
EXODUS 33:1 The LORD spoke to Moses, "Depart, go up from here, you and the people that you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your seed.'

Moses is commanded to depart from the mount, and lead up the people towards the promised land, Exo 33:1. An angel is promised to be their guide, Exo 33:2. The land is described, and the Lord refuses to go with them, Exo 33:3. The people mourn, and strip themselves of their ornaments, Exo 33:4-6. The tabernacle or tent is pitched without the camp, Exo 33:7. Moses goes to it to consult the Lord, and the cloudy pillar descends on it, Exo 33:8, Exo 33:9. The people, standing at their tent doors, witness this, Exo 33:10. The Lord speaks familiarly with Moses; he returns to the camp, and leaves Joshua in the tabernacle, Exo 33:11. Moses pleads with God, and desires to know whom he will send to be their guide, and to be informed of the way of the Lord, Exo 33:12, Exo 33:13. The Lord promises that his presence shall go with them, Exo 33:14. Moses pleads that the people may be taken under the Divine protection, Exo 33:15, Exo 33:16. The Lord promises to do so, Exo 33:17. Moses requests to see the Divine glory, Exo 33:18. And God promises to make his goodness pass before him, and to proclaim his name, Exo 33:19. Shows that no man can see his glory and live, Exo 33:20; but promises to put him in the cleft of a rock, and to cover him with his hand while his glory passed by, and then to remove his hand and let him see his back parts, Exo 33:21-23.

Verse 1

Unto the land - That is, towards it, or to the borders of it. See Exo 32:34 (note).

EXODUS 33:2 I will send an angel before you; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite:

Verse 2

I will send an angel - In Exo 23:20, God promises to send an angel to conduct them into the good land, in whom the name of God should be; that is, in whom God should dwell. See Clarke's note on Exo 23:20 (note). Here he promises that an angel shall be their conductor; but as there is nothing particularly specified of him, it has been thought that an ordinary angel is intended, and not that Angel of the Covenant promised before. And this sentiment seems to be confirmed by the following verse.

EXODUS 33:3 to a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in your midst, for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I consume you on the way."

Verse 3

I will not go up in the midst of thee - Consequently, the angel here promised to be their guide was not that angel in whom Jehovah's name was: and so the people understood it; hence the mourning which is afterwards mentioned.

EXODUS 33:4 When the people heard this evil news, they mourned: and no one put on his jewelry.

EXODUS 33:5 The LORD said to Moses, "Tell the children of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go up into your midst for one moment, I would consume you. Therefore now take off your jewelry from you, that I may know what to do to you.'"

Verse 5

Now put off thy ornaments from thee - "The Septuagint, in their translation, suppose that the children of Israel not only laid aside their ear-rings, and such like ornaments, in a time of professed deep humiliation before God, but their upper or more beautiful garments too. Moses says nothing of this last circumstance; but as it is a modern practice, so it appears by their version to have been as ancient as their time, and probably took place long before that. The Septuagint gives us this as the translation of the passage: 'The people, having heard this sad declaration, mourned with lamentations. And the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Now, therefore, put off your robes of glory, and your ornaments, and I will show you the things I will do unto you. And the children of Israel put off their ornaments and robes by the mount, by Horeb.' "If it had not been the custom to put off their upper garments in times of deep mourning, in the days that the Septuagint translation was made, they would not have inserted this circumstance in the account Moses gives of their mourning, and concerning which he was silent. They must have supposed too that this practice might be in use in those elder times. "That it is now practiced in the east, appears from the account Pitts gives of the ceremonies of the Mohammedan pilgrimage to Mecca. 'A few days after this we came to a place called Rabbock, about four days' sail on this side of Mecca, where all the haggas or pilgrims, (excepting those of the female sex) do enter into hirrawem or ihram, i.e., they take off all their clothes, covering themselves with two hirrawems, or large white cotton wrappers; one they put about their middle, which reaches down to their ankles; with the other they cover the upper part of their body, except the head; and they wear no other thing on their bodies but these wrappers, only a pair of grimgameca, that is thin-soled shoes like sandals, the over-leather of which covers only the toes, the insteps being all naked. In this manner, like humble penitents, they go from Rabbock until they come to Mecca, to approach the temple, many times enduring the scorching heat of the sun until the very skin is burnt off their backs and arms, and their heads swollen to a very great degree.' - pp. 115,116. Presently after he informs us 'that the time of their wearing this mortifying habit is about the space of seven days.' Again, (p. 138): 'It was a sight, indeed, able to pierce one's heart, to behold so many thousands in their garments of humility and mortification, with their naked heads, and cheeks watered with tears; and to hear their grievous sighs and sobs, begging earnestly for the remission of their sins, promising newness of life, using a form of penitential expressions, and thus continuing for the space of four or five hours.' "The Septuagint suppose the Israelites made much the same appearance as these Mohammedan pilgrims, when Israel stood in anguish of soul at the foot of Mount Horeb, though Moses says nothing of putting off any of their vestments. "Some passages of the Jewish prophets seem to confirm the notion of their stripping themselves of some of their clothes in times of deep humiliation, particularly Mic 1:8 : Therefore I will wail and howl; I will go stripped and naked; I will make a wailing like the dragons,

and mourning as the owls. "Saul's stripping himself, mentioned 1Sam 19:24, is perhaps to be understood of his assuming the appearance of those that were deeply engaged in devotional exercises, into which he was unintentionally brought by the prophetic influences that came upon him, and in which he saw others engaged." - Harmer's Observat., vol. iv., p. 172.

The ancient Jewish commentators were of opinion that the Israelites had the name יהוה Jehovah inscribed on them in such a way as to ensure them the Divine protection; and that this, inscribed probably on a plate of gold, was considered their choicest ornament; and that when they gave their ornaments to make the golden calf, this was given by many, in consequence of which they were considered as naked and defenceless. All the remaining parts of their ornaments, which it is likely were all emblematical of spiritual things, God commands them here to lay off; for they could not with propriety bear the symbols of the Divine protection, who had forfeited that protection for their transgression.

That I may know what to do unto thee - For it seems that while they had these emblematic ornaments on them, they were still considered as under the Divine protection. These were a shield to them, which God commands them to throw aside. Though many had parted with their choicest ornaments, yet not all, only a few comparatively, of the wives, daughters, and sons of 600,000 men, could have been thus stripped to make one golden calf. The major part still had these ornaments, and they are now commanded to lay them aside.

EXODUS 33:6 The children of Israel stripped themselves of their jewelry from Mount Horeb onward.

EXODUS 33:7 Now Moses used to take the tent and to pitch it outside the camp, far away from the camp, and he called it "The Tent of Meeting." Everyone who sought the LORD went out to the Tent of Meeting, which was outside the camp.

Verse 7

Moses took the tabernacle - אה האהל eth haohel, the Tent; not את המשכן eth hammishcan, the tabernacle, the dwelling-place of Jehovah, see Exo 36:11, for this was not as yet erected; but probably the tent of Moses, which was before in the midst of the camp, and to which the congregation came for judgment, and where, no doubt, God frequently met with his servant. This is now removed to a considerable distance from the camp, (two thousand cubits, according to the Talmudists), as God refuses to dwell any longer among this rebellious people. And as this was the place to which all the people came for justice and judgment, hence it was probably called the tabernacle, more properly the tent, of the congregation.

EXODUS 33:8 When Moses went out to the Tent, that all the people rose up, and stood, everyone at their tent door, and watched Moses, until he had gone into the Tent.

EXODUS 33:9 When Moses entered into the Tent, the pillar of cloud descended, stood at the door of the Tent, and spoke with Moses.

Verse 9

The cloudy pillar descended - This very circumstance precluded the possibility of deception. The cloud descending at these times, and at none others, was a full proof that it was miraculous, and a pledge of the Divine presence. It was beyond the power of human art to counterfeit such an appearance; and let it be observed that all the people saw this, Exo 33:10. How many indubitable and irrefragable proofs of its own authenticity and Divine origin does the Pentateuch contain!

EXODUS 33:10 All the people saw the pillar of cloud stand at the door of the Tent, and all the people rose up and worshipped, everyone at their tent door.

EXODUS 33:11 The LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. He turned again into the camp, but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, didn't depart from the Tent.

Verse 11

The Lord spake unto Moses face to face - That there was no personal appearance here we may readily conceive; and that the communications made by God to Moses were not by visions, ecstasies, dreams, inward inspirations, or the mediation of angels, is sufficiently evident: we may therefore consider the passage as implying that familiarity and confidence with which the Divine Being treated his servant, and that he spake with him by articulate sounds in his own language, though no shape or similitude was then to be seen.

Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man - There is a difficulty here. Joshua certainly was not a young man in the literal sense of the word; "but he was called so," says Mr. Ainsworth, "In respect of his service, not of his years; for he was now above fifty years old, as may be gathered from Jos 24:29. But because ministry and service are usually by the younger sort, all servants are called young men, Gen 14:24." See also Gen 22:3, and Gen 41:12. Perhaps the word נער *naar*, here translated young man, means a single person, one unmarried.

EXODUS 33:12 Moses said to the LORD, "Behold, you tell me, 'Bring up this people:' and you haven't let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight.'

Verse 12

Moses said unto the Lord - We may suppose that after Moses had quitted the tabernacle he went to the camp, and gave the people some general information relative to the conversation he lately had with the Lord; after which he returned to the tabernacle or tent, and began to plead with God, as we find in this and the following verses.

Thou hast not let me know, etc. - As God had said he would not go up with this people, Moses wished to know whom he would send with him, as he had only said, in general terms, that he would send an angel.

EXODUS 33:13 Now therefore, if I have found favour in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you, so that I may find favour in your sight: and consider that this nation is your people.”

Verse 13

Show me now thy way - Let me know the manner in which thou wouldst have this people led up and governed, because this nation is thy people, and should be governed and guided in thy own way.

EXODUS 33:14 He said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

Verse 14

My presence shall go with thee - פני ילכו panai yelechu, my faces shall go. I shall give thee manifestations of my grace and goodness through the whole of thy journey. I shall vary my appearances for thee, as thy necessities shall require.

EXODUS 33:15 He said to him, “If your presence doesn’t go with me, don’t carry us up from here.

Verse 15

If thy presence go not - אין פניך הלכים im ein paneycha holechim, if thy faces do not go - if we have not manifestations of thy peculiar providence and grace, carry us not up hence. Without supernatural assistance, and a most particular providence, he knew that it would be impossible either to govern such a people, or support them in the desert; and therefore he wishes to be well assured on this head, that he may lead them up with confidence, and be able to give them the most explicit assurances of support and protection. But by what means should these manifestations take place? This question seems to be answered by the Prophet Isaiah, Isa 63:9 : In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the Angel of his presence (פניו panaiv, of his faces) saved them. So we find that the goodness and mercy of God were to be manifested by the Angel of the Covenant, the Lord Jesus, the Messiah; and this is the interpretation which the Jews themselves give of this place. Can any person lead men to the typical Canaan, who is not himself influenced and directed by the Lord? And of what use are all the means of grace, if not crowned with the presence and blessing of the God of Israel? It is on this ground that Jesus Christ hath said, Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the midst of them, Mat 18:20; without which, what would preachings, prayers, and even Sacraments avail?

EXODUS 33:16 For how would people know that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people? Isn’t it in that you go with us, so that we are separated, I and your people, from all the people who are on the surface of the earth?”

Verse 16

So shall we be separated - By having this Divine protection we shall be saved from idolatry, and be preserved in thy truth and in the true worshipping of thee; and thus shall we be separated from all the people that are upon the face of the earth: as all the nations of the world, the Jews only excepted, were at this time idolaters.

EXODUS 33:17 The LORD said to Moses, "I will do this thing also that you have spoken; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name."

Verse 17

I will do this thing also - My presence shall go with thee, and I will keep thee separate from all the people of the earth. Both these promises have been remarkably fulfilled. God continued miraculously with them till he brought them into the promised land; and from the day in which he brought them out of Egypt to the present day, he has kept them a distinct, unmixed people! Who can account for this on any principle but that of a continual especial providence, and a constant Divine interference? The Jews have ever been a people fond of money; had they been mingled with the people of the earth among whom they have been scattered, their secular interests would have been greatly promoted by it; and they who have sacrificed every thing besides to their love of money, on this point have been incorruptible! They chose in every part of their dispersions rather to be a poor, despised, persecuted people, and continue separate from all the people of the earth, than to enjoy ease and affluence by becoming mixed with the nations. For what great purposes must God be preserving this people! for it does not appear that any moral principle binds them together - they seem lost to this; and yet in opposition to their interests, for which in other respects they would sacrifice every thing, they are still kept distinct from all the people of the earth: for this an especial providence alone can account.

EXODUS 33:18 He said, "Please show me your glory."

Verse 18

Show me thy glory - Moses probably desired to see that which constitutes the peculiar glory or excellence of the Divine nature as it stands in reference to man. By many this is thought to signify his eternal mercy in sending Christ Jesus into the world. Moses perceived that what God was now doing had the most important and gracious designs which at present he could not distinctly discover; therefore he desires God to show him his glory. God graciously promises to indulge him in this request as far as possible, by proclaiming his name, and making all his goodness pass before him, Exo 33:19. But at the same time he assures him that he could not see his face - the fullness of his perfections and the grandeur of his designs, and live, as no human being could bear, in the present state, this full discovery. But he adds, Thou shalt see my back parts, אַחֲרַי אֵת אַחֲרַי, eth achorai, probably meaning that appearance which he should assume in after times, when it should be said, God is manifest in the flesh. This appearance did take place, for we find God putting him into a cleft of the rock, covering him with his hand, and passing by in such a way as to exhibit a human similitude. John may have had this in view when he said, The Word was made flesh and dwelt Among us, full of grace

and truth, and We Beheld His Glory. What this glory was, and what was implied by this grace and truth, we shall see in the succeeding chapter.

EXODUS 33:19 He said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the LORD's name before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

Verse 19

I will make all my goodness pass before thee - Thou shalt not have a sight of my justice, for thou couldst not bear the infinite splendor of my purity: but I shall show myself to thee as the fountain of inexhaustible compassion, the sovereign Dispenser of my own mercy in my own way, being gracious to whom I will be gracious, and showing mercy on whom I will show mercy.

I will proclaim the name of the Lord - See Clarke's note on Exo 34:6.

EXODUS 33:20 He said, "You cannot see my face, for man may not see me and live."

Verse 20

No man see me, and live - The splendor would be insufferable to man; he only, whose mortality is swallowed up of life, can see God as he is. See 1Jn 3:2. From some disguised relation of the circumstances mentioned here, the fable of Jupiter and Semele was formed; she is reported to have entreated Jupiter to show her his glory, who was at first very reluctant, knowing that it would be fatal to her; but at last, yielding to her importunity, he discovered his divine majesty, and she was consumed by his presence. This story is told by Ovid in his Metamorphoses, book iii., table iii., 5.

EXODUS 33:21 The LORD also said, "Behold, there is a place by me, and you shall stand on the rock.

Verse 21

Behold, there is a place by me - There seems to be a reference here to a well-known place on the mount where God was accustomed to meet with Moses. This was a rock; and it appears there was a cleft or cave in it, in which Moses was to stand while the Divine Majesty was pleased to show him all that human nature was capable of bearing: but this appears to have referred more to the counsels of his mercy and goodness, relative to his purpose of redeeming the human race, than to any visible appearance of the Divine Majesty itself. See Clarke on Exo 33:18 (note).

1. The conclusion of this chapter is very obscure: we can scarcely pretend to say, in any precise manner, what it means; and it is very probable that the whole concerned Moses alone. He was in great perplexity and doubt; he was afraid that God was about to abandon this people; and he well knew that if he did so, their destruction must be the consequence. He had received general directions to decamp, and lead the people towards the promised land; but this was accompanied

with a threat that Jehovah would not go with them. The prospect that was before him was exceedingly gloomy and discouraging; and it was rendered the more so because God predicted their persevering stiffneckedness, and gave this as one reason why he would not go up among them, for their provocations would be so great and so frequent that his justice would be so provoked as to break through in a moment and consume them. Moses, well knowing that God must have some great and important designs in delivering them and bringing them thus far, earnestly entreated him to give him some discovery of it, that his own mind might be satisfied. God mercifully condescends to meet his wishes in such a way as no doubt gave him full satisfaction; but as this referred to himself alone the circumstances are not related, as probably they could be of no farther use to us than the mere gratifying of a principle of curiosity.

2. On some occasions to be kept in the dark is as instructive as to be brought into the light. In many cases those words of the prophet are strictly applicable. Verily, thou art a God, who Hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior! One point we see here very plainly, that while the people continued obstinate and rebellious, that presence of God by which his approbation was signified could not be manifested among them; and yet, without his presence to guide, protect, and provide for them, they could neither go up nor be saved. This presence is promised, and on the fulfillment of the promise the safety of Israel depended. The Church of God is often now in such a state that the approbation of God cannot be manifested in it; and yet if his presence were wholly withdrawn, truth would fall in the streets, equity go backward, and the Church must become extinct. How have the seeds of light and life been preserved during the long, dark, and cold periods when error was triumphant, and the pure worship of God adulterated by the impurities of idolatry and the thick darkness of superstition, by the presence of his endless mercy, preserving his own truth in circumstances in which he could not show his approbation! He was with the Church in the wilderness, and preserved the living oracles, kept alive the heavenly seeds, and is now showing forth the glory of those designs which before he concealed from mankind. He cannot err because he is infinitely wise; he can do nothing that is unkind, because he delighteth in mercy. We, as yet, see only through a glass darkly; by and by we shall see face to face. The Lord's presence is with his people; and those who trust in him have confident rest in his mercy.

EXODUS 33:22 It will happen, while my glory passes by, that I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and will cover you with my hand until I have passed by;

EXODUS 33:23 then I will take away my hand, and you will see my back; but my face shall not be seen."
