

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Exodus 33:12-23

Verses 12-14

Verses 15-17

Verses 18-20

[Moses] said, “Now, please show me your glory.” [God] replied, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and I will pronounce my name Yahweh in your presence. I shall be gracious to whom I am gracious and I shall love whom I love.” He continued, “But you will not be able to see my face for no person can see me and live.”

Moses extracted a promise from the Lord that he would be with Moses in the task of leading the people and that he would also accompany the people to the land where they could settle and find rest. His concern was for the Presence for Moses needed assurance, or evidence that he was the chosen leader of the people and the people themselves were chosen, too. Moses was concerned that there would be something from God to clearly indicate that he had restored his people after they had broken the covenant. He was vulnerable as a leader from attack from within and without and the people could also be exposed unless it was evident a powerful Lord had chosen to be with them. The Lord answered these concerns by emphasising his personal relationship with Moses; he would honour the friendship with him.

It was at this point that Moses wanted more. He had received two promises: the Lord would go with his people and protect them and the Lord would protect Moses' leadership. There was an element of curiosity in this request: **Now, please show me your glory.** There was an element of shrewdness, too. Moses wanted further confirmation of the allegiance of the Lord to him and the people. By seeing the Lord, literally, **cause me to see** הראני, Moses would have some hold over God. The Lord would be even more familiar to him, under the power of the relationship and more readily appealed to for support. We cannot overlook Moses' doubt. How could he be sure that a God of holiness and wrath would respond favourably to such a profane people, who were only too ready to turn to false gods and golden calves? And he had only heard God's voice and not seen anything of him.

The amazing thing was the Lord's graciousness in dealing with Moses. Far from dismissing Moses' impertinence, the Lord went part of the way in responding to his request. The Lord chose to reveal two things to Moses. First, his goodness: **I will make all my goodness pass before you.** Moses had asked for **glory**, the emanation and shining light coming from God's being and his power. Yahweh would not display the greatness of his inner self. Rather, he offered **goodness** טוב. The Lord's main feature was his goodness, the kindness and grace Moses and the people really needed. Goodness leads to faithfulness; by being true to himself, that is, good, the Lord remains true to his people.

What is the importance of God saying: **I will pronounce my name Yahweh in your presence?** As is well known, the name of someone stands for that person. The temple was the place where God's name would be present. In addition, God had already revealed his identity to Moses in the episode of the burning bush, where he pronounced his name Yahweh and I am who I am (3:14,15). Contained in the name of God was a promise to be there for the people and to grant them access to him through his name. Joel 2:32 promises salvation to those who call on the name. The name is proclaimed and indicates that God's name stands for all that he says; his word. This would happen when God provided a fresh revelation of his covenant and his name (34:4-7).

Yet, the Lord would not give himself into Moses' control and would maintain his transcendence: **But you will not be able to see my face for no person can see me and live.** God, in his naked power, would be overwhelming. He is a consuming fire (Deut 4:24), though this refers to the jealous wrath of God and his intolerance for the worship of false gods. In general, it refers to the judgement of God

(Isa 33:14). The burning bush and firey mountain, indicated God's inapproachable power and holiness. No one has seen God except Christ (Jn 1:18;14:9), meaning God the Father. The impure cannot be in the presence of God and live, therefore, God must wear a mask, as Luther often said. His face must remain covered.

This calls for faith, for a living trust in his goodness and proclaimed word.

Verses 21-23

Then the Lord said, "Look, there is a place near me and you will stand on the rock [there]. When my glory passes and I shall put you in the crevice of the rock and place over you my hand until I have passed by. Then I shall remove my hand and you will see my back but you will not see my face."

The essence of God is seen in his face. Cf the Aaronic blessing.

Not the same as 33:11 or Gen 32:30. The face is his glory, the essence of God, what is within that can shine through the expressions on God's face.