

- f. At the Lord's direction Moses descended Mount Sinai with the stone tablets in hand. When he saw the spectacle at the foot of the mountain, Moses threw the tablets into the midst of the revelers and shattered them before their eyes. And taking the calf, burning it and grinding it to powder, he mixed it with water and made the sons of Israel drink it. They had shattered the covenant and they would now own their transgression. Then Moses turned his attention to Aaron, who sought to excuse himself first at the people's expense, and then by attempting to distance himself from the actual fabrication of the image (32:21-24).

The purpose of the covenant had been to formalize Yahweh's relationship with Israel, His chosen son, and He had appointed Aaron as His priest to mediate His presence with His people. But now both covenant son and mediating priest had despised the covenant and rebelled against Him. Per Moses' petition, Yahweh would uphold His covenant and spare Israel as His "son," but the nation needed to be purged of its uncleanness before it could go forward with Him.

- 1) Toward that end, Moses issued a call to the people for all those who were devoted to Yahweh to come over to him. In an action that anticipated their new role as consecrated intermediaries between God and Israel (ref. Numbers 1:47-53, 3:6-13, 40-45), the Levites joined Moses at his side.
- 2) The sons of Levi had expressed their devotion to Yahweh by joining themselves to Moses, and now the Lord required that they demonstrate the authenticity and absoluteness of their consecration by standing with Him against His enemies. They were to take up swords and go through the camp of Israel, slaying their rebellious kinsmen – men, women, and children – on Yahweh's behalf. Moreover, that act of devotion was to be a sign and turning point for the nation going forward (vv. 25-29).

- g. As a deserved punishment, this great slaughter had honored divine justice, but it had not brought about atonement for Israel. This is evident from Moses' response on the following day (vv. 30-35). Even while the ground was stained with the blood of the house of Israel, Moses returned to the Lord's presence in order to attempt to make atonement for them and their covenant violation. This episode of interaction between Yahweh and His mediator is one of the most profound and revealing in the whole of the Israelite narrative.

- 1) The first thing to note about this episode is that it explicitly links atonement with Moses' work of mediation. God had previously disclosed to him the concept of atonement through a substitutionary sin offering (29:10-33; cf. Leviticus 8:14-34), but here Moses was seeking to make atonement through his intercession alone. *Most importantly, he was doing so by joining himself to his people in their sin.* If the Lord was to cast away Israel, blotting it out of His book (that is, the census book listing Yahweh's covenant people; cf. 30:11-12; Psalm 69:28; Isaiah 4:3; Ezekiel 13:9), then Moses pleaded that his name, too, be erased from it.

- 2) But the Lord was resolute: He responded to Moses' plea by affirming that those who had sinned against Him would indeed be punished and their names blotted out of His book (vv. 33-34). Moses could neither atone for their guilt by his intercession nor share in their punishment. This outcome makes a crucial contribution to the biblical storyline's developing revelation of redemption and it must not be missed.
- Throughout the Old Testament text, God advanced His foundational promise of restoration by portraying with increasing scope and depth the person and work of Christ. He did so by means of an ever-widening series of typological entities, each of which acted in itself to enlarge God's existing revelation of His future redemption while also emphatically pointing forward to it. Each typological entity exemplified a Christological reality, but it also fell short of it. Being *shadows*, types indicate their corresponding *substance*, but they themselves are not that substance.
  - So it was with Moses. As a type of Christ, Moses epitomized the emerging principle of covenant mediation between God and sinful men, and in that regard his seeking atonement for his people is significant in the progress of biblical revelation. But the fact that he was unable to atone for Israel's sin highlights the fact that that work awaited another man whom Moses only portrayed and prefigured – another prophet like Moses who would serve as an effectual mediator and source of atonement for God's people (cf. again Deuteronomy 18:14-19; John 5:45-47; Hebrews 3:1-11).
- 3) Moses' inability to make atonement for the sons of Israel is further reflected in God's withdrawal of His presence from them (note also Yahweh's repeated reference to Israel as "your people" and "the people" rather than "My people"). He would uphold His promise to bring Israel through the wilderness and give them the land of Canaan, but He Himself would no longer lead them; that task was to be assigned to one of His angels (32:34-33:3). Covenant communion – expressed only days earlier by the intimate fellowship meal on Yahweh's sanctuary-mountain – had been fractured, and the relationship between Father and son was now characterized by estrangement (33:4-6). The tragic irony of the golden calf episode is that the very action Israel had intended to secure God's abiding presence and favor had instead resulted in distance, alienation, and wrath.

The text pointedly highlights this new condition of covenant estrangement by means of the narrative parenthesis of 33:7-11. As a graphic testimony to the people, Moses took a tent and pitched it outside the Israelite encampment. There, until the completion and consecration of the tabernacle and the ordination of Aaron and his sons, he would meet with Yahweh while the people watched at a distance.

Anyone desiring to interact with the Lord had to leave the camp and go out to Him. God had not utterly forsaken His chosen son, but Israel's innocence under the covenant was gone and its relationship with Him forever altered. Already the nation had failed to meet its covenant obligation to be *Israel*; Abraham's seed could not fulfill its high calling.

- h. Moses had been unable to atone for Israel's violation of the covenant, and God had declared to him His intention to not lead them to Canaan lest He destroy them by His presence among them. Instead, He would provide guidance and oversight for the nation through one of His angels. That declaration provided the occasion for Moses' next intercessory episode (33:12-34:9).

Yahweh had told Moses to continue on toward Canaan with Israel (32:34), and Moses' response was that he was unwilling and unable to do so by himself. If the Lord was determined not to go with His people, then He should not send them at all. Moses pleaded with Him that, as he had found favor in His sight to that point, he needed Him to continue with him if he were to go forward with the people. It wasn't that Moses was questioning the ability of an angel to lead Israel; he needed to be certain that Yahweh remained committed to His people, and only His continued presence with them would establish that beyond all doubt (vv. 13-16).

Once again Moses' mediation prevailed and the Lord agreed to go with Israel when the time came for them to depart from His holy mountain (33:17; cf. v. 14). He would not lead them indirectly by one of His angels, but directly by the angel of His presence (cf. 23:20-23 with 14:19 and Numbers 20:14-16).

Moses' reaction to Yahweh's oath was to cry out to Him to show him His glory (33:18). This spontaneous appeal was likely a doxology as much as a plea. Moses had been on an emotional rollercoaster: He had exulted with the elders of Israel in Yahweh's presence and then received the glorious prescription for a sanctuary and priesthood. Everything was in place for the Lord to dwell in the midst of His people in blessed covenant fellowship, but in a moment exaltation was replaced by shock and dismay. Yahweh's indignation against Israel was fully warranted and the nation deserved to be destroyed. Nevertheless, He twice relented, turning first from His intention to annihilate and then from His decision to abandon His covenant son. Contemplation of such a God – One in whom holiness, justice, faithfulness and mercy converged in infinite perfection – left Moses overwhelmed and he could only respond by asking for a greater glimpse of the divine glory.

For the third time the Lord granted Moses' petition (vv. 19-23); He would show him His glory, and this event arguably constituted Yahweh's most significant self-revelation during the Israelite theocracy. The reason is that this theophany was set in the context of the covenant's reinstatement. *God's revelation of His goodness provided the explanation for His continuance with Israel.* Consenting to Moses' request, the Lord directed him to make two new tablets and then ascend Mount Sinai so that He could again write on them the words of the covenant (34:1-4).

When Moses entered Yahweh's presence with the new tablets, the Lord fulfilled His promise and caused His glory to pass in front of him. Notably, Moses had asked to see Yahweh's *glory*, and in granting his request God had told him he would behold His *goodness* (ref. again 33:18-19) – goodness to be revealed not by visual manifestation but by proclamation (vv. 6-7).

Moses longed to gaze upon the divine glory, and the way God answered his petition made him realize that he had already seen it numerous times in the Lord's dealings with His covenant son. For all its unbelief and disobedience, Yahweh had been *good* to Israel; He would surely fulfill His oath to Abraham – not because of the worthiness or integrity of his offspring, but because of His own faithfulness, for the sake of His own glory. In the goodness of His enduring faithfulness toward His chosen people, the Lord would not overlook sin but would supply a provision for it. In all things He would show Himself to be both just and the One who justifies the unrighteous. Moses understood the significance of what was transpiring before him, and responded with a confident plea that Yahweh would indeed continue His pattern of goodness toward His covenant son, thereby showing Himself glorious in Israel and before the nations of the earth (34:9).

- i. Standing upon the foundation of His self-revealing proclamation, the Lord explicitly declared to Moses His intention to renew His covenant with Israel. By restating key facets of the covenant He left no doubt that He wasn't entering into an entirely new covenant, but simply restoring the broken one (vv. 10-26; cf. 20:3-5, 23:12-33). After another forty days in the Lord's presence, Moses again descended Sinai with stone tablets containing the Ten Words of the covenant, this time written by his own hand at the Lord's direction (cf. 31:18 with 34:1, 27-28).

The most striking difference in this second episode is the strange phenomenon of the divine glory shining in Moses' face (34:29-35). Scholars have explained it in various ways, but the surrounding context connects this phenomenon with the preceding episode of the golden calf and its tragic implications for Israel.

- 1) First, Moses' actions in relation to his radiant face indicted Israel as an unfaithful and obstinate son (ref. 32:9, 33:3-5). They provided a metaphor for the fact that, though God would speak openly to Israel, His words would be lost upon them; no sooner would they hear from Him than the glory of His words would be obscured by their veiled hearts.
- 2) But from the larger perspective, Israel had thought Yahweh's presence and provision could be mediated through a calf-image, and by this startling manifestation He was showing them that the only "image" able to accomplish that end is *man*. Not a calf, but the image-son is suited to bear the manifest glory of the divine. In this, too, Moses anticipated the One who was to come (John 1:1-14). But beyond that, he foreshadowed human destiny in the Last Adam: man, the image-son, made God's consummate dwelling place in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:20ff; 2 Corinthians 3:1-4:6).