

The highlight of receiving the law ended in tragedy as 3000 were killed and a plague devastated the camp. The Israelites could not even keep the most important commands of God for 40 days. The tablets from God were in pieces at the foot of the mountain. The wailing for the dead pierced the air. But our chapter today hits the lowest of lows.

God will keep His promises. He will give them the land He promised to Abraham. He will even send an angel to make sure it all comes to pass. But it is not THE angel of God (14:19) as He fears the result of dwelling among them. The main purpose of the Exodus is set aside. There will be no need for a tabernacle, a space for God. Their lack of reverence for His word, and stubborn insistence on their own ways has caused God to withdraw His presence for their sake. His holy and just presence would require judgment should they turn to their own ways again. (Exodus 20:5)

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. Last week we learned that stiff-necked was an expression for an animal that would resist the yoke of the owner by holding its head up high. It is a refusal to submit. Pride is the refusal to yield to any other than one's own will. The people had just been set free from slavery. You would think they would humbly listen to the God that set them free and be careful to keep the covenant they made to Him. Instead they fell captive to a new master, pride. "We know best! We don't have to obey God. We have a better idea." Like Eve in the Garden, they question what God has said. (Genesis 3:6) A holy God in the midst of a stubborn and rebellious people will mean many more will be judged. So God graciously commits to withdrawing His presence.

⁴ When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. It really is a "disastrous word". There is no more disastrous expression than "the presence of God will not be with you." Cain heard something similar. (Genesis 4:14) King Saul will hear it. (1Samuel 16:14) Israel will hear it. (2Kings 17:18) It should send shivers down our spine.

When God is with us, life has meaning and purpose. You can count on the suffering of life resulting in some good purpose. You have a place to turn when the burdens of life become too much for you to bear. There is hope. (Psalm 130:7)

There is nothing more frightening than to be left to our own devices. Our own heart deceives us. (Jeremiah 17:9) And there is a foreboding sense of certain, impending judgment. Our neck is stretched out and our nose is high. We won't accept the yoke, but our heart is trembling. Eventually we convince ourselves that we are the master of

Commented [Paul1]: Exodus 14:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them,

Commented [Paul2]: Exodus 20:5 (ESV)

⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

Commented [Paul3]: Genesis 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Commented [Paul4]: Genesis 4:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

Commented [Paul5]: 1 Samuel 16:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him.

Commented [Paul6]: 1 Samuel 16:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him.

Commented [Paul7]: Psalm 130:7 (ESV)

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.

Commented [Paul8]: Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

our fate and our heart stops trembling. It grows harder and more determined to justify itself in every issue regardless of the facts. Finally it is so hardened that we redefine reality to fit our deception.

Was Moses wrong to intercede for them? After all, they will die in the desert as God was warning. (Numbers 14:22-23) No, Moses did the right thing. He will be commended in Scripture for his intercessory prayer power. (Jeremiah 15:1) There is always hope for redemption until the last breath is drawn. Better to have the presence of God deal with us and suffer the consequences, than to not have His presence at all. (Psalm 51:11)

The Israelites had enough of a sense of what God was saying to mourn the very idea of God's presence leaving. Believers know exactly what this is talking about. Our prayers don't seem to be answered. We don't even have a sense that God is listening. It feels as if the heavens are brass. That communion we felt with God is just not there. The joy is gone. (Psalm 51:12) It is an effort to smile. The fruit of the Spirit becomes a thing we must force rather than something flowing spontaneously from us. Why? Our stiff-necked attitude of refusing to take God's yoke is a sign of our stepping away from Him. He does not leave us. It is we who refuse to go with Him. He can say, "I won't go with you" because we aren't going where He is going. (John 12:26)

Verses 7 through 11 look back at how God had been meeting with Moses. The tabernacle will become the official Tent of Meeting, but before it was built Moses had a prayer tent outside the camp. Anyone could go there to pray. When Moses would go out to commune with God, the cloud would descend in front of the entrance of the tent. Everyone in the camp of Israel would stand before the door of their tents and watch as God spoke with Moses.

"Face to face" is an expression of intimacy. Moses did not see a manifestation of a face, for we will see next week that he requests to see some type of manifestation. "Face to face" means that there is no intermediary. At times, God does use an intermediary even with Moses, (Acts 7:38) but Moses was special in that God spoke directly to him. What the people heard, when God came down Mount Sinai, Moses heard on a regular basis.

I believe the reason we have this description of Moses hearing from God at this point in the passage is to emphasize the consequences of God not going with them. That would be the end of divine counsel. When there are disputes, there will be nowhere to turn but the wisdom of man. When the voice of God is rejected, we are left with nothing but men competing for control. Instead of meeting with God in the pillar of cloud, we meet with men in a smoke filled room.

Commented [Paul9]: Numbers 14:22-23 (ESV)

²² none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice,
²³ shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it.

Commented [Paul10]: Jeremiah 15:1 (ESV)

¹ Then the LORD said to me, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go!"

Commented [Paul11]: Psalm 51:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Commented [Paul12]: Psalm 51:12 (ESV)

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Commented [Paul13]: John 12:25-26 (ESV)

²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.
²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

Commented [Paul14]: Acts 7:38 (ESV)

³⁸ This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.

If we only realized the consequences of our stiff-necked attitude, we would quickly bow our necks. (Zechariah 7:12) We would be mourning and take off our jewelry and fast and pray for God to have mercy and go with us. Even if He destroys us, it's better than going our own way.

Commented [Paul15]: Zechariah 7:12 (ESV)

¹²They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the LORD of hosts.

I love the little addendum to verse 11, *When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.* Joshua reminds me of Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration. "Lord, do you want us to build three little shelters for You, Moses, and Elijah?" (Matthew 17:4) He wanted to hang out there. When the glory of God is manifest, we savor the sensation, the purity, and the joy of the encounter. But Moses knew life isn't about hanging out in the tent. You go to the tent to get your instructions. Sure, you savor the encounter, but then we must take that encounter into the word and live what we heard.

Commented [Paul16]: Matthew 17:4 (ESV)

⁴And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

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. Moses reminded God of His word. It's not that God had forgotten, but that Moses based His request on what God had already said. This is a great example of how to intercede. Remember what God has said. Remember His word.

Next, Moses brought up His relationship with God. Not everyone can pray with this kind of authority. Remember that in the book of James we are told that the fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful. (James 5:16) Our walk with God affects our prayer life.

Commented [Paul17]: James 5:16 (ESV)

¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Notice what Moses is asking. He doesn't begin by asking that God renounce what was just declared. He'll get there, but first Moses asks to be shown the ways of God. How does God go about things? What are His ways? Moses knew that if he walked in the ways of God, he would find even more favor with God, and he would therefore pray according to God's will. (1John 5:14) The ways of God are perfect. If we understand the ways of God then we understand what is just and righteous. (Genesis 18:19) The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the blameless. (Proverbs 10:29)

Commented [Paul18]: 1 John 5:14 (ESV)

¹⁴And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

Commented [Paul19]: Genesis 18:19 (ESV)

¹⁹For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."

Commented [Paul20]: Proverbs 10:29 (ESV)

²⁹The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the blameless, but destruction to evildoers.

Commented [Paul21]: Jeremiah 5:5 (ESV)

⁵I will go to the great and will speak to them, for they know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God." But they all alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bonds.

Not knowing the way of the Lord is equated to not accepting God's yoke in Jeremiah 5:5. Moses was asking God to keep him from being stiff-necked by accepting God's yoke. To walk in God's ways is to accept the yoke of righteousness and justice. If our prayers are to be effectual, we must walk in the ways of God. No one is perfect. Perfection is not required for God to hear your prayers. But when you live in the ways of God, your prayers are in line with God's will. You have expectant faith to make your request.

Moses continued his intercession. *Consider too that this nation is your people.* God had said, *Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.* 32:7 God called them "your people". Sometimes I hear one parent say to another, "Your child is misbehaving!" Suddenly the child belongs only to one parent. Moses doesn't want to claim ownership. He is reminding God that they are His nation of people. Since they are God's, it is up to God to care for them and direct them. How can they be His nation if He doesn't go with them?

14 And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." We started the message on the lowest note possible, but now we have hit the highest, the promise of presence and rest. God accepted Moses' intercession. Did God change His mind? He knows the end from the beginning. He was prompting Moses to intercede for Israel, but He was also giving the people a warning. It can be dangerous to have a holy God present among you. (Proverbs 19:23) But if you walk in His ways of righteousness and justice, His presence gives us rest. (Matthew 11:28)

The author of Hebrews points out that the Psalms declare they did not enter the rest of God. (Psalm 95:11) **The rest of God is not found in possessions, but it is experiencing the presence of God.** The presence of God is experienced when we walk in the ways of God. He was explaining that Israel never really fully lived in the ways of God. (Hebrews 3:19) They did not know righteousness. True rest is only experienced in Jesus who is the Lord our righteousness. (Jeremiah 23:6)

When we enter into Jesus, we know the rest that only He can give. We no longer strive to please God to gain acceptance. We walk in His ways because we are accepted. And so He writes, *"For we who believe have entered that rest."* Hebrews 4:3a We have righteousness that is not our own. We trust in what He did on our behalf. The way of God is Jesus who declared Himself to be the only way. (John 14:6)

Moses replied, *"If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here."* If you aren't going, I'm not going. Though Moses knew that God was with him in Egypt, he still had the idea that God was the God of Sinai. If God wouldn't go with them to the Promised Land, Moses was saying they were going to stay where God is at Sinai. In other words, "We're not leaving You!"

Even though the Promised Land had homes, fields, and pastureland waiting for them, Moses would rather live in the desert with God than to be in the Promised Land without Him. I wonder if we could say the same. **When it comes to a choice of between abundance or presence, which would we choose?** Moses had no problem choosing. He was 80 years old and he had made his choice 40 years ago. He wasn't going to change it now.

Commented [Paul22]: Proverbs 19:23 (ESV)

²³The fear of the LORD leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.

Commented [Paul23]: Matthew 11:28 (ESV)

²⁸Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Commented [Paul24]: Psalm 95:11 (ESV)

¹¹Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."

Commented [Paul25]: Hebrews 3:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?

¹⁹So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Commented [Paul26]: Jeremiah 23:5-6 (ESV)

⁵"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

⁶In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Commented [Paul27]: John 14:5-6 (ESV)

⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jory and Mac have made that choice over the past year. They have given up abundance to obey God's calling. I'm looking forward to seeing the transformation in Jory when he returns. Would you remember in prayer those who have left all to follow God, to go where He is leading to remain in His presence?

Moses continued praying, 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?*" What makes a difference between the people of God and everyone else? It is His presence! And how do people see that difference? It is the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. (Galatians 5:22-23; Psalm 139:7)

Remember, walking in His ways is consistent with being righteous, that is, expressing the attributes of God. The fruits of the Spirit are the visible difference. The presence is seen in the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and goodness of each child of God. That is how people can see God has favored us. That is how they can become hungry for righteousness. (Matthew 5:6) That is the power behind our witness, the very presence of God.

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."* Moses had a relationship with God. God initiated it. God developed it, but we can also say that Moses cooperated with it.

In the account we have looked at today, God challenged Moses to become even more intimate with Him. He wanted others to be spared through Moses' intercession, and teach Moses what it meant to stand in the gap. (Ezekiel 22:30)

We often stand at a crossroad. We can walk away from God and still have the blessings we seek, or we can value His presence above all else. **Will you say with Moses, "If Your presence does not go with me, I will not leave this place?"** Do you want the presence of God so strongly that nothing else compares? Are you desperate to know the ways of God because you desire to know Him and please Him? Do people see the presence of God in your life in the fruits of the Spirit?

What is the priority in your life? I hope you can say you just want God's presence whatever it takes and wherever He leads!

Find time to get alone with God and linger like Joshua did in the tent of meeting. Maybe you have been away from His presence and you want to return to His ways, no better day than today, and no better time than now.

Commented [Paul28]: Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Commented [Paul29]: Psalm 139:7 (ESV)

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

Commented [Paul30]: Matthew 5:6 (ESV)

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Commented [Paul31]: Ezekiel 22:30 (ESV)

³⁰ And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.

Questions

- 1 Why didn't God want to go with them?
- 2 Who in the Bible has heard the disastrous word?
- 3 Who leaves whom?
- 4 What are the consequences?
- 5 What was the tent of meeting?
- 6 How did Moses intercede?
- 7 How do you experience His presence?
- 8 What choice was Moses willing to make to stay with God? Relate.
- 9 What is the difference between believer and unbeliever?
- 10 Is the presence of God your highest priority?