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**Session 17**

***God of Freedom, Week 9b***

**Exodus 33 *and* Exodus 34**

**29-30 January 2024**

**Start at 23:40**

**Outward Sign of Inward Mourning –** Moses must have heaved a sigh of relief when He heard God reiterate His covenant with Abraham’s descendants concerning the land at the beginning of chapter 33. But everyone mourned when they heard God say that He would not go with them, lest they be consumed along the way there. It is significant that they removed their ornaments as a sign of their mourning for sin. (It was some of these very ornaments that had been used to create the terrible golden calf idol.) Jesus would later tell His disciples that those who mourn over their sin would be blessed by God. But at this moment they are stunned and dismayed because God for the first time is saying that He will not and cannot go with them.

**The Tent of Meeting –** The “tent of meeting” mentioned over and over in Exodus 33:7-11 is a provisional meeting place that is set up before the Tabernacle was built. Notice that Joshua’s name is also mentioned in various ways, as Moses prepares his readers for the fact that Joshua will be his successor. They would see Joshua taking on more and more roles of leadership and faithfully fulfilling them, so that he would be ready when the time came for him to take over the reins.

**Seeing God’s Glory –** In Exodus 33:18-23, Moses asks to see God’s glory, and the Lord graciously complies. Notice that He does so in such a way that will bless Moses but not harm him. He tells Moses in effect that he will get to see as much of God’s glory as will satisfy his longing, but not destroy him.

**God’s Character –** When God meets Moses at the top of the mountain again, He proclaims His name and His character, beginning with “The Lord, the Lord, a God **merciful and gracious**…” From the earliest pages of Scripture, whenever God interacts with man, His first impulse and His first speech is mercy, grace, and forgiveness…again and again and again and again. Yet we, like the Israelites, tend to forget all the good things God has done for us while vividly recalling terrible things that have happened, such as the 9/11 attack. Let us determine to read scripture, not asking, “Is God good?” but rather, “Since God IS good, how does this particular event reveal His goodness?”

**The Mountain of God –** God reiterates the covenant laws, but this time He speaks at some length on idolatry. This is no surprise, in light of what has just happened among the people. And when Moses finishes writing the Ten Commandments on the second set of stone tablets, he comes back down the mountain for the seventh and last time. Matthew picks up on this idea in his gospel, as he records seven different specific times that Jesus went up a mountain. In Jesus’ case, He ascended different mountains at different times, some of which we can identify and others that we can not. When the woman at the well asked Jesus which mountain was the right place to worship, Jesus told her that God was looking for

people who would worship Him in spirit and in truth. The place no longer matters because Jesus *is* the Tabernacle.

**The People’s Response –** When Moses came down, his face was brilliantly shining, and the people were afraid to come near him at first. But he called Aaron and the leaders to him, and then all the people drew near and listened intently as he shared the words of the Lord with them. Notice that this time there is no questioning or grumbling or arguing, but a humble spirit of hearing and receiving what the Lord had to say. This is characteristic of those who have learned to grieve their sin.

**Shining Like Moses –** Does your heart long to shine forth like Moses did? Remember that the Bible is a book about God and that **we become what we behold**. If you want to shine like the stars in the midst of a crooked generation, fix your gaze on the testimony of Who He is. What if every day we said, “Lord, show me Your glory!” And God, concealing Himself enough that we can bear to behold it, presented us with the glorious truth of who He is. Let us pray that it may be so for each one of us!

**More on “The Mountain of God”**

I have been increasingly intrigued by this idea of “the mountain of God” as I have started to study through the book of Isaiah recently. Consider this passage from Isaiah 2:2-4:

*It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths.”*

Compare this with excerpts from a similar passage in Revelation 21:9-16:

*Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem…It had a great, high wall…And the one who spoke with me…measured the city with his [measuring] rod, 12,000 stadia [=1380 miles]. Its length and width and height are equal.”*

So here we have a city over 1300 miles high, sitting on top of a “great, high mountain”—which would elevate it even higher. As a comparison, Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world currently, is only about 5½ miles high! So the “highest of the mountains” in the new earth will make Mount Everest look like an anthill!

Last Tuesday Brenda showed a video in her class entitled “Exodus Revealed”. One of the topics discussed in that video was the location of Mount Horeb/Sinai. Although many people have thought it was in the Sinai Peninsula, we know from references in the Bible that it was in the land of Midian, which is now Saudi Arabia. Bible scholars/researchers have located a mountain that has a blackened top, as if it had been burned by fire. There is what appears to be the remnant of an altar at its base, which is carved with images of bulls very similar to carvings found in ancient Egypt. And there is also a very wide plain near it which would have been big enough to contain the millions of people who had left Egypt.

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Last of all, consider this quote from *God’s Promise to the Chinese*: “…there are many oracle bone forms for *mountain*, but surprisingly these very same characters are also used for *fire!* From this we can assume that God’s glorious, holy presence, as a fire, enshrouded His holy mountain.”

And with that thought in mind, let’s return to the book of Isaiah, as he talks about the coming “day of the Lord” in chapter 4, verses 2-5:

*In that day the branch of the Lord [a reference to the Messiah] shall be beautiful and glorious…And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem…Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy.*