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**C0722 – June 20, 2007 – Ex 34:1-7 – The Cleft In The Rock
Incident**

I want to pick up with a brief review of Exodus 33:18-23 where Moses' prayed to God, "Show me Your glory!" We need to understand some more things about the Doctrine of God and answer a question someone asked about seeing God then we'll move into chapter 34 where God's goodness actually passes before Moses.

Exodus 33:18-23 Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!" [Moses is asking to see the essence of God. He wants to see God in all of His fullness] ¹⁹And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you [remember, God's goodness is equivalent to His face in v 20 and His glory in v 22], and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you [God is going to reveal Himself in two ways, seeing and hearing. Moses is going to see something, namely the afterglow or after-effect of God passing by and he's going to hear the name of the Lord, namely YHWH]; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion [this is the part we need to finish tonight before we move on]." ²⁰But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" ²¹Then the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; ²²and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by [Moses didn't see God's glory, face, or goodness because God had him covered up in a cave'. ²³"Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen. [the back in contrast to the face signifies the after-effect or afterglow of God's passing by but we know Moses did not see God's glory, face, or goodness because no one can see God and live]"

Last time I had someone come up and ask me a question with respect to this. In Exod 33:20 it says no one can see God's face and live but in Gen 32:30 it says Jacob saw God face to face and did not die. So, how are these two reconciled? Anyone have an answer?

We can even point out that Moses spoke face to face with God in this same chapter, Exodus 33:11. When we looked at the divine commentary of this in Numb 12:8 we concluded that Moses actually saw a form and we identified this as the pre-incarnate Christ. So, this one chapter says Moses spoke with God face to face and then it says no one can see God's face and live. What's the solution? The Bible's a perfect harmony and yet unbelievers bring up supposed contradictions. So, what are you going to say? What kind of answer are you going to give?

The short answer is seeing God's face means comprehending His essence. No one can comprehend the totality of God's essence. This is what John meant when he said, "No one has seen God at any time." and this is what it means here when it says no one can see God and live. On the other hand, speaking to God face to face refers to seeing the pre-incarnate Christ or Christ Himself. He has and can be seen in this way.

The Believer's Bible Commentary says, "No one can see God's face and live (v. 20). This means that no one can look upon the unveiled glory of God; He dwells "in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). In that sense, no one has seen God at any time (1 Jn. 4:12). How then do we explain passages in the Bible where people saw God and did not die? For example, Hagar (Gen. 16:13); Jacob (Gen. 32:30); Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel (Ex. 24:9-11-11); Gideon (Judg. 6:22,23); Manoah and his wife (Judg. 13:22); Isaiah (Isa. 6:1); Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26, cf. 10:20); John (Rev. 1:17).

The answer is that these people saw God as represented by the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes He appeared as the Angel of the LORD (see Judges 6 for a discussion of this doctrine), sometimes as a Man, and once manifested Himself as a Voice (Ex. 24:9-11; cf. Deut. 4:12). The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has fully declared God (John 1:18). Christ is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His Person (Heb. 1:3).

That is why He could say, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).”ⁱ

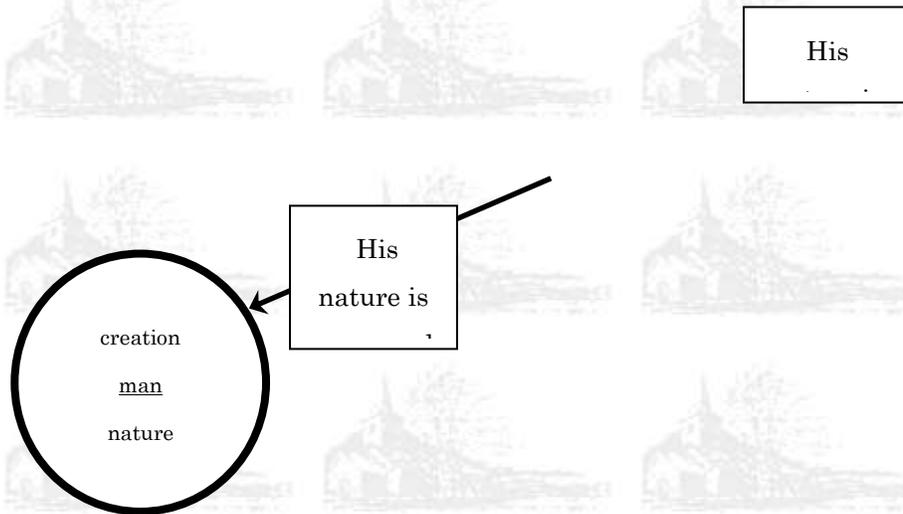
Now, remember, the primary thing in this section is the proclamation of the name of the Lord. That name is YHWH which is His personal name first revealed in Genesis 2:4 along with the other primary name of God, *elohim* which refers primarily to His sovereignty as Creator. So, when we’re talking about the God of the Bible we are talking about the Personal Sovereign Creator. Whatever else we say about God the core concept is the fact that He is the Personal Sovereign Creator. If we deny those things then we’re talking about a different god, a god formed in the image and likeness of man, an idol. What is said here of YHWH could never be said of Allah. He is not loving. So, God is going to proclaim His personal name YHWH before Moses and enlarge upon its meaning and this is going to take place in Exod 34:6-7. We’ll look at that in a moment.

Right now I want to turn back to verse 19 where God gives His answer to Moses’ prayer “Show me your glory”. The Lord says, **I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.**” In other words, do not think that I will show you My goodness and proclaim My name to you for any other reason than the fact that it pleases Me and is in accordance with My will.

This is telling us something very important about understanding who God is and how God acts. God’s nature is not identical to God’s expression of His nature. One is static and the other is dynamic. A lot of people confuse categories here because they think, for example, if God is sovereign then God is necessarily expressing His sovereignty upon the created order to the same degree at all places and all times and that’s simply not true. Here He’s telling Moses, I will choose when and to whom I express grace and compassion. So, if we want to understand how God operates then we have to distinguish between the nature of God and the expression of His nature upon the created order.

Sovereign

Righteous



For example, while God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) and this is a total expression of His being (i.e. He is not part love, part righteous, part just, part sovereign) it does not follow that His love is expressed upon the created order equally or to it's highest degree at all times and all places within the created order. In other words, there's a difference between the objective attributes of God and the subjective expression of His attributes. By way of example we say that the cross of Christ is God's supreme expression of love to the human race. This implies lesser expressions. In short, God's nature is perfectly stable but His nature is expressed variably upon the created order (see diagram above).

The expression of His nature is conditioned solely on His will, "**I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.**" This is quoted by Paul in Romans 9:15 to prove the same point with respect to election. God has the right to express His nature to the degree He wants and to whom He wants and when He wants yet always in harmony with His perfectly stable nature. You also have to keep in mind that there is no limitation on the expression of His attributes except that He Himself determines. The expression of His attributes is solely up to Him but we never have to wonder if God has enough power or love or compassion to meet our needs. He always does by virtue of His infinite nature.

1. The Sight and Sound of YHWH (34:1-7)

Exodus 34:1-7 Now the LORD said to Moses, “Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered. ²“So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain. ³“No man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of that mountain.” ⁴So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand. ⁵The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. ⁶Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

Verse 1, **Now the LORD said to Moses**, probably at the tent of meeting in the form of the pre-incarnate Christ (Numb 12:8; Exod 33:7-11). So, there is certainly a distinction between talking with God face to face and seeing and hearing what Moses is about to see and hear. He’s about to enjoy a heightened vision and sound of YHWH which will give him more comprehension of God but not exhaustive comprehension of God. Continuing verse 1, **“Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones.** Now, the former tablets were cut out by God but these tablets were cut out by Moses. Jewish tradition claims that God cut the original stone tablets from Mt Moriah on the Temple Mount, precisely where Abraham offered Isaac and where the Ark of the Covenant later rested in Solomon’s Temple within the Holy of holies. Today the Dome of the Rock is covering that rock. So, if you enter the Dome of the Rock you will see this large rock fenced off and that’s where Jewish Tradition says the original stone tablets were cut (making it the most holy site in Judaism). It’s also the place where Islamic Tradition says Mohammed ascended to heaven and received the Quran (making it the third most holy site in Islam). So, this is the most controversial site between

Judaism and Islam and that's why the Palestinians and the Jews can never agree on Jerusalem or the Temple Mount. The Palestinians always argue land for peace. We'll stop suicide bombings if you'll give us land but in the end if they don't get the entire Temple Mount there won't be peace. Ultimately they want the Temple Mount. And there's no way the Jews are going to give up the Temple Mount. So, the original stone tablets, at least by Jewish Tradition, were cut from the Temple Mount rock. But the second set of stone tablets was cut out by Moses so they did not come from the Temple Mount. They probably came from Mt Sinai. Continuing in verse 1, **and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered.** So, God wrote on original tablets and he's going to write on the new tablets. But the original Ten Commandments were **shattered** by Moses so they were never placed in the Ark of the Covenant. It wasn't even built yet. Remember, the shattering of the original Ten Commandments happened in chapter 33 when Moses came down from Mt Sinai, picked up Joshua off the side of the mountain and then they saw the people worshipping the Golden Calf and like many OT prophets he acted out what the people had done. They had broken the covenant. The first actors were not from Hollywood they were from Israel. The forerunners of modern actors were the prophets. And so, Moses stands before the people and shatters the stone tablets and this was a picture of the fact that they had broken the covenant and needed a new heart. The old sinful heart, the carnal nature, the sin nature whatever you want to call it, is not able to fulfill the commandments of God. So, of course, since Israel has to obey in order to receive blessing, He promised to give them a new heart in the new covenant and this is all future and this is all going to happen in the near future with the prophetic clock ticking down (Jer 31:31-34). **2"So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain.** He's going to go up Mt Sinai again. He already went up one time for 40 days and 40 nights and now he's going up again for another 40 days and 40 nights. So, Moses didn't just fast once he fasted twice, each time for 40 days and 40 nights and these two fasts couldn't have been far apart. He may well have not eaten for more than 80 days and 80 nights. **3"No man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of that mountain."** This time not even Joshua is **to come up** half-way. The whole mountain is off limits to everyone except Moses. So, once again God's holiness is set in contrast to Israel's sinfulness

and neither man nor nature can be on or in front of Mt Sinai. Man because of sin and nature because under the curse of sin. Every time we meet a picture like this it reminds us of how holy God is. We like to imagine that we are not so different from God but that's just not reality. These OT pictures vividly illustrate the contrast between the Holy Creator and the sinful creation. Picture you living in camp with all the other people and you've got your animals and here you are for 40 days and 40 nights and you've got to watch your kids and your cattle and make sure they don't get on or near that mountain or else it's "hasta la vista baby" and this is the kind of mental image you want to have when you think about the holiness of God and our sinfulness. The two just can't get together. People that think we can do enough good works to get to God just don't have a concept of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. Thank God for Jesus Christ who resolved the sin dilemma and paid the penalty in full. That's what we should be thankful for. Christ did it all and getting right with God is a free gift received through faith alone.

Now, verse 4, Moses response. **4So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones,** these would have been two small tablets small enough to fit in one hand; small things, something like the size of an iPod or a small book. We normally picture them as square at the base and rounded at the top. I don't know who came up with this imagery but it stuck. We don't really know the shape of the tablets to my knowledge. **and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him,** Moses was an obedient servant. He does exactly what the Lord commands **and he took two stone tablets in his hand.** They're blank at this point and even though he knows what is supposed to be on them he waits for the Lord to write it. **5The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him,** when the cloud appeared some kind of theophany was imminent. **as he called upon the name of the LORD.** I really don't like the end of verse 6 as translated in the NASB95. It makes it sound like Moses was calling out the name Lord but the NIV captures the Hebrew much better, "Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD." It's simply a summary of what follows in verse 6. **Then the LORD passed by in front of him.** He did not stand in front of Moses He merely **passed by.** No mention is made here of Moses being put in the cleft of the rock but certainly he was for no man can see God's face and live (33:20). What passed by was the full essence of God but

Moses could not see that. He could only see God's back, a reflection or after-effect of God's essence. Man simply cannot comprehend God in His total essence. God is Incomprehensible and man is limited. The main thing is not what Moses saw but what Moses heard. As the **Lord passed by in front of him** He **proclaimed** his name YHWH. He's filling up this name with meaning. He revealed some of its meaning in Exod 3:14-15 but now He's revealing much more. **"The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."** This is one of the most important verses on the Doctrine of God. The NNIBC says, "this verse is the foundation for understanding the character of the Lord."ⁱⁱ Now, I don't exactly agree, I think the event of Creation is the foundation for understanding God's character but nevertheless I do agree that these are very important verses. They tell us what the Lord God does, how He operates, how He expresses His nature with respect to creation, especially with respect to man. The verse is not so much concerned with the nature of God as with the expression of His nature. But, of course, when we see how God expresses Himself, how God acts with respect to creation it tells us something of His essence because His actions flow from His being or nature. So, here we are learning who YHWH is by what YHWH does and what He will do. This is not an arbitrary list. It's a list of things that will directly apply to the Israelites future. When they encounter future problems who are they going to rely on? Who are they going to turn to? When we walk through this world we too encounter circumstances and the question is always, "Can I trust God in this circumstance?" This is always the problem "Can I trust God?" and there's a technique that Bible teachers have recognized in Scripture that believers have to learn to use effectively if they're every going to trust God. It's called the faith-rest drill. Some of you are familiar with the faith-rest drill and some of you aren't because I haven't taught it here but Thieme taught it and I'm sure Fred taught it and other Bible teachers have taught it too.

The faith-rest drill is a problem-solving device which enables one to have peace in the midst of turmoil. The concept of faith-rest is all over Scripture and it basically answers the question, "When I get in a jam how am I going to

have faith in God so I can enjoy rest, peace in the midst of the jam?” “Is God really able to help me through the jam?” Now, the faith-rest drill has three basic parts or steps that are designed to get us through the jam.

The first step is you have to grab some fragment of Scripture, a promise, a story, a doctrine, a verse, something from the word of God. This has to be something that’s already been lodged away in your soul because when you get in a jam there’s no time to study the Scriptures. You’ve got to train in advance. So, whatever it is, doctrine, story, promise of God you grab that and start praying about it because you’ve got to connect your circumstances somehow with Scripture.

So, that fragment of Scripture becomes the basis for step 2; faith. You’ve got to believe the Scripture. You’ve got to believe what God has said and God has given us doctrine concerning every potential problem. There’s nothing out there that you will face that God hasn’t provided a problem-solving device for. But the question is “Are we going to believe Him?” We can’t just make ourselves believe. Something has to happen so we can believe. Faith is not some kind of blind leap out there into the nothingness. The Bible never says that about faith. The Bible always presents faith as knowledge, certainty that results from being persuaded. So, the human heart needs a rationale to believe and this is where Christians struggle. We struggle here because we’re being bombarded by the world system at work, on the radio, on TV, everywhere. The world system is always attempting to undermine the rationale of the word of God and it’s so pervasive we tend to subconsciously accept the world’s way of thinking and that makes it very difficult for us to trust that fragment of Scripture. So, step 2 is where the rubber meets the road and here we have to answer a really big question, “How do I have faith in God’s word?” “How does the human mentality begin to believe?” “How do we stop not believing and start believing God’s word?” “How is faith generated in the human soul?” And we have to answer this question because the Christian walk is a walk of faith. If we don’t know how it works what are we doing? When we turn to the Scriptures all the great believers (Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Rahab) based their faith on a rationale. They were persuaded. And then they were able to mix faith with that fragment of Scripture and that results in peace. So, we’ve got to be persuaded that God’s word is objectively true if we’re going to believe it. And to get to that point there has to be a rationale, reasons for believing God’s word. So, I’m about to

start a class on Wednesday nights that's designed to help us be persuaded so we can respond with faith and enjoy rest and inner joy.

Now, the third step is the result, rest, inner peace. So, you've got some Scripture, you mix that with faith and the result is rest, inner peace and joy in the midst of turmoil. That's the faith-rest drill and it's a problem-solving device. Ultimately we want to have peace and joy in trials and this fits right in with James. What's the mental attitude James says we ought to have in times of trial? Joy, "consider it all joy" (Js 1:2). This doesn't happen automatically. What happens automatically is anger, yelling, frustration (tell story of Matt and Wendy. Mom, Dad and three children in Big Rig accident). So, the second step in the faith-rest drill is where believers have historically fallen into trouble and this is where we need to come in and bolster the faith-rest drill and that's where we develop the rationale, there are reasons to believe.

So, right here God is giving self-revelation of His nature that's directly applicable to the problems Israel will face in the future. So, what we have is a lot of pieces of doctrine and when you fall into a jam you reach for those pieces of doctrine. What I want to do is interlock those pieces and give you a rationale for believing them. I want you to see how the grass is not greener on the other side and how the Bible is not only superior but the only way to go and get inner peace. It's a total system that answers the deepest longings of the human heart.

ⁱ William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995), Ex 33:18.

ⁱⁱ Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen and H. Wayne House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), Ex 34:6.

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