

Commentary on Exodus 34:1-10

By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Series*) for **September 26, 2010**, is from **Exodus 34:1-10**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary*. I do encourage you to write your own verse by verse notes and questions before reading the notes and questions below. The **International Bible Lessons** can be read at: <http://internationalbiblelessons.com/>; new *International Bible Lessons* are published each Saturday.

Exodus 34:1 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.

God himself would write on these tablets that Moses provided. Our Bibles are the word of God on the paper that we have provided. Moses broke the first tablets in righteous indignation after he saw how the Israelites had rebelled and broken God’s law. When a believer sins against God, it breaks his heart, so he goes to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith seeking forgiveness.

2 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.

God specifically gave Moses a time and place to meet him. Presumably, this would require some labor on Moses’ part; for he had to climb to the top of the mountain carrying two stone tablets. Moses, too, had to suffer physically for the people’s sins. He probably prayed and prepared his heart to meet God as he climbed the mountain.

3 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.”

God established certain requirements for the people to meet when Moses went up the mountain to meet God. God is holy, and he merits our respect. If we do not know how to respect God, God tells us in his word, the Bible, just as he told Moses. Similar respect would be given to God at the tabernacle by the Israelites. People need to show respect or reverence wherever they meet with God.

4 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.

What may seem as needless repetition as we read the Bible actually shows that Moses obeyed God and did exactly what God said. When Moses did not do exactly as God said, God had to be just and merciful toward Moses rather than allow people to mistakenly think that God had a double standard, or that God had a

lesser standard of behavior for leaders than for the people, or that God would allow leaders to get by with sins that the people could not get by with committing. Ultimately, God will not allow the rich and famous to live immorally just because they are rich and famous. The story of Moses and God's just punishment later proves this truth.

5 The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, "The Lord." [LORD or YHWH]

God exists and is present everywhere. The Lord descended because in some sense the Almighty God and Creator of all does "humble" himself whenever he communicates with his creatures. God proclaimed his name [YHWH] so Moses would know that God in the cloud was the same God that he had met at the burning bush.

6 The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

The "computer Bible" I use does not capitalize "Lord" as "LORD," which would indicate the use of God's revealed divine name, "Yahweh" or "Jehovah," but the divine name is used in verses 5 and 6, and often elsewhere (please check your printed copy of the Bible). God reveals his true moral character as the reason for giving Moses the law again and also for his forgiving the rebellious Israelites. Thankfully, God comes to us believers with this unchanging moral nature today. Because we do not deserve his forgiveness for our sins, God comes to us in faithfulness motivated by his steadfast, unfailing love. The fact that we live it all may be due to the fact that God is slow to anger and prefers to act with mercy and grace toward sinners, especially repentant sinners who come to him in faith.

7 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."

This verse could be translated as "for thousands" or "for thousands of generations;" meaning God's steadfast love is unlimited numerically speaking. God forgives those who come to him in faith and repentance. "The guilty" are those who maintain their rebellion against God, refusing to come to God in repentance, asking God to help them change their lives and live in obedience to him. God will not excuse from punishment those who remain disobedient, for that would make God unjust. Our sins do have consequences in the lives of our children and grandchildren, which should be a warning to us against sinning. Our sins naturally adversely affect our families and those around us; by the grace of God, our children and grandchildren can turn to God, believe, repent, receive forgiveness, and begin a new life through faith Jesus Christ.

8 And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.

Moses worshiped God because he knew that God was worthy to be praised. God did not demand that Moses bow down to him, as an earthly king or ruler might command a subject to bow before him. Moses knew that God deserved the honor of his demonstrating his desire to humbly obey God in everything by bowing to God. There is symbolism in bowing; and in bowing to particular persons.

9 He said, “If now I have found favor 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.”

Moses knew in his heart that he was right with God, because he was obeying God and speaking with God. But Moses concern was not for himself. His first concern was the same as God's, for the people God had led out of slavery. Moses' prayer for the people was in accordance with the thoughts and purposes of God. Although the people did not deserve God's forgiveness, God had revealed his moral character to Moses; and on the basis of God's moral character, Moses prayed for his people and God's people. We call this true intercessory prayer, especially when the people prayed for do not deserve the prayers or the mercy of God.

10 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.”

This covenant, offered by God to Moses and the people, was an agreed to legal commitment that God freely chose to bind himself to fulfill, and God did so with his own free initiative. It was a promise that God would not break. God fulfilled this promise literally throughout the history of the Israelites, and most notably in the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of God's only begotten son, Jesus Christ.

Five Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think God prefers to work through and speak to people through godly men and women; such as Moses, rather than appear and speak directly to groups of people? In what ways would you describe Moses as a godly person? How was God speaking to people through Moses different from God speaking to people through Jesus Christ?
2. Why does God want people to obey him exactly? What would happen if surgeons did not operate on people with exactness? What would happen if builders did not build large buildings, bridges, or airplanes with exactness? What are some consequences when commands or designs are not followed exactly?

3. How does God describe his moral character (see verses 6 and 7 especially)? Does this description encourage or discourage you? Give reasons for your answer.

4. How does the Bible and subsequent history show that our human choices can have a dramatic effect of the generations that follow us? How does that make you feel? What does that knowledge make you want to do?

5. When you evaluate the way Moses prayed, how would you describe true intercessory prayer today? Why is intercessory prayer so important for believers to practice?

Copyright 2010 by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr. Permission Granted for Not for Profit Use.