid to come near him (v.30), or that the purpose of the veil was to protect others from the glorious radiance of Moses' face. Yet the apostle Paul explained the real purpose of the veil: not to hide the shining face of Moses, but so that the diminishing glory of his face would not be observed because the glory was fading. Moses, who put a veil over his face, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away (2 Corinthians 3:13). The Old Covenant had a glory, but it was a fading glory. God did not want people to see the fading glory of the Old Covenant, and lose confidence in Moses. The Old Covenant was great and glorious, but it looks pretty pale in comparison to the New Covenant. A bright autumn moon may look beautiful and give great light, but it is nothing compared to the noonday sun.