

Sacred Space In Promise – The Renewal of the Covenant

I. The Renewal of the Covenant (32:15-34:35)

A. Moses' Response to Israel's Idolatry (32:15-32)

1. At the Lord's direction Moses descended Mount Sinai with the stone tablets in hand. When he saw the spectacle before him, Moses threw the tablets to the ground, shattering them in the sight of the people to underscore the significance of their actions.
2. He then burned, ground, and mixed with water the symbol of their sin, and forced the people to drink it, thereby taking full ownership of their covenant-shattering idolatry.
3. Israel was forced to own its transgression, and now it would suffer the consequences. Moses proceeded to divide the people according to their allegiance, and then directed his fellow Levites – who alone demonstrated their loyalty to Yahweh – to slay the unfaithful violators.
4. The rebels had been put to death, but Israel's solidarity as "son of God" meant that the whole nation bore the guilt of covenant violation. Thus Moses again interceded as mediator, hoping to atone for the nation's sin. Unto that end, he offered to bear their guilt and be blotted out of Yahweh's book (i.e., removed from the register of the covenant household) in their stead.

B. God's Response to Moses' Intercession (32:33-33:11)

1. Yahweh had given Moses the provision of substitutionary atonement for ordaining Aaron and his sons to serve Him as priests (chap. 29), but He was unwilling to let Moses bear Israel's guilt in their place; *those who against Him would be blotted out of His book.*

Though Moses was God's appointed mediator, he could not act as the people's substitute; he could neither atone for their guilt nor bear their punishment. That role was reserved for the future prophet/mediator whom Moses prefigured. * Deut. 18:14-19; Heb. 3:1-11

2. Moses could not stand in Israel's stead, and thus the Lord declared His intent to withdraw from His covenant-breaking "son." He would uphold His promise to bring Israel to Canaan, but through one of His angels; *He Himself would no longer lead them.* * 32:34-33:6

The tragic irony of this episode is that the very action Israel intended to secure God's abiding presence and favor had instead resulted in distance, alienation, and wrath.

3. Covenant Father and son were now manifestly estranged from one another, attested by Yahweh interacting with the people through Moses *outside the camp.* * 33:7-11

C. Moses' Second Plea (33:12-23)

1. Yahweh declared that He would not continue with Israel in their midst, and Moses again pled with Him to relent, once again pleading His faithfulness to His covenant and its continuance: *If He was determined not to go with His people, then He should not send them at all.* For their destination wasn't simply a land pledged to them, but Yahweh's dwelling place (ref. again Exod. 15:17). *The covenant promised that Father and son would dwell together; inhabiting Canaan without their covenant God would leave Israel's exile unresolved.*

2. And if Yahweh didn't go up with Israel into Canaan, He wouldn't go up with *Moses* whom He'd appointed to lead them. Thus Moses pled with the Lord to not abandon him, but to affirm His own words that declared His favor toward him. *Specifically, Moses asked the Lord to manifest His glory to him, and Yahweh agreed, stating that He would display His glory by disclosing His goodness* – goodness that consisted in His *lovingkindness*, i.e., His covenant love through which He would uphold and preserve the covenant relationship.

D. The Renewal of the Covenant (34:1-35)

1. The Lord honored Moses' petition in both of its concerns (33:17-23): His presence would indeed go up with Israel to the promised land (cf. Isa. 63:9), and He would also grant Moses' request to behold His glory.
2. Thus Yahweh directed Moses to carve out two new tablets and take them up to the top of Mount Sinai where He would again declare and inscribe the words of the covenant.
3. It was during this time on the mountain that the Lord granted Moses' plea to see His glory, and this theophany importantly accompanied the renewal of the covenant relationship. *Moses longed to gaze upon the divine glory, and Yahweh answered Moses' plea in a way that showed him that he had already seen that glory numerous times in His dealings with Israel.*
 - a. For all their infidelity, Yahweh had shown Himself *good* to Israel. So His goodness – His steadfast love and faithfulness – would see His covenant fulfilled unto His own glory.
 - b. Israel would continue to fail its sonship, but God would prevail, making provision in that failure for the sake of His oath to the patriarchs and His goal for His creation. * 34:5-8

Moses understood the significance of what was transpiring before him, and responded by asking Yahweh to continue His pattern of goodness toward His covenant son, thereby showing Himself glorious in Israel and before the nations. * 34:9

4. Standing on the foundation of His glorious self-disclosure to Moses, Yahweh declared His intent to renew His covenant with Israel. Though He spoke of *making* a covenant (34:10), His elaboration (vv. 11-26) shows that the Lord was renewing the broken covenant and its relationship, not issuing an entirely new one.

II. Conclusion – Veiled Glory as the Covenant's Defining Characteristic

1. The renewal of the covenant involved two climactic circumstances: Moses' experience of Yahweh's revealed glory, and his bearing the divine glory before the sons of Israel.
2. God displayed His glory to Israel through Moses, but in a manner that indicted the nation as a rebellious and unreceptive son. The Exodus narrative is brief and sparse, but Paul's insight shows that Moses' practice of veiling himself spoke to Yahweh's glory being veiled from the Israelite people. They *observed*, but could not *discern*, the glory disclosed to Moses, which consisted in Yahweh's expressed goodness in covenant love and faithfulness. This glory would continue to elude the sons of Israel, whose hearts were shrouded in an obscuring veil.
3. But Israel's God remained faithful, and one day His glory would be fully manifest and embraced by all men alike. And not as fading away, but as *increasing* until the faces of His people reflect it in full, even as His glory has found its fullness in the true Son. * 2 Cor. 3