

MOSES' PLEA FOR GOD'S PRESENCE

BIBLE TEXT : Exodus 33:1-23

LESSON 68 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will *give* thee rest" (Exodus 33:14).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Exodus 33:1-23

¹ And the LORD said unto Moses, Depart, and go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto the land which I swore unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it:

² And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite:

³ Unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou *art* a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way.

⁴ And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments.

⁵ For the LORD had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye *are* a stiffnecked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee.

⁶ And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb.

⁷ And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, *that* every one which sought the LORD went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which *was* without the camp.

⁸ And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, *that* all the people rose up, and stood every man *at* his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle.

⁹ And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood *at* the door of the tabernacle, and *the LORD* talked with Moses.

¹⁰ And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand *at* the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man *in* his tent door.

¹¹ And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I God's Refusal to Go with the Israelites to Canaan

1 God directed Moses to lead the Israelites to Canaan that the promise made to the patriarchal fathers might be fulfilled, Exodus 33:1;

Genesis 12:1 ¹ Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

Genesis 15:18-21 ¹⁸ In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:

¹⁹ The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites,

²⁰ And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims,

²¹ And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

Genesis 17:8 ⁸ And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Genesis 28:13-14 ¹³ And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I *am* the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

¹⁴ And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Psalms 105:42 ⁴² For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant.

2 God promised to send an angel before the Israelites, since He could not go because of their sin, Exodus 33:2, 3;

Joshua 7:12 ¹² Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, *but* turned *their* backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.

Psalms 66:18 ¹⁸ If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear *me*:

Isaiah 59:2 ² But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear.

3 The solemn announcement produced an attitude of contrition among the Israelites, Exodus 33:4-6;

Psalms 34:18 ¹⁸ The LORD *is* nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Psalms 51:17 ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Isaiah 66:2 ² For all those *things* hath mine hand made, and all those *things* have been, saith the LORD: but to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

4 Moses moved the Tabernacle of the congregation (not the Tabernacle where the priests ministered before God, which was built later) outside the camp, and the people resorted thereto, Exodus 33:7, 8;

Psalms 34:4 ⁴ I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.

Hebrews 10:25 ²⁵ Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

II Moses' Intercession for the Israelites

1. God's presence at the Tabernacle was sufficient proof that God was directing Moses. Exodus 33:9-11;

Hebrews 13:7 ⁷ Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.

2. Joshua, the servant of Moses, proved again his loyalty to God and to Moses by not departing from the Tabernacle, Exodus

camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle.

¹² And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight.

¹³ Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation *is* thy people.

¹⁴ And he said, My presence shall go *with thee*, and I will give thee rest.

¹⁵ And he said unto him, If thy presence go not *with me*, carry us not up hence.

¹⁶ For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? *is it* not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that *are* upon the face of the earth.

¹⁷ And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.

¹⁸ And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

¹⁹ And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.

²⁰ And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

²¹ And the LORD said, Behold, *there is* a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock:

²² And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:

²³ And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

33:11;

Exodus 17:9-10 ⁹ And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.

¹⁰ So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

Exodus 17:13 ¹³ And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

Exodus 24:13 ¹³ And Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God.

Exodus 32:17 ¹⁷ And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, *There is* a noise of war in the camp.

3. Moses pled for a more complete and intimate knowledge of God and His ways, approaching God in boldness prompted by an unselfish, spiritual life, Exodus 33:12, 13;

Jeremiah 9:23-24 ²³ Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches:

²⁴ But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 31:34 ³⁴ And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Hosea 6:3 ³ Then shall we know, *if* we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter *and* former rain unto the earth.

John 7:12 ¹² And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people.

4. God gave the promise for which Moses asked, Exodus 33:14;

Isaiah 63:9-14 ⁹ In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.

¹⁰ But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, *and* he fought against them.

¹¹ Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, *and* his people, *saying*, Where *is* he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where *is* he that put his holy Spirit within him?

¹² That led *them* by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name?

¹³ That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, *that* they should not stumble?

¹⁴ As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.

Isaiah 54:7-8 ⁷ For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.

⁸ In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.

Psalms 78:52-55 ⁵² But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.

⁵³ And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.

⁵⁴ And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, *even* to this mountain, *which* his right hand had purchased.

⁵⁵ He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.

2 Peter 1:3 ³ According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

5. Moses claimed the promise, since it was asked for God's glory, the welfare of the Israelites, and for a testimony to the ungodly, Exodus 33:15, 16;

Mark 16:17 ¹⁷ And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

1 Kings 8:56 ⁵⁶ Blessed *be* the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of

Moses his servant.

6. God gave a further reassurance in answer to Moses' reasonable request, Exodus 33:17
7. Moses, eager for a still closer personal acquaintance with the Almighty, asked the ultimate from God, Exodus 33:18, 19
8. God granted as much of Moses' request as it was possible for him to stand, Exodus 33:20-23: John 1-18

NOTES:

The Unfailing Promise

Back in the very beginning of the Hebrew nation, when Abraham was called out of the land of Ur, God promised that Abraham's seed should eventually possess the land of Canaan. This promise was renewed to Isaac and Jacob in later times, but none of the three ever came into its realization. They dwelt in tents and spent most of their lives wandering in the land. But God never forgets His promises; and when the Israelites cried because of their burdens the Lord brought them out of Egypt in a miraculous way and started them on their way to Canaan.

The Israelites failed God and fell short of what God would have them attain to, but God's promises to Abraham still stood. God was displeased with the Israelites because of their sins. He would have consumed the Israelites, were it not for the faithful intercession of Moses who prayed for them. Moses reminded God that His name would not receive honor if the Israelites were destroyed. Had Moses not interceded, a decree similar to that given on the border of the Promised Land — that none would enter Canaan — would surely have been given at Mt. Sinai instead.

God repented of the judgment He would have sent upon the Israelites; and after the tribe of Levi had separated themselves from among the other tribes He gave the order that the encampment at Sinai was to be broken up and the long march to Canaan begun. He was remembering the promise He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was giving the Israelites one more opportunity to prove their sincerity and love for Him. But because of the sin among the people God could no longer dwell in their midst.

Necessity of Holiness

God cannot abide where sin is tolerated or condoned. When Jesus died on Calvary He took our sins upon Himself and died so we would not have to die, and the presence of our sins upon the Innocent One caused God to turn away from even His own beloved Son. God could not look upon sin when Christ died, nor could He dwell where sin existed in Israel's time. Neither can He now call that person who has sin in his heart a son.

There was a measure of mercy as well as judgment in God's refusal to be in the midst of the Israelites. He was not going to leave them entirely to their own resources, but promised to send an angel to open the way ahead. Because of their sinful tendencies He personally drew away from them in mercy, lest He should destroy them in their sins when they turned from Him as they so often did. They would, in this manner, be sheltered from the sudden power of God's judgment and be given time to repent and turn their hearts to God again.

The Tabernacle of the Congregation

God's departure from their midst was a virtual reversal of their prime and peculiar favor: the fact that God had dwelt in their midst and was their governing power, guide, protector, and salvation. Naturally they mourned and refused to put on their ornaments. In spite of their waywardness, sin, and idolatry they really did not want to be separated from God; and when Moses told them the Lord's words they were

deeply distressed. They became more penitent than at any previous time, stripping off their ornaments. God saw their repentance.

Before the permanent Tabernacle was built, the pattern of which was shown to Moses on Mt. Sinai, the Israelites had a place where God met them. This was called the Tabernacle of the congregation and is thought to be the place where Moses lived, or at least where his headquarters was situated. When God's decision was given to Moses he took this Tabernacle and moved it outside the camp and pitched it some distance away, to bring more clearly to the Israelites the fact that God was not dwelling in their midst. Moses also showed here a determination that no matter what was necessary he was going to be in the place where God's presence could be with him.

The Israelites became much more concerned about their spiritual welfare when this took place and would stand in the doors of their tents as Moses went to the Tabernacle. How relieved and comforted they must have been when they saw the cloudy pillar descend upon the Tabernacle, because they knew that God was talking to Moses, assuring them of divine leadership.

Joshua, the Faithful Soldier

Moses was not entirely alone in his stand for God, however. There has always been a remnant of godly men and women who have stood for the faith in the face of apostasy and sinfulness of all kinds. God has always had some "Samuels" who could still hear the voice of God when the "Elis" could not; "7,000's" who would not bow their knees to idols, even if they were unknown to the "Elijahs"; "Elishas" who poured water on the hands of the "Elijahs"; "Hebrew children" who have stood behind and with the faithful "Daniels"; and "Joshuas" who, when the Spirit of God was grieved because of the presence of sin, would not leave the Tabernacle.

It was this same Joshua who did not hesitate to muster an army and face great physical danger in a battle with the trained Amalekites while Moses prayed for God's help for the army of the Israelites. It was this same Joshua who went up Mt. Sinai with Moses, perhaps farther than any other man besides Moses. And here, as the faithful minister of Moses, we see him still filling his place of responsibility. God, give us more Joshuas!

Moses' Plea for God's Presence

Moses was not content with the arrangement as thus established. He knew the great responsibility that was upon his shoulders. He knew the tendencies of the people to murmur, grow fainthearted, and depart from the true God. He knew that in his own strength he could never bring them into Canaan. God had promised to send an angel before them but this was not enough for Moses, nor did he feel that God's ways were sufficiently plain. If he was on such intimate terms with God, as God had said, God should be with him in a greater way than ever before. He was not interested in knowing more about man's ways nor of reaching a higher state of intellectual accomplishment. He wanted to know God better. He wanted to know God's will more perfectly. He wanted to find more grace in God's sight.

God honored Moses' prayer and gave him the reassuring answer: "My presence shall go with thee." Because of Moses' request and prayer God's presence was to be with them at all times instead of only the angel going before them to prepare the way. Moses claimed the promise in his answering words: "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." Moses had found grace in God's sight.

Better to have a death in the wilderness of Mt. Sinai than the

QUESTIONS

1. Upon what occasions had God promised Abraham and Jacob that the land of Canaan would be given to their seed?
2. What change in God's former provisions for the Israelites was apparent in the promise made to send an angel before them?
3. What attitude did the Children of Israel take when they heard God's instructions to Moses?
4. Where had the Tabernacle of the congregation been pitched and to what place did Moses move it?
5. What great lesson is taught us by the Israelites going to the Tabernacle as they did?
6. What did the Israelites do when the glory of the Lord came down upon the Tabernacle of the congregation?
7. How does the Bible describe the relationship of God and Moses?
8. What request did Moses make of God prior to asking to see God's glory? What were his reasons for making that request?
9. Did God grant the request? Should we make requests of this kind when we pray?
10. Why did God not grant Moses' request to see God's glory? What did God do instead?

prospect of a day's journey without God's presence with them continually! Better the dearth of the desert than the land flowing with milk and honey without God's presence! How were they to be distinguished from all the people of the world if not by the fact that God dwelt among them? How were they to know that they were following God's will if His presence was not with them? How were they to know for sure that God's angel had gone before them if God was not with them at all times?

Christians today can learn a valuable lesson from the persistence of this godly man, Moses, at this time of his life. How can we know that we are separated and set apart from all the people of the world except the presence of God be with us? How are we to know God's will if God's presence is not with us? How are we to be assured that the angel of the Lord has gone before us if God's presence is not with us? How are we effectually to serve God if His presence is not with us? God's presence, His Holy Spirit, is what we must seek after, contend for, and cherish above everything else when He is ours. Our continuous prayer must be: "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."

Insatiable Spiritual Hunger Rewarded

Moses was still not content, however. He wanted to receive all that it was possible for a mortal to receive from God. He wanted a more complete revelation of God, and from God, than man had ever received. He was not seeking for temporal blessings nor earthly glory. He yearned for a disclosure of God, more full and glorious than he had received at the burning bush, more personal than the devouring fire on the mountain, and more satisfying to his soul than could be had through the thick darkness or cloudy pillar. His desire was to see His glory. The Lord granted the request, mercifully tempering the answer by making His goodness known to Moses instead of His unveiled glory, and by proclaiming the name of the Lord before that godly man.

In our next lesson we shall see more clearly how Moses was being tested by God through all these events. We shall see how Moses proved that he was a man who could be trusted with this great responsibility of leadership and how his willingness and fitness to be an intercessor for the Israelites was being tried here. We shall see how he emerged triumphant through it all, proving that his ambition was not for earthly glory and the esteem of men but for God's power and blessing upon his life at all times.

How wonderful it must have been to Moses to stand in a cleft of a rock and feel the hand of God there shielding him from the consuming *presence* of the Almighty! How rapturous it must have been for him to

see that which no other mortal eye had ever seen, and to hear the voice of the Lord proclaim the name of the Lord, Jehovah, with its attributes of goodness, graciousness, and mercy!

What a high place this godly man, Moses, attained to in God's battalions of faithful warriors! It was his because he valued the presence of God above everything else in the world. We, too, can attain to a high place in God's economy if we seek "first the kingdom of God"; for it is promised that "the hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him" and that "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."