

Pentateuch 14

Brought to the Mountain of God Part 2: Exodus 15:22-24:18

Moses the Mediator

- I. Moses ascended and descended the mountain of God. Moses represented the people to God and God to the people. In other words, Moses acted as a Mediator.
 - A. [Stairway between Heaven and Earth]
 - B. Exodus 19:3-9
 - C. Chapter 19 sevenfold repetition of “down” and “speak”
 - D. Chapter 24 sevenfold repetition of “ascend”
- II. Moses’ role as mediator comes to its fullest expression in chapter 33 of Exodus—arguably the highest point of tension and resolution in the book—as Moses intercedes for the Israelites who have just committed idolatry by making and worshipping a golden calf.
 - A. Crucial Event
 1. Described in terms of the flood narrative
 - a) Corrupted/ Way: Exodus 32:7-8/ Genesis 6:12
 - b) Start over: Exodus 32:10
 2. Literary Structure
 - a) The instructions for the tabernacle are given in Exodus 25–31 and the construction of the tabernacle is recounted in Exodus 35–40.
 - b) Notice that the end of 31 and the beginning of 35 features the Sabbath.
 - (1) Ultimate purpose of the Tabernacle is Sabbath communion with God
 - (2) The Mosaic covenant is likened to a marriage relationship elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:20; Ezek. 16; Hos. 2), with YHWH’s wooing Israel in the wilderness. Borrowing that analogy, it is as if the narrative builds momentum as it moves from courtship to betrothal in the covenant ratification ceremony of Exodus 24; then, on the threshold of consummation, Israel commits adultery on the nuptial night (Morales).
 - (3) Especially given the context of sacred space and time, Israel’s making of the golden calf to symbolize God’s Presence, parodying ironically the making and purpose of the tabernacle in

Exodus 25:1–9, merits the immediate and unreserved vengeance of God (Morales).

3. Interestingly, the golden calf is not the dead center of the account. Rather the whole incident sets up Chapter 33 with Moses' mediation.

a) Leading up to Exodus 33 and highly significant for later considerations regarding the Day of Atonement, the day after Israel's sin Moses had declared to the people (Exod. 32:30), 'You have sinned a great sin! Now therefore I will ascend to YHWH. Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.'

(1) 32:32

(2) The phrase 'blot out', from māḥâ, happens also to have been the term used for God's intention to blot out humanity (hā'ādām) from the face of the land (hā'ādāmâ) in the flood narrative (Gen. 6:7), heightened all the more by Moses' added explanatory 'from your scroll'.

(3) He is in effect calling upon God to forgive Israel by obliterating him instead. Here the essential nature of intercession is manifest: this profound gesture of atonement unveils the inner meaning of Moses' role as mediator (Morales).

B. Chapter 33

1. YHWH will not go with them

2. Moses does not accept this. Why?

a) Is this about land entry?

(1) What about 33:15?

(2) If Moses chose the land what would he have that is different from Cain, the tower of Babel, Lot, Esau?

(3) All examples of life east of the flaming sword.

(4) So God tests Moses, sifting his heart and discerning its inward motivation and desire: Will he, after all, be willing to rest the matter short of its fundamental goal? No, Moses forsook neither the treasures of Egypt nor the repose of Midian merely to establish another nation among the scattered lot of Babylon's tower—better God's Presence in the wilderness than his absence

in the land. Land, then, is not the core of the patriarchal promises, but life in the land with God (Morales).

3. Thus the primary issue of Exodus 33 and Moses' mediatorial work comes into focus: the Presence of God, particularly his tabernacling Presence, amidst Israel. Having made a golden calf to symbolize God's Presence, Israel is now threatened with the loss of the divinely ordained symbol of his Presence, the tabernacle. After tasting the house of God through the descriptive instructions in Exodus 25–31, the narrative unexpectedly plummets into an unthinkable possibility, that the tabernacle will not be built at all—no longer necessary since God will not accompany Israel. Here, then, we find the dramatic height of the book, the focal point of its narrative tension and resolution. The logic of the literary structure, with Moses' mediation occurring between the instructions and the construction of the tabernacle, now becomes manifest: apart from Moses' mediation, there is no tabernacle; there is no new cosmos filled with the glory of YHWH (Morales).
4. Think of Christ and New Heaven and New Earth.

III. What about Moses' face?

- A. While the Hebrew word used for Moses' veil (*masweh*) differs from that of the tabernacle veil (*pārōket*), scholars have nevertheless long noted the analogy at play.
- B. Moses has been transfigured by his face-to-face friendship with YHWH, a foretaste of the reality signified by the twelve loaves of the Presence basking in the light of the *mēnôrâ* lampstand. Yet to the degree that even God's reflected glory must be veiled from Israel, Israel's knowledge and experience of God—revealed through Moses' mediation—is consequently limited (cf. 2 Cor. 3:7–18).