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C0718 – May 9, 2007 – Ex 33:1-17 – God's Withdrawal From Israel

Discovery of Herod's tomb and parts of the sarcophagus. Josephus handouts. Edomite, Judaism, Herod the Great, Caesarea, Jerusalem Walls, Temple, Massada, Herodium, Murderer, Funeral Requests, Denied

Now, the order of events is quite important to see the force of chapter 33. God delivered His people from bondage in the land of Egypt. He guided them safely across the wilderness and through the Red Sea. He revealed to them His law at Mt Sinai which when obeyed would result in divine blessing. He revealed the plan of the Tabernacle to Moses on Mt Sinai so that He could dwell with them as Shechinah Glory. He has gone to great lengths to be near to His people. But the people broke His law. The people broke His covenant. They committed the greatest crime of all: idolatry. The divine law began and ended with the prohibition of idolatry (Exod 20:3-6; 23:13). Every ordinance in between was designed to reinforce the prohibition of idolatry. Now, it is the natural inclination of all men to worship. It is not that some men worship and others do not or that some men are religious but others are not. All men are religious, all men worship. God made us this way. The difference is the object of worship (Rom 1:18-32). Either men worship the Creator or some aspect(s) of the creation. There are no other options. Because of their idolatrous worship we see God withdrawing from this people. From the beginning of Exodus He called them "My people". When they sinned with the golden calf He called them "Your people". Now He withdraws further by annulling the Tabernacle. He will no longer dwell with them for fear that He might destroy them along the way. As the Jewish commentators Cassuto said, "All that I have promised the Patriarchs I shall carry out, but on no account shall I cause My Presence to dwell in the midst of Israel's camp through the Tabernacle that they will build to My name, as I said I would, because the people are no longer worthy thereof. Although I gave you detailed directions with regard to the construction of the Tabernacle, and ad the

commencement of these instructions I said to you (xxv 8): ‘And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst’, and at the end I said to you (xxix46) that I brought the children of Israel forth out of the land of Egypt that ‘I may dwell among them’, yet now, seeing that they were unfaithful to Me, I do not permit them to build a Tabernacle for Me, and I shall not dwell in their midst. I shall give them My protection and help from afar, but they shall not be privileged to see the symbol of My presence in the midst of their camp.”ⁱ

9. Departure from Mt Sinai (33:1-23)

a. Tabernacle Annulled (33:1-6)

Exodus 33:1-6 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give it.’”² “I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. ³“Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way.” ⁴When the people heard this sad word, they went into mourning, and none of them put on his ornaments. ⁵For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the sons of Israel, ‘You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you.’” ⁶So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt. You have already brought the people up to Mt Sinai now bring them up again, this time **to the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give it’**, a quotation from Gen 12:7. This refers to the **land** dimension of the Abrahamic Covenant. Their sin did not annul the Abrahamic Covenant. That stands regardless of their sin. Let’s review covenants. What is a biblical

covenant? A biblical covenant is a legal contract. Legal contracts are made between two or more parties. Such contracts contain terms to fulfill and may be unilateral (one-way) or bilateral (two-way). Unilateral contracts are fulfilled by one party and contain 'I will' language. Bilateral contracts are fulfilled by both parties and contain 'If...then' language. Why are covenants made? To measure behavior. God demonstrates His faithfulness by fulfilling His covenants. How should covenants be interpreted? Literally. The nature of contractual language requires literal interpretation. If contracts are not interpreted literally then the terms of the contract are easily misconstrued. Contracts are legal documents. The contract being referred to here is the Abrahamic Covenant. This covenant was first made between God and **Abraham**, then it was repeated to **Isaac** and finally to **Jacob**, who was later named 'Israel'. This covenant is a unilateral contract, unlike the Mosaic Covenant. God **swore** to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that He would fulfill the terms of the contract. There are three basic terms or promises. God swore to give them a 'Land', a 'Seed' and make them a 'Worldwide Blessing'. God's oath is recorded in Genesis 15 where He took animals, cut them in half and passed between the pieces (Gen 15:17). This was the ancient way a covenant was cut between two parties. The important thing to note is that only God passed through the pieces. Abram was in a conscious trance-like state. Thus, God alone was claiming responsibility to fulfill the terms of the contract. Abram did not have to do anything. In verse 1 God reminds Moses of the 'Land' dimension since that is where they are going. It is called the 'Promised Land' because God promised it to Israel. The 'Promised Land' is a literal piece of real estate in the Middle East. The borders are outlined by God in Gen 15:18-21. God promised the land to Abram as an eternal possession in Gen 17:8. What is truly marvelous is that God keeps on bringing up this covenant in the Book of Exodus. This is the sixth time He has mentioned it so far (Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23, 28; 33:2). He mentions it a seventh time in the next chapter (Exod 34:11). Seven is the perfect number or number of completion. God will completely fulfill His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The 'Promised Land' will be the eternal possession of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants. It's an oath of God. One day they will be planted in their land never to be removed again. This will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom and New Heaven and New Earth. The covenant implies a literal bodily resurrection (Matt 22:23-33).

Note verse 2, **I will send an angel before you** not My angel as God promised before in Exod 23:23. The angel God promised would go before them in Exod 23:23 was “the angel of the Lord”, the pre-incarnate Christ. But the condition for Him going before them was obedience. If they were obedient He would go before them. If they were disobedient He would not forgive their sin and might destroy them along the way. Obedience was necessary to enjoy the blessings of the Mosaic Covenant. So, God is withdrawing from the people because of their sinfulness. Rather than sending His angel he will **send an angel**. He will protect them from afar but not by his immediate presence. **and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite**, those who inhabit the Promised Land (also see Gen 15:19-21; Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23, 28; 34:11; et. al...). They will enjoy military victory by this angel but only if they are obedient to the Mosaic Law. Military victory was conditioned on obedience.

PRINCIPLE: If a nation is obedient to God He will give them military victory.

3“Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey. The land has several characteristics. *First*, it is a small land in comparison to the rest of the land God created but spacious enough for all Israel (Exod 3:8). *Second*, its geographic location is important. It is a land bridge between three major continents (Asia, Africa and Europe). *Third*, it is a good land. It has, intrinsically, the ability to produce an abundance of fruit so great that the nation could dwell within the land with no need to import from other nations. In return they would become the world’s leading exporter (Deut 8:7-10). *Fourth*, good life is in the land (Exod 3:8, 17). The land comes before long to symbolize life with God in ideal conditions, like Adam and Eve enjoyed with God in the Garden of Eden before their tragic Fall. We would characterize this life as the abundant life. It is often called the land of **milk and honey**. “The term *milk* speaks of the herds and flocks of the Hebrew peoples. The modern dairy cow is not indicated; rather, the milk would come from goats. This means that the land will provide the forage necessary for the care and raising of goats and attendant sheep and cattle. There would be milk—dairy goat milk. The modern, Western reader may not appreciate this fact, having perhaps a negative attitude toward goat milk. But in many places even in our modern world, the care and breeding of goats is highly valued, for it produces delicious milk that has many uses, both fresh for drinking and processed for cheese and yogurt; not to mention the meat that the herds provide.” “The term *honey* refers to the bee, of course, and that which the bee represents, agriculture.” The abundance of agricultural products: sweet fruits and rich vegetables, gifts from the land that God graciously gives. **for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way.**” He had said, “Let them construct a sanctuary that I may dwell among them” (Exod 25:8). They had already received

contributions from the people to build it. Moses had spent 40 days and nights on Mt Sinai seeing the heavenly temple and receiving instructions to construct it but now that is all annulled. He will not **go up in their midst**. He will not dwell among them. Why? **because they are an obstinate people**, better stiff-necked, **and God might destroy them on the way**. In a way this is gracious. God will send an angel that will surely give them protection and yet He will stay far away from them also to protect them lest He break forth upon them and destroy them. **4When the people heard this sad word, they went into mourning, and none of them put on his ornaments**. The **ornaments** were the gold jewelry they did not give to make the golden calf. They now came to represent that ungodly idolatrous act. **5For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel, 'You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you.** The seriousness of sin and the utter holiness of God. If He came into their midst for one moment (an instant) He would destroy them. God is totally separate from sin. Even though God greatly desired to dwell with man his sin issues forth the wrath of God. Sin must be judged. Thank God for Jesus Christ who paid the substitutionary penalty for the sin of all men. Can you imagine where the world would be if God did not reconcile the world to Himself through Christ (2 Cor 5:17-21)? **Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you."** Take off your jewelry because it is a reminder of the golden calf. Just strip it off. **6So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward**. They did not put it back on so as to be a reproach to God.

b. The Tent of Meeting (33:7-11)

Exodus 33:7-11 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. **8And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent.** **9Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses.** **10When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent.** **11Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks**

to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

The **tent** here is not the tabernacle. The tabernacle has not been built yet so Moses **pitched** a tent **outside the camp**. It was **outside the camp** to symbolize God's withdrawal from the midst of the people. It was in fact, a **good distance from the camp**. Moses called this **tent** the **tent of meeting** since it was where he met with YHWH. If anyone **sought the Lord** they **would go out to the tent of meeting...outside the camp**. Some people sought the Lord and others did not. All seem to have stood at the entrance of their own tents when Moses went out but some would make the trek out to the **tent of meeting** when Moses went out. The Lord would speak to Moses and Moses would come outside and teach the people. One such man who went to these Bible studies was **Joshua**. The Torah intends to keep mentioning Joshua because of his future role as the leader of Israel. He is first mentioned as commanding Israel's army in Exod 17:8-14 and leading them to victory over the Amalekites at the Battle of Rephidim. After that military victory God commanded Moses to write a book and recite it to Joshua that God would "utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." This was a fore view of Joshua's military Conquest in the Book of Joshua. Next he is called the "servant of Moses" in Exod 24:13. He who leads must first learn to follow. Joshua was Moses' right hand man. He is mentioned next as waiting on the side of Mt Sinai forty days and nights for his leader to return and issue the next command. He did not get tangled up in the golden calf incident (2 Tim 2:3-4). So far we can gather that he is a man of military intelligence, obedience, service, patience and now we see he is spiritual. When Moses would depart from the tent of meeting, from speaking face to face with God, Joshua **would not depart from the tent**. Joshua was a spiritual man, a powerful man of God deeply interested in Bible doctrine. He would be like that man who gets hungry for the word of God. Day and night their energies are spent on devouring the word of God. They exhaust themselves to studying doctrine after doctrine, book after book, over and over and over so as to burn it into their hearts. Their thirst is never quenched. They take notes. They ask questions. They diligently search out those who have answers. They drive people crazy talking about God. Joshua yearned to be closer to God. He always wanted to know more. He was in awe of who God was. Everything else in life could wait. God, the author of life was the most important and

interesting thing in his life. He would not even depart from the tent when Moses departed. It's as if he longed to enter that tent and have that face to face communion. And notice how the text says in verse 11, he was **a young man**. We are in desperate need of young men interested in God who will patiently and tirelessly study the word of God. Louis Sperry Chafer said, "...the study of Bible doctrine is a life undertaking and ever makes its claims upon time and strength. Happy indeed is the student who secures a full rounded introduction to the vast science of Systematic Theology, but thrice blessed is he who with unrelenting purpose pursues his study to the end of his days on earth...Many generations have passed since the pulpit has held lower ideals of doctrinal preaching that it holds today. Nevertheless, the human heart is unchanged and God's remedy for sin-sick and unspiritual souls is the same, and the servant of God who would minister to those needs with true efficiency will discover the importance of unceasing study that he may himself prove to be unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth (2 Tim 2:15)."ⁱⁱ These words made such an impression on my heart that though I have not read them for many years I instantly recalled them and found them in less than a single minute search when I read about this Joshua. We need young Joshua's with unrelenting purpose to study the queen of the sciences and fulfill the highest calling of man, the accurate teaching of the word of God! It is the only cure for the sin-sick soul! Are you that next young man? Are you willing to put forth the tireless pursuit of truth? Are you hungry for Bible doctrine? Are you willing to finish the course? Are you a Joshua or an Aaron? Are you a leader or a follower? The Torah means to show that a great leader must go through certain stages of development. It does not come overnight. Joshua humbled himself under the hand of God and God exalted him to replace Moses as Israel's leader. The great leaders of the Bible never had to make their way. God always paved the way for them (e.g. David).

A few words about the pillar of cloud in verses 9-10. Of course it is without the Shechinah Glory, the visible manifestation of God's presence, but perhaps more. This pillar would stand at the entrance of the tent when Moses entered, barring the way for any other to enter. Verse 11, the **Lord** would **speak with Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend**. Now, this is something unique. This is intimate communion not experienced by anyone else. Everyone saw the **pillar of cloud** but not everyone saw what Moses saw. Moses did not just see a vision or have dreams. Ronald Allen

suggested that the pillar of cloud shrouded Jesus Christ from the others but Moses saw Him and spoke **face to face** with him. Turn over to Numbers 12:6-8.

Numbers 12:6-8 He said, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. “Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses?”

The explanation for “the form of the Lord” may be that Moses saw the pre-incarnate Christ. Others say this is just a way of saying Moses saw God’s back. It seems possible that Moses saw the pre-incarnate Christ. What is certain is that there is no other prophet in the OT like Moses. In Deut 18:18 God said that one day He would raise up a prophet like unto Moses. That prophet was the Lord Jesus Christ.

c. Departing with His Angel (33:12-17)

Exodus 33:12-17 Then Moses said to the LORD, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’ But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, ‘I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.’ ¹³“Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.” ¹⁴And He said, “My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest.” ¹⁵Then he said to Him, “If Your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here. ¹⁶“For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?” ¹⁷The LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.”

Apparently these words were spoken between Moses and the Lord in the Tent of Meeting, thus the prior sections placement. Moses is not satisfied with going up without God's presence. Moses knows it is an angel (Exod 33:2) but he does not **know** the angel. **Moreover**, Moses argues, **You have said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.'** yet these words are not found anywhere earlier in Exodus. Yet, they must have been said on a prior occasion. The word of God does not record all that God has said in history just as it does not record all that Christ did (John 21:25). There is captured and un-captured revelation. God providentially ensured that all He wanted to capture was captured, recorded faithfully and sufficiently preserved for our edification. On the basis of Moses favor with God he prays, **If I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways, that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight.** Essentially Moses wants God to go with them. If He does then Moses will be able to learn more about the ways of God and thus be able to **find favor** with God (even though they are ultimately beyond our finding out...cf Isa 55:8-9).

PRINCIPLE: To please God you must know God. Knowledge precedes pleasing God. You can't bypass knowledge of God and please God. Moses wants know more about God's ways so he can please God and find favor with Him. This is why we don't stress emotional experiences here. We stress Bible doctrine. The doctrinal construct here is "Know God, Please God". If you don't know Him and you don't know His ways then how can you know what you are doing pleases Him? There have been many Christians do sincere things to please God but it was scandalous because they did not know God or His ways. You can't live a God-pleasing life if you don't know what pleases Him. You can't assume you just know or that God will accept your sincerity. He will not! Knowledge of God is the missing link today and nobody wants to look intently into the word of God to know Him and learn His ways. But this is the only way you're going to please Him! I get tired of hearing people say "We love you Jesus" or when talking about someone else, "Oh, but they love Jesus". Don't tell me you love Jesus. I'm not judge or jury. Show Him, obey Him. Actions speak louder than words! I have seen so much bogus worship pass off for true spirituality its sick. The worship leader turns down the lights creating a sensuous mood, gets everyone swaying back and forth, raising their hands and then he says between songs, "Oh we love you Jesus." Jesus doesn't need you to tell Him you love Him. It won't hurt to say it but saying it

isn't loving Him. Loving him is obeying Him. That's what people don't want to hear. I've seen these people. After the "worship service" they go out, barely pass their classes on the university campus (they don't do their work heartily unto the Lord), find another Christian hippie, marry her, five years later their divorced because they had no doctrine and this person just didn't make them feel good. Well, that wasn't Moses. He wanted God to go with them so he could learn God's ways and please God.

He prays also, **Consider too, that this nation is Your people**, You're covenanted people. The Lord answers in the affirmative, **My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.** Verse 15, then Moses **said to Him, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.**

PRINCIPLE: This should be the attitude of every believer in every decision. Lord, if you don't go with Me on this then I don't want to do it. Unfortunately, far too often we do not have this mentality. We want to go up regardless of what God wants for our lives. That's a formula for chaos. When the Lord went with Israel they enjoyed victory, when the Lord did not go up with them they suffered defeat.

Deuteronomy 1:6-8 "The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, 'You have stayed long enough at this mountain. ⁷Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. ⁸See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them.'

¹⁹"Then we set out from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, just as the LORD our God had commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea. ²⁰"I said to you, 'You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the LORD our God is about to give us. ²¹'See, the LORD your God has placed the land before you; go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. Do not fear or be dismayed.' ²²"Then all of you approached me and said, 'Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land for us, and bring back

to us word of the way by which we should go up and the cities which we shall enter.’²³“The thing pleased me and I took twelve of your men, one man for each tribe.

²⁶“Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; ²⁷and you grumbled in your tents and said, ‘Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us.

³⁴“Then the LORD heard the sound of your words, and He was angry and took an oath, saying, ³⁵‘Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give your fathers, ³⁶except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and to his sons I will give the land on which he has set foot, because he has followed the LORD fully.’ ³⁷“The LORD was angry with me also on your account, saying, ‘Not even you shall enter there. ³⁸Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter there; encourage him, for he will cause Israel to inherit it. ³⁹Moreover, your little ones who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there, and I will give it to them and they shall possess it. ⁴⁰But as for you, turn around and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea.’ ⁴¹“Then you said to me, ‘We have sinned against the LORD; we will indeed go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us.’ And every man of you girded on his weapons of war, and regarded it as easy to go up into the hill country. ⁴²“And the LORD said to me, ‘Say to them, “Do not go up nor fight, for I am not among you; otherwise you will be defeated before your enemies.” ’ ⁴³“So I spoke to you, but you would not listen. Instead you rebelled against the command of the LORD, and acted presumptuously and went up into the hill country. ⁴⁴“The Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against you and chased you as bees do, and crushed you from Seir to Hormah. ⁴⁵“Then you returned and wept before the LORD; but the LORD did not listen to your voice nor give ear to you.

You should never, never go up without the Lord. You do what the Lord says to do. You obey His commandments under the filling of the Spirit and you will enjoy victory. But if you go up without Him you will suffer defeat.

ⁱ Cassuto, U., *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 426.

ⁱⁱ Chafer, L.S., *Systematic Theology*, Vol 1, 10-11.



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