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## Show Me Your Glory: A Narrative Theology of Exodus 33:12–34:10 from a Biblical-Historical Perspective

John C. Peckham

**T**he encounter between God and Moses recorded in Exodus 33:12–34:10 is perhaps the greatest divine self-revelation in the OT. The glory of the divine character was manifested in response to the dire situation created by Israel's idolatrous rebellion, an apostasy which called into question the continuance of the covenant relationship itself and jeopardized God's presence among the people. In examining this passage at least two parallel issues are addressed. First, the content of God's self-revelation, its significance and meaning is of central concern. Second, the unity of the passage is brought to light by significant pointers within the flow of the narrative, *contra* the traditional view of source criticism which has dealt with this passage as a hodge-podge collection of multiple sources, dismissing the continuity and importance of the variegated narrative. This paper applies a methodology which seeks the significance of narrative elements by taking into account both human *and* divine authorship. In this way, one may look for continuity from a micro and macro perspective in the immediate pericope and the wider metanarrative of the Exodus. In doing so, it will be seen that Exod 33:12–34:10 weaves a beautiful tapestry of unified, narrative, artistry which depicts the incomparable love of God.

### Context of the Narrative

Not long since, Israel's great rebellion of worship of the golden calf seems to have irreparably broken the God-Israel relationship (Exod 32). After a plague has fallen, God commands Moses to lead the people forth (Exod 33:1), promising an "angel" to go before the people (33:2) but denying the presence of God in their "midst" (33:3) lest he destroy them (33:5). The projected absence of God's presence sends the people into deep mourning (33:4, 6) and frames the problem central to Moses' pleas in Exod 33:12ff. The verses of Exod 33:7–11 further highlight this issue by drawing explicit attention to Moses' meeting with God *outside* the camp at a "tent of meeting," but not the yet-to-be-built sanctuary "tent of meeting." Within this context the severe tension regarding the presence of God and the manner of that presence amongst the people permeates the foregoing narrative.

### Exodus 33:12–17: Dialogue Regarding Divine Presence

Moses makes three requests of God in Exod 33:12–14, intermixed with two quotations of God's promises. First, Moses wants to know (וְיָרָא) who will be sent with (אֲנִי) him, seeking clarification of the ambiguity of God's statements in Exod 33:1–3. It has been suggested that Moses may be asking which of the people will go with him, in light of the great apostasy at Sinai, or that he may be addressing the distinction between promised angelic presence and his desire for the very presence of God to accompany him.<sup>1</sup> However, it seems likely that Moses is concerned about the ambiguity with regard to the proximity, rather than the agency, of the divine presence, since the "angel" is almost surely theophanic.<sup>2</sup> If this is the case, Moses is referring to the

<sup>1</sup> Moses may want to know which angel or which of the people will be going with him. Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 580. Or, he may be questioning the sending of an angel instead of God's very presence. See J. Gerald Janzen, *Exodus*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 245; Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, *Rashbam's Commentary on Exodus: An Annotated Translation*, trans., Martin I. Lockshin, BJS (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 407; J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 307; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 213.

<sup>2</sup> This "angel," already prominent in God's past leading and guidance of the people (Exod 3:1; 14:19–20; 23:20, 23) is recurrently depicted in terms of divinity. God states that His "name is in" the angel (Exod 23:21). Further, throughout the OT, the "angel of the LORD" often seems to refer to God Himself (cf. Gen 16:7–13; 22:11; 32:28; Hos 12:3–5; Exod 3:2–4; Judg 13:13–22; Isa 63:9; Zech 3:1–5). See also Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 308.

difference between the divine presence “going before” Israel or going in their “midst” (33:2–3).<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, Moses’ second request seeks confirmation of God’s favor through reciprocal knowledge of God. After referencing God’s proclamation, “I have known you by name,” Moses requests that he may, in turn, know (יָדַע) God, pointing to the mutuality of the covenant relationship, albeit presently imperiled (Exod 33:12–13).<sup>4</sup> Concurrently, Moses asks for special assurance of divine favor in action, using an interesting play on words, “if I have found favor ... so that I may find favor” (33:13).<sup>5</sup> The parallel protasis and apodosis draw attention to the specificity of Moses’ request, and perhaps even the audacity. He seems unwilling to settle for a spoken word of favor, he desires more (cf. Gen 32). Moses’ concern is not one of private interest, but regards the covenant promise as a whole. This is apparent in his third request, “Consider (חַשְׁבָה) too, that this nation is your people,” which once again draws attention to the jeopardized covenant relationship (Exod 33:13).

God’s response is striking in its concision. He makes two promises: his “presence” (פָּנָיִם) will go and he will give “rest” (נוֹחַ) (Exod 33:14). However, any indication regarding the proximity of the divine presence is conspicuously absent; neither “with you” nor “in your midst” appear in the Hebrew. As such, God’s response does not entirely satisfy Moses’ requests. God affirms that his “presence” (פָּנָיִם) will go but has not stated in what manner he will go with Moses, nor has he specified where or with whom his

<sup>3</sup> The language of הָיָה in Moses’ question of who will go with him also appears frequently in God’s promises to the patriarchs (See Gen 21:20; 26:3; 31:3; 39:2, 23). This “expresses communal action or action in company” meaning “to be present with someone.” Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, “עַם,” *HALOT* (Leiden: Brill, 1994). Cf. Horst Dietrich Preuss, “Ich Will Mit Dir Sein,” *ZAW* 8.2 (1968). Gerard notes that “*im* in particular stresses a close relationship.” Van Groningen Gerard, “עַמִּים,” *TWOT* 676. Moreover, there is also a hint of the tension with regard to the “people” since “*im*, the preposition, as ‘*am* the noun, expresses the concept of inclusiveness, togetherness, company.” Gerard, 676.

<sup>4</sup> Specifically, Moses states: “let me know Your ways that I may know You.” This language of reciprocal, covenant knowledge is often used in suzerain-vassal treaties of the ANE. See Huffmon regarding the ANE prominence of covenants as mutuality of knowing. Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Treaty Background of Hebrew Yada’,” *BASOR* 181 (1966). Muilenburg further suggests that “the knowing relationship both in our text and in other biblical passages carries with it the same connotation” of a relationship of love. James Muilenburg, “The Intercession of the Covenant Mediator (Exodus 33:1a, 12–17),” in *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas on His Retirement from the Regius Professorship of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge*, ed. David Winton Thomas, Peter R. Ackroyd, and Barnabas Lindars (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 181. Cf. Amos 3:2; Hos 2:20 (Heb 22); 6:3, 6; 8:2; 13:4, cf. 4:1, 6; Jer 1:5; 15:15.

<sup>5</sup> Notice also the use of the Hebraism “favor in your sight.” This is not general favor, but the favor that proceeds in relationship with God Himself.

presence is going.<sup>6</sup> God could mean that his presence will go with Moses but not with the people, or that his presence may go “before” the people but no longer reside “with” them or in their “midst.”

Moses’ response, “If Your presence does not go, do not lead us up from here” (Exod 33:15), has puzzled many commentators. At first reading it may seem that Moses is talking past God, refusing to hear him, flippantly dismissing his promises. However, in light of the ambiguity of God’s statements and Moses’ own remembrance of the great sin at Sinai, the further plea of Moses need not amount to a lack of confidence in God’s purpose but an understandable uncertainty regarding the future, grounded in his warranted lack of confidence in the people’s ability to dwell with God without special provision for their sinfulness.<sup>7</sup> Moses is likely unsatisfied both by the absence of any specification regarding the proximity of the divine presence and the absence of explicit reference to the people.<sup>8</sup>

The persistence of Moses’ request is in proportion to the magnitude of what is at stake. The covenant relationship itself is in jeopardy and, accordingly, Moses seems to be negotiating its renewal.<sup>9</sup> The transgression of the people has seemingly called into question whether the sanctuary, necessary for God’s presence among the people, will even be built. This issue was implied previously in that after the apostasy Moses met with God “outside the camp” in a “tent of meeting” (מִוֶּעֶבֶד מִלִּפְנֵי), language used later of the sanctuary, but here sadly denoting its absence (Exod 33:7). If there is no

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<sup>6</sup> Some have seen a contradiction here between this promise and the refusal to go with the people in Exod 33:3. However, it is important to note that in 33:3 God specifically says he will not go in their “midst” lest he consume them. The issue is not only whether God will go at all, but also the proximity of his presence.

<sup>7</sup> While some have attributed this to multiple sources being sloppily combined, the continuity of the narrative argues against this. Meyers suggests Moses is speaking superfluously, having “leftover appeals.” Lester Meyer, *The Message of Exodus: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1983), 160. However, Childs appears closest to the mark when he maintains that the “issue is whether God will again accompany his people in such a way as to make them again distinct from all other peoples. This was the essence of the original covenant promise.” Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 595.

<sup>8</sup> Since the use of the first common singular in Hebrew may be used for an individual or for a group (collective singular) it is not clear whether God is speaking about Moses alone or the people. Cf. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 595; Sarna, *Exodus*, 213.

<sup>9</sup> Beyond the narrative context itself, Moses’ repeated use of conditional language often found in treaties, specifically “if” (אִם), in combination with the particles וְ (v. 13) and/or וְ (v. 15), suggests that Moses is renegotiating the terms of covenant, a partial recapitulation of the scene of Exod 3. Cf. James Muilenburg, “Form and Structure of the Covenantal Formulations,” *VT* 9.4 (1959); Muilenburg, “The Intercession of the Covenant Mediator (Exodus 33:1a, 12–17),” 171–172.

sanctuary, and thus no place of atonement for sin, by default, God will not go “in the midst” of the people since to do so would mean their death. With this in mind, the magnitude of Moses’ requests is staggering. The very possibility of atonement is contingent upon God’s decision to remain “with” the people, that is, in their “midst.”

God’s second response is longer than the first, but still concise: “The 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’” (Exod 33:17). God’s favor is essential to the continuance of relationship. This is emphatically highlighted in that this is the fifth time in this pericope that reference is made to finding grace in God’s sight. God, on the basis of his grace, has apparently assented to Moses’ appeals. Nevertheless, tension remains in the air, suggesting further drama to follow.<sup>10</sup> Is God intentionally ambiguous and/or partial in His responses, withholding full assent in order to draw out further intercession?

### **Exodus 33:18–23: Request and Promise of Confirmatory Revelation**

The *unified* narrative continues in Exod 33:18 when Moses calls upon God to show himself. Apparently, Moses desires a guarantee that God will go “with” the people and make provision for their sin so that they will not be destroyed by his presence.<sup>11</sup> Though Moses has asked to see God’s “glory,” God promises to make all His “goodness” pass before Moses, literally before

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<sup>10</sup> Verses 12–17 present a beautifully constructed dialogue which emphasizes the magnitude of the breach between God and the people, and Moses’ action as mediator. As we have seen, throughout the dialogue there is a great deal of selective quoting and carefully crafted queries and responses. Because of this, many have suggested that Moses’ questions and God’s responses do not align together, suggesting that the dialogue is a construct from numerous sources that do not actually cohere. Irwin, however, suggests that vv. 12–17 form a unified narrative with vv. 18ff based on the unique nature of this banter which he calls “delayed response.” William H. Irwin, “The Course of the Dialogue between Moses and Yhwh in Exodus 33:12–17,” *CBQ* 59 (1997): 633. He contends that God and Moses are speaking at “cross purposes,” specifically stating, “neither party to the dialogue responds to what the other has just said.” *Ibid.* 629–30. However, it is not clear that it is necessary to suggest that God and Moses are actually speaking at cross purposes. On the contrary, it seems like Moses and God are responding quite carefully to the statements of one another. Irwin is quite astute in noting some “delay” in the responses, but it seems that the delay might be intentionally partial and not actually at cross purposes. God does respond to what Moses has said, and vice versa, albeit selectively. However, it should be noted that God has not yet gone beyond the verbal promise to a tangible assurance of these promises. Thus, there seems to be an ambiguity that serves both to heighten the tension and invoke further intercession.

<sup>11</sup> Apparently, Moses desires a demonstration as “incontrovertible evidence” and “assurance of God’s promise.” Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC 2 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 704, 706. cf. Enns, *Exodus*, 582.

his “face” (פָּנָי), or “presence” (Exod 33:18–19). As such, God refers to language of “goodness” that is at the same time central to covenant relationship and essential to his own character.<sup>12</sup> The very next clause associates this “goodness” with the “name of the LORD,” also to be proclaimed before (לְפָנָי) Moses, which once again points to God’s character and reminds of the first call of Moses and revelation of God’s name, YHWH (Exod 3).<sup>13</sup> As such, this scene may be a recapitulation of the first call of Moses toward reclamation of Israel as God’s people.

Directly after this mention of God’s name, there follows the somewhat cryptic statement often translated “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion” (Exod 33:19), which has sometimes been taken to mean that God chooses to bestow grace and compassion on some but withholds it from others, emphasizing God’s free election.<sup>14</sup> Yet, on the contrary, this phrase seems to echo once again the first call of Moses where the divine name is made known (Exod 3:14). As such, this *idem per idem*, construction, parallel to the original revelation of the divine name, adds to the divine self-description, moving from “I am who I am” to something like “I will proclaim before you the name LORD, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show” (JPS). This explanation of divine character serves to emphasize the divine right to bestow mercy on even those who are egregiously undeserving, but does not refer to arbitrary election of those who will receive mercy in exclusion to others.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the divine freedom and authority to bestow grace

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<sup>12</sup> While פָּנָי may refer to beauty, and thus a visual connotation, it is likely that the term refers to the manifestation of God’s character which is explicated in Exod 34:6–7. The term here describes the omnibenevolence of God by use of the “most all-encompassing positive word in the [Hebrew] language.” Janzen, *Exodus*, 247. Further, פָּנָי is repeatedly found in covenant contexts (cf. Gen 32:10; Deut 23:7; Josh 24:20; 1 Sam 25:30; 2 Sam 2:6; 7:28; Jer 18:10; 33:9, 13). Sarna suggests that in ANE treaties it “bears the technical meaning of covenantal friendship” implying “that the present verse also contains an intimation of the renewal of the covenant between God and Israel.” Sarna, *Exodus*, 214. See also Michael V. Fox, “Tôb as Covenant Terminology,” *BASOR* 209 (1973).

<sup>13</sup> Sarna comments “a name is understood to connote one’s character and nature, the totality of personality” and thus God intends to disclose “to Moses His defining characteristics.” Sarna, *Exodus*, 214.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, see Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 1<sup>st</sup> English ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 436; Leonard J. Coppes, “רַחֵם,” *TWOT* 842; Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 309.

<sup>15</sup> Many scholars concur that this *idem per idem* construction signifies an emphasis on God’s attributes of grace and compassion rather than discrimination between objects of God’s mercy. Cf. Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 1:940; Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 76, 596; David Noel Freedman, “The Name of the God of Moses,” *JBL* 79

and compassion on Israel, even after such odious rebellion, is highlighted, leading into the fuller expression of the divine character in Exod 34:6–7. Presumably, such proclamation, accompanied by theophany, is to be a concrete evidence that Moses and the people have indeed found grace (חן) in God's sight, in accordance with his character of love (Exod 33:16–17; cf. Exod 33:12–13).<sup>16</sup> The parallel pronouncement in Exod 34:6–7 further supports this interpretation.

There is one caveat, however; Moses cannot see God's face (פְּנֵי הַיְהוָה), for no human can see the unmitigated divine glory and live (Exod 33:20). By the use of פְּנֵי הַיְהוָה the narrator highlights what is at stake with regard to the reality and proximity of God's presence (הֵיכָל הַיְהוָה). If even Moses, who did not sin in the apostasy, cannot see God directly how much more dangerous is the "presence" of God in the "midst" of the people who are sure to sin again? Just as God's face cannot be seen unmitigated, neither can God's presence dwell in the midst of Israel unmitigated. Mediation and accommodation is necessary for the relationship of the all holy God to a sinful people. Thus, the uncertainty with regard to the sanctuary, the locus of such mediation and accommodation through atonement, is again brought to mind.

The description of the future divine self-revelation contains significant insights with regard to the fragile God-Israel relationship. God's "glory" will pass by Moses who must be protected by God from its full extent by being placed in the cleft of a rock and shielded by God's "hand" (כַּף) (Exod 33:21–22; cf. 1 Kgs 9:1, 13).<sup>17</sup> God is at once the glory that endangers Moses' life and the mediator who makes communion possible by his own provision, illustrating the paradox of intimate relationship between the altogether holy God and sinful humans made possible only by the free accommodation of

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(1960): 154; David Noel Freedman and J.R. Lundbom, "חֲנֹן," *TDOT* 30; Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1991), 305; Janzen, *Exodus*, 248; William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, AB 2:225; Sarna, *Exodus*, 214; Stuart, *Exodus*, 708. Lundbom asserted that the *idem per idem* construction was used to end a discussion. Jack R. Lundbom, "God's Use of the Idem Per Idem to Terminate Debate," *HTR* 71.3–4 (1978). Oden suggests the construction may express the totality/intensity of the action of the verb. In this context, the adverbial locating phrase (אֵצֶל) stresses the extent of the verbal action. Perhaps most notably, he concludes that the traditional interpretation that the construction refers to freedom of choice is without substance. G.S. Oden, "Idem Per Idem: Its Use and Meaning," *JSOT* 17.53 (1992).

<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, "The characteristics of Yahweh, namely his grace and mercy, are placed here in grammatical apposition to the name of Yahweh." Stuart, *Exodus*, 708. Cf. G. W. Ashby, *Go out and Meet God: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, ITC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 134.

<sup>17</sup> This again calls to mind the sanctuary as the root for cover (סֹכֵת) is used to describe the wings of the cherubim who cover the mercy seat (Exod 25:20; 37:9) and for the veil which was to cover (סֹכֵת) the ark (Exod 40:3, 21).



God.<sup>18</sup> Only after God has passed by will his hand be removed and Moses will see only the “back” (אַחֲרָיִם) or remnants of God’s presence. This emphasis upon the limitations of divine proximity draws attention to the enormity of the wider situation and continues the palpable tension regarding the presence of God.<sup>19</sup>

While the reference to God’s “back” (אַחֲרָיִם) is often taken as anthropomorphic, the word itself is a directional term which appears to contrast the immediate “presence” (פְּנֵיָהּ) of God with the after-effects or residue (אַחֲרָיִם) of that presence.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, for the second time in three verses it is stated that Moses will not see God’s face (פְּנֵיָהּ). Focus on the respective language of “face” and “back,” in a rush to dismiss divine corporeality, may miss the import of this encounter which highlights that Moses is in physical proximity to God’s very presence with all the danger that entails for a human being, an intimacy which demands attention and worship. Though Moses cannot “see” God’s presence directly, that presence can be experienced. God is willing and able to accommodate humanity in such a way that Moses may stand beside the fullness of God’s presence and remain unscathed. It is just such a provision that will be necessary for God to go in the “midst” of Israel, but will God make such provision for Israel?

Before turning to the encounter in Exod 34, it is important to recognize that Exod 33:18–23 evidences striking continuity with Exod 33:12–17, both verbally and thematically. Though there is a significant shift of emphasis from God’s going and being with them, to a concrete, punctiliar, revelation from God to Moses, God’s “presence,” and by extension the possibility of the continuance of mutual, covenant relationship, is the underlying and unifying theme. Little by little, God responds to Moses’ requests in an unfolding self-revelation. God states four affirmations in v. 19 alone which all relate to the

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, עָבַר is used at the beginning and end of Exod 33:22, while God passes by and until God passes by. What is the meaning of this repetition? Perhaps the language of עָבַר reminds the reader of the original Passover, in which the very dangerous visitation of God’s judgment is mediated through sacrifice. The careful reader could thus not forget the significance of God’s presence.

<sup>19</sup> Even the language of removal of God’s hand, סָרַח, elsewhere refers to forgiveness and/or removal of punishment (Exod 8:4, 7, 25, 27; 10:17; 23:25; Num 21:7) with God as subject and apostasy with Israel as subject (Exod 32:8; Deut 9:12; 11:16; cf. 1 Kgs 22:43). Though it does not refer explicitly to forgiveness or apostasy in this context, the language might remind of the acute necessity of forgiveness after the rebellion at Sinai. Cf. R.D. Patterson, “סָרַח,” *TWOT* 621.

<sup>20</sup> Harris notes that “in no other place is the word used for the back of a person’s anatomy ... the word ‘*ahôr*’ means ‘back’ in the sense of direction” (2 Chr 13:14; Ezek 8:16). R. Laird Harris, “אַחֲרָיִם,” *TWOT* 27. For Sarna, “Here the term means the traces of His presence, the afterglow of His supernatural effulgence.” Sarna, *Exodus*, 215.

concerns of the preceding verses: his goodness will pass, he will proclaim his name, he will be gracious, and he will be compassionate. These should not be seen as only responding to the request to see God's "glory" in v. 18 but also to the tension throughout vv 12–17 regarding God's presence and his favor. Notice especially the verbal connection of "favor/grace" (יָחַד) and God's proclamation that he will "be gracious" (יִחַד) which is made emphatic in the *idem per idem* construction (Exod 33:12–17, 19). The question of God's presence is cleverly revisited in wordplay and allusion throughout vv. 18–23 where the encounter with this "presence" (פָּנָיו) is the specific concern. Further, the root פָּנָה is used twice in v. 11, three times in 12–17, and four times in 18–23 (and will appear once more in 34:6). This word for "presence" both semantically and conceptually links all of these sections of the narrative, including the disputed preceding passage of Exod 33:7–11. This encounter is itself the concrete affirmation of this special favor/grace which Moses is calling upon in his requests for God to once again go in the "midst" of the people, that is, to make the accommodations necessary to remain in covenant relationship with imperfect humans.

#### Exodus 34:1–4: The Centrality of the Law

The narrative abruptly shifts to an interlude which describes the reforming of the law, stipulations which themselves suggest the renewing of covenant relationship. God commands Moses to cut tablets like the ones that had been shattered, reminding again of the rebellion (Exod 34:1). The language itself also reminds of the nature of the apostasy, since the term for cutting (לָחַט) most often refers to the carving of idols, so much so that the term for idol is לִפְסֵל, literally, something carved.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Moses cuts (לָחַט) two tablets of stone which only need to be cut (לָחַט) because the people of Israel had made an idol (לִפְסֵל) of gold for themselves. However, God himself will inscribe the words after Moses has cut the tablets, bringing to mind the synergy involved in this covenant relationship. Moses is then commanded to ascend Sinai in the morning alone, all living are to be out of sight of the mountain, the encounter will be so holy that even the animals are prohibited even from the "front of the mountain" (Exod 34:2–3). Finally, Moses is depicted as following the divine instructions in exact detail (Exod 34:4).

This restoration of the law is strikingly couched between the description of the future encounter and the actual encounter with God. One must note

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<sup>21</sup> In fact, elsewhere in the Pentateuch this root always refers to idolatry, except here and in the re-telling of this story in Deut 10.

the importance of this placement which first points out the nature of the broken relationship in clear allusions, and just as importantly highlights the centrality of God's law to his abiding presence and character. Throughout the narrative, the precision of God's directions remind of the absolute holiness of God and his call for obedience, which is in no way lessened by his character of compassion and grace. Despite the rebellion and the physical shattering of the tablets themselves, the law remains unchanged.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, then, the magnanimous grace and compassion of the Lord does not rule out the law, rather, here the law is situated in the middle of the revelation of God's glory, alongside God's grace and compassion, in perfect harmony. This re-institution of the law is itself an act of grace, a concrete indication of God's favor.<sup>23</sup>

### **Exodus 34:5–10: The Climax of God's Confirmatory Revelation**

The encounter finally commences, ultimately predicated on God's downward movement toward Moses. Although Moses had ascended to the peak of the mountain, God must descend to him in order for any encounter to take place. Upon descent, God "stands" there "with him" (עִמּוֹ) and proclaims the divine name (Exod 34:5). Although the Hebrew syntax does not conclusively denote the subject of both the standing and the proclamation, there is no shift in the text implying a change in subject from God, the clear subject of "descended," to Moses.<sup>24</sup> Further, the wider context suggests that God must also be the subject of the proclamation (קָרָא) of the divine name since God was unambiguously specified as the subject of this action in the foretelling of this encounter (Exod 33:19). God then passes in front of Moses, literally "before his face" (פְּנֵי הַיְיָ), again highlighting the divine presence, and

<sup>22</sup> "In the core biblical story, the tablets that Moses had smashed in anger were destroyed, but the demands of God were not even slightly damaged, and these demands are what remained unchanged. The text underscores this fact by asserting three times that the new Words being received by Moses were exactly like the first ones (34:1, 2, 4)." Charles D. Isbell, "The Liturgical Function of Exodus 33:16–34:26," *JBQ* 29.1 (2001): 29–30.

<sup>23</sup> "This promise was the concrete sign that Israel had been forgiven and the relationship had been restored from God's side." Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 611. The re-writing of the law signified "God had decided to forgive the Israelites and accept them once again as his covenant people, and he would renew his covenant with them." Stuart, *Exodus*, 712.

<sup>24</sup> Although the niphal of נִצַּב presents Moses as subject in 33:21 and 34:2, here the root is hithpael. It is likely that the text presumes that Moses is "standing" there in accordance with Exod 33:21 and God, upon descent, "stands" there "with him." However, even if Moses were the subject of standing, the text would still denote an intimate human presence "with" God.

proclaims the name (Exod 34:6).<sup>25</sup> In all this, God is the active agent, only he can effectuate the divine-human encounter.

The name YHWH is likely connected to the proclamation “I am (היה) who I am (היה)” in Exod 3:14, since YHWH is widely considered to be the third person of היה.<sup>26</sup> Here the name is proclaimed twice, further evoking the spectacle and content of the first call of Moses at the burning bush, and again suggesting recapitulation (Exod 3:14).<sup>27</sup> Yet, the encounter in Exod 34 goes beyond Exod 3 in the profundity and beauty of the self-revelation of the divine character. The divine name is explained in terms of the most unfathomable love in what has become the *locus classicus* of all OT texts on God’s character, Exod 34:6–7.<sup>28</sup> “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth” (Exod 34:6). As in Exod 33:19, the proclamation of divine character is explicitly associated with his name which is, among other things, compassionate (רחום) and gracious (חנון).<sup>29</sup>

The root of “compassionate,” רחם, refers to the most profound, rich, and intense mother-love; the love that maternity has for its own offspring, providing affection, comfort, and where appropriate, mercy.<sup>30</sup> The root

<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, although Moses is not able to see God’s face, his encounter is nevertheless “face to face,” albeit with the necessary mediation.

<sup>26</sup> For instance, see Freedman, “The Name of the God of Moses”; J. Carl Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6–8,” *BSac* 158.629 (2001): 42; Norman Walker, “Concerning Exodus 34:6,” *JBL* 79 (1960): 277.

<sup>27</sup> Freedman notes that יהוה יהוה is “strikingly parallel to the 1st person repetition in Exod 3:14” אֶהְיֶה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה. Freedman, “The Name of the God of Moses,” 154. Stuart contends that this may be an instance of “the repetition of endearment phenomenon” even though in all other cases it is someone calling someone else’s name twice and here God is calling his own name. Stuart, *Exodus*, 715.

<sup>28</sup> One need only consider the amount of allusions to this text throughout the OT to recognize its pervasive influence. For instance, consider Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; 31–32; Ps 86:15; 103:8, 17; 145:8; Jer 32; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3. Moreover, this “is the only place [in the OT] where God actually described Himself, listing His own glorious attributes.” Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation,” 36. Fretheim refers to it as a “virtual exegesis” of the “name” which “constitutes a kind of ‘canon’ of the kind of God Israel’s God is.” Fretheim, 301–302. “In Jewish tradition these verses are called the Thirteen Attributes of God (Heb. Shelosh ‘esreh middot).” Sarna, *Exodus*, 216.

<sup>29</sup> The close relationship between God’s compassionate and gracious nature continues throughout the OT, with the adjectival רחום חנון paired 11 times (Exod 34:6; 2 Chron 30:9; Neh 9:17, 31; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2), and רחום without חנון appearing only twice (Deut 4:31; Ps 78:38). The latter two instances, Deut 4:31 and Ps 78:38, both connect forgiveness, not destruction, with God’s compassionate nature.

<sup>30</sup> For further information regarding the meaning and usage of this root, see Mike Butterworth, “רחם,” *NIDOTTE*; Coppes, “רחם”; U. Dahmen, “רחם,” *TDOT*; Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 108; Janzen, *Exodus*, 252; Thomas M. Raitt, “Why Does God Forgive?” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 13

derives from the term, רַחֵם, literally “womb,” and thus by extension connotes internal emotions, often those like that a mother has for her children.<sup>31</sup> As such, רַחֵם is a word of intense and profound emotionality, often connoting aspects of love with the primary meaning of compassion which is manifested in beneficent action, when appropriate.<sup>32</sup> God is by far the most common agent of רַחֵם which is fundamental to his character, connoting God’s intense and profound affection and compassion for human beings, even that which surpasses the mother’s tender feeling for her child (cf. Is 49:15; 63:15; Jer 31:20; Ps 103:13).<sup>33</sup> In some cases it appears not merely as a willed affection, but actually affected and/or aroused, an emotion that is responsive to the actual state of affairs. Although God desires to continually bestow compassion on human beings, רַחֵם may be withdrawn since it is contingent upon the maintenance of an ongoing divine-human relationship (cf. Deut 13:17–18; 30:2–3; Is 27:11; 55:7; Jer 16:5; 42:12–16; Hos 1:6–7; 2:4; 2 Chron 30:9). Nevertheless, divine compassion far surpasses all reasonable expectations and is often manifested in unmerited grace and mercy, the removal of God’s anger/wrath, forgiveness, restoration, and blessing. It is amazingly enduring and one of the primary groundings of God’s beneficent disposition and actions; an integral aspect of God’s love. Here it refers to an emotional, relational love; compassion which surpasses obstacles and is manifested in action.<sup>34</sup>

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(1991): 51; H. Simian-Yofre, “רַחֵם,” *TDOT*; H. J. Stoebe, “רַחֵם,” *TLOT*; Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), chapter 2

<sup>31</sup> רַחֵםִים is likely an intensive plural. It is “probably in reference to the accompanying physiological phenomena of strong emotion” Stoebe, 1226. This connection is widely recognized, see, for instance Butterworth, “רַחֵם,” 1093; Coppes, “רַחֵם,” 841; John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC 30 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), 243–244; Gary Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, NAC 15A (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 306; Stoebe, 1225; Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 (Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 14; Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1:1–15:29*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 527; John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, WBC 24 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 202.

<sup>32</sup> In human usage, it often describes the affection between family members: a father for his children, the compassionate emotion of a mother, and a brother toward his brothers (cf. Gen 43:30; 1 Kgs 3:26; Ps 103:13). It is that affectionate feeling that is especially aroused by the occasion of a loved one in distress or need of help. Conversely, it may also be used to describe the lack of compassion which is shown in times of war. However, the term is most common with divine agency.

<sup>33</sup> The adjectival רַחֵםִים appears 13 times altogether, and in every instance but the likely exception of Ps 112:4, God is the agent, connoting the compassionate nature of God.

<sup>34</sup> It “carries strong overtones of the meaning ‘to love’, which the simplest stem normally has in Aramaic and Syriac.” Robert C. Dentan, “The Literary Affinitives of Exodus Xxxiv 6f,” *VT* 13 (1963): 40. Gowan contends that it “needs to be given a stronger emotional quality than the word ‘mercy’ usually has.” Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 236.

The other, closely associated, term “gracious,” is from the root *חנן* which refers to favor and graciousness. In its most basic sense, this root refers to a positive, favorable disposition and/or action from one to another.<sup>35</sup> It is closely associated with entreaty since it often consists of a free, beneficial disposition and/or action in a situation where the (potential) object of favor is in, or will soon be in, a situation of distress or need.<sup>36</sup> With God as agent, the *qal* is most often used in entreaty, when God is asked to “be gracious,” usually relative to the request of specific action(s).<sup>37</sup> It likewise appears frequently as the description of God’s beneficent disposition and/or actions, whether requested or received (Cf. Gen 33:5, 11; 2 Kgs 13:23). However, the term most often appears within the context of entreaty, frequently in the syntagm “find favor” in one’s sight [*חַנַּן* + *חַן* + *עֵינַי*], a syntagm that appears frequently here in Exod 33–34.<sup>38</sup> God hears and responds to entreaty not out of any obligation but because he is “gracious” (cf. Exod 22:27).

These core characteristics of compassion and graciousness are further associated with, and perhaps descriptive of, his enduring, longsuffering patience signified by the idiomatic expression that God is “long of nose” ( *חַנּוּן* )

<sup>35</sup> Yamauchi considers it to entail not only a favorable response but a “heartfelt response by someone who has something to give.” Edwin Yamauchi, “חנן,” *TWOT* 302. Freedman and Lundbom suggest with regard to human relationships, “It is present in the heart of one who is positively disposed toward another.” Freedman and Lundbom, “חנן,” 26. For further information regarding the nature and usage of this root see Freedman and Lundbom, “חנן”; Terence E. Fretheim, “חנן,” *NIDOTTE*; H. J. Stoebe, “חנן,” *TLOT*.

<sup>36</sup> Importantly, God is never the patient of *חנן* except when the term refers to supplication, in other words, he is never depicted as the beneficiary of *חנן* or *חנן*.

<sup>37</sup> Isa 33:2; Ps 4:2; 6:2 [3]; 9:13 [14]; 25:16; 26:11; 27:7; 30:11; 31:9 [10]; 41:4 [5]; 41:1 [11]; 51:1 [3]; 56:1 [2]; 57:1 [2]; 67:1 [2]; 86:3, 16; 119:58, 132; 123:3; Cf. Ps 119:29; 123:2.

<sup>38</sup> The idiom apparently refers to the looking at one’s eyes to determine whether one was favorably disposed or not. Fretheim, “חנן,” 203. Since “‘favor is shown on the face’ . . . ancient peoples looked at the eyes while contemporary humans look at the smile.” Freedman and Lundbom, “חנן,” 24. Moreover, the term for face (*פָּנֵי*) itself is a common term used to express the presence or absence of divine favor, whether it is hidden/turned away, or turned toward someone. In theological usage, with God as the potential benefactor: Noah “found favor” in God’s sight (Gen 6:8). Abraham entreats one of three strangers (in an apparent theophany): “Lord, if now I have found favor in your sight” do not pass by (Gen 18:3). Lot, speaking to the “man” who saved him from destruction in Sodom says “your servant has found favor in your sight” (Gen 19:19). Moses found favor in God’s sight (Exod 33:12) and based his significant entreaty upon it (Exod 33:13, 16–17; 34:9). In times of further distress, Moses laments to God why he has “not found favor” in God’s sight (Num 11:11, 15), entreating further divine response. In numerous other instances the syntagm denotes the request, hope for, or reception of favor in God’s sight: to Gideon (Judg 6:17), to David (2 Sam 15:25). An elliptical instance refers to the Israelites having “found grace in the wilderness” (Jer 31:2). Favor in the sight of another may also be extended by God (and only by him), from the chief jailer to Joseph (Gen 39:21) and from the Egyptians to the Israelites (Exod 3:21; 12:36).

אֵימָה). Since anger was metaphorically seen in the nose (think red) the length signifies a “cooling mechanism.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, God has great capacity to overcome his anger at sin and bestow grace and compassion.

Further, God describes himself as “abounding in lovingkindness and truth” (Exod 34:6).<sup>40</sup> The latter term, אֱמֶת, refers to truth and/or faithfulness, and refers to a core characteristic of God which makes covenant relationship possible.<sup>41</sup> Here it highlights the truth and loyalty of God in contrast to the disloyalty and falsehood of Israel with the golden calf. The former term, אֱוֶן, appears once again in the very next verse; God is the one “who keeps lovingkindness for thousands” and forgives all kinds of sin, though not to the exclusion of justice since he is concurrently the punisher of the guilty (Exod 34:7).<sup>42</sup> God’s abundant אֱוֶן, here and elsewhere, exceeds the bounds of covenant responsibility, even extending to Israel after their egregious rebellion.

אֱוֶן is one of the most significant descriptors of God’s character in the entire Scriptures, occurring 251 times in 245 verses, 4 here in Exodus. It is often translated as lovingkindness, steadfast love, loyalty, goodness, faithfulness, mercy et al. It may connote love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness, yet also faithfulness, loyalty, and strength. Perhaps Gowan puts it best when he writes that אֱוֶן “cannot be adequately translated by anything short of a paragraph.”<sup>43</sup> Throughout the OT it refers to relational conduct and/or attitude in accord with the highest virtues (love, loyalty, goodness, kindness) and beneficial to another, which meets and exceeds all expectations (often manifested in mercy and forgiveness), in which the agent

<sup>39</sup> Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” 946. Cf. the description of divine anger as the “heat of my nostrils” in Exod 32:10, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Here, the syntagm אֱמֶת אֱוֶן, appears, which emphasizes the commitment, reliability, faithfulness, steadfastness, and fidelity of the divine אֱוֶן. It appears elsewhere in the Torah in Gen 24:27; cf. Gen 32:10 [11]; Ps 61:7[8]; 85:10, 11; 115:1; Prov 14:22; 16:6; 20:28. These characteristics were “manifested in active kindness and protective faithfulness respectively.” Alfred Jepsen, “אֱמֶת,” *TDOT* 314.

<sup>41</sup> The root “carries underlying sense of certainty, dependability.” Jack P. Scott, “אֱמֶת,” *TWOT* 42. “As a characteristic of God revealed to men, it therefore becomes the means by which men know and serve God as their savior (Josh 24:14; I Kgs 2:4; Ps 26:3; 86:11; Ps 91:4; Isa 38:3), and then, as a characteristic to be found in those who have indeed come to God (Exod 18:21; Neh 7:2; Ps 15:2; Zech 8:16).” Scott, 42. Further, “emeth is something which determines God’s nature, which is a part of his being divine, which makes it possible for man to trust him.” Jepsen, “אֱמֶת,” 316.

<sup>42</sup> Thus, “as it stands in Exodus, the passage is a beautifully balanced statement with regard to the two most basic aspects of the character of God—His love and His justice. It is significant that love holds the primary place.” Dentan, “Literary Affinitites,” 36.

<sup>43</sup> Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 236.

is ontologically free to act otherwise, and is responsive to and/or creates or maintains the expectation of appropriate response from the recipient.<sup>44</sup> Since it describes the attitude of the agent who characteristically acts in such a way, a  $\text{חסד}$  disposition often becomes the basis of entreaty for  $\text{חסד}$  action, as is the case here in Exod 34.<sup>45</sup>

Divine  $\text{חסד}$  is grounded in the divine character of love, compassion, goodness, faithfulness, and justice. It is nevertheless free and voluntary, but not altogether spontaneous, often taking place within the commitment of the covenant relationship, but not restricted thereby.<sup>46</sup> It is a basic grounding characteristic of God which makes the covenant meaningful and reliable. It is unmerited but not altogether unconditional (cf. Exod 20:6; Deut 5:10; 7:12). It includes action which may be one-sided and unilateral, but assumes a relation which will be reciprocated (even if  $\text{חסד}$  itself is not, or cannot, be). It is from benefactor to beneficiary, not merely *quid pro quo*, but assumes appropriate responsiveness and expects reciprocation when/if the context arises.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, it often takes on the connotation of mercy and

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<sup>44</sup> For further discussions of this seminal term of the divine character see D.A. Baer and R.P. Gordon, "Encountering the Rest," *NIDOTTE*; Gordon R. Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOT (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967); R. Laird Harris, "חסד," *TWOT*; Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978); Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Loyalty and Love: The Language of Human Interconnections in the Hebrew Bible," in *Backgrounds for the Bible*, ed. Michael P. O'Connor and David Noel Freedman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987); Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth, 1962); H. J. Stoebe, "חסד," *TLOT*; Hans-Jürgen Zobel, "חסד," *TDOT*.

<sup>45</sup> From the perspective of the (potential) beneficiary,  $\text{חסד}$  is a disposition and/or action which will fulfill a need or important desire.  $\text{חסד}$  may take place in human non-religious relationships, from humans toward God, but most often takes place from God toward humans.

<sup>46</sup> For instance, it is clear that  $\text{חסד}$  is possible beyond covenant limits since 2 Sam 15:20 describes it for Ittai, one who is clearly outside the Israelite covenant. Accordingly, Sakenfeld favors the meaning of "free acts of rescue or deliverance, which includes the idea of faithfulness" in the context of "sustained solidarity." Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry*, 1–12. Cf. Dentan, "Literary Affinitives," 43; Raitt, "Why Does God Forgive?" 54; Zobel, "חסד," 61. This is *contra* Glueck, who argued that  $\text{חסד}$  is a covenantal term with corresponding obligations. In many instances (i.e. with regard to  $\text{קְרִיית}$ ) God has committed himself to certain responsibilities (soft obligations) to which his faithfulness is unparalleled. However, this is to be distinguished from "hard obligations" since (1) there is no external obligation upon God due to the simple fact that there is no one capable of enforcement, and (2) the very language used of God with regard to  $\text{קְרִיית}$  presumes the lack of ontological obligation. As such, divine  $\text{חסד}$  may be responsive to virtue and/or entreaty, yet may be withdrawn or withheld according to the state of affairs.

<sup>47</sup> For examples of human  $\text{חסד}$  toward God see Jer 2:2; Neh 13:14; 2 Chron 32:32; 35:26; Hos 4:1; 6:4, 6; cf. 2 Sam 22:26; Ps 18:25 among others. Some scholars have contended that humans never direct  $\text{חסד}$  toward God, interpreting all of the uncertain occurrences as directed



forgiveness and results in the removal of wrath and the bestowal of blessings, especially deliverance. Thus, divine  $\text{רסן}$  often surpasses the bounds of expectation and exceeds all moral responsibility. As such, divine  $\text{רסן}$  is an aspect of his character of goodness, but is not mere clemency or beneficence but, rather, consists in always doing that which is best, righteous, and just, always and without fail.

This compassion, grace, truth, and lovingkindness all flow out in forgiveness, which is likewise essential to the continuance of covenant relationship and makes it possible for the divine presence to remain with Israel.<sup>48</sup> The extent of this forgiveness is highlighted by the use of three different, yet overlapping, terms for sin: iniquity ( $\text{רָעָה}$ ), transgression ( $\text{עָשָׂה$ ), and sin ( $\text{חַטָּאת}$ ).<sup>49</sup> For all intents and purposes these three words together function to describe the whole scope of sin such that there is no sin outside of the scope of God's forgiveness; there is no sin that God cannot bear for them.<sup>50</sup> God's forgiveness is larger than the rebellion of Israel.

Importantly, God is not compelled to be gracious. On the contrary, he has every right to destroy the people for their apostasy. Yet, his compassion reaches beyond the blessings and curses of covenant, providing a means for continuance of what would otherwise be a shattered relationship. This divine forbearance, grounded in his character of compassion, graciousness, longsuffering, lovingkindness, and faithfulness, is thus essential to the divine-human relationship; without divine compassion there could be no

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toward other human beings. Clark, *The Word Hesed*, 259, 267; Alfred Jepsen, "Gnade Und Barmherzigkeit," *Kerygma und Dogma* 7 (1961): 268–269; Zobel, "רסן," 61–62. A potential rationale for the rejection of human  $\text{רסן}$  toward God is the theological supposition that humans cannot benefit God. However, numerous scholars correctly recognize that there are examples of human  $\text{רסן}$  toward God, including Baer and Gordon, "Encountering the Rest," 213; Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, 56–63; E.M. Good, "Love in the OT," *IDB* 168; "Loving-Kindness," in *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, ed. W. E. Vine. (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1996), 142; Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas*, 128; H. J. Stoebe, "Die Bedeutung Des Wortes Häsäd Im Alten Testament," *VT* 2 (1952); Stoebe, "רסן," 458–459.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 303; Raitt, "Why Does God Forgive?" 54. The root of "forgiveness" ( $\text{נשא}$ ) literally means to carry, lift, or take away. God's love extends to the point where God will take upon Himself the sins and unburden the sinner.

<sup>49</sup>  $\text{עוה}$  refers to crooked behavior (cf. Ps 38:7; Is 24:1; Lam 3:9; Job 33:27; Prov 12:8); [ $\text{עָשָׂה}$ ] most often refers to the breach of relationships, which is quite appropriate here;  $\text{חַטָּאת}$  means to miss the mark (cf. Judg 20:16). See G. Herbert Livingston, "הטאה," *TWOT* 277; Carl Schultz, "עוה," *TWOT* 650.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Cassuto, *Commentary*, 440; Stuart, *Exodus*, 716. All three words for sin also appear in Lev 16:21; Job 13:23; Ps 32:5; Is 59:12; Ezek 12:14; Dan 9:24 and two appear in Mic 7:18. In each case the combined magnitude of sin is felt.

God-human relationship.<sup>51</sup> This willingness to overcome sin and the disruption of the relationship manifests the steadfastness of God's commitment, which is the only way in which the divine-human relationship can be continued.

However, once again, none of this is to the exclusion of divine justice since, concurrently, God is the punisher of the guilty whom he will "surely not acquit" (Exod 34:7). Some have considered this statement puzzling, perhaps even contradictory; how can God forgive all kinds of sin, including "iniquity" and yet visit "iniquity?"<sup>52</sup> Though God may forgive the iniquity as it relates to the divine-human relationship, that does not mean he suspends the immediate consequences of such iniquity, nor is it as if the iniquity never occurred.<sup>53</sup> The effects of iniquity are not merely wiped away, thus the importance of remaining in the relationship with God, so that he will "carry" this iniquity. Further light is shed on this by considering the clear allusion to the second and third commandments of the Decalogue.

First, "he will not acquit" is a direct allusion to the third commandment, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished (לֹא יַעֲזֹב אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשֵּׁם הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר לֵאלֹהֵינוּ) who takes His name in vain," or literally, "carries (נָשָׂא) his name in vain" (Exod 20:7). God will forgive, or "carry" (נָשָׂא) iniquity, transgression, and sin but God will not acquit the one who takes or "carries" (נָשָׂא) his name in disrespect and vanity. Notice the emphasis on the divine name; forgiveness puts God's name, his reputation on the line. Mere forgiveness without atonement would fall upon the character

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<sup>51</sup> Thus, throughout the Torah, compassion continues to function as the grounding of entreaty and the basis of deliverance (cf. Gen 19:16).

<sup>52</sup> Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus," 947. Some have resolved the perceived issue by interpreting this to mean that God forgives the repentant but does not acquit the unrepentant. Laney, "God's Self-Revelation," 50. Cf. Sarna, *Exodus*, 216. Although this is a correct principle in itself, the passage does not seem actually to state this. Importantly, "āwōn" may refer to the act of sin, the punishment for the sin, or the state between the act and the punishment "guilt." Milton C. Fisher and Bruce K. Waltke, "נָקָה," *TWOT* 597. As such, the perceived issue is not as acute as is sometimes supposed.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Exod 32:34. Thus, "Divine forbearance does not mean that sinners can expect wholly to escape the consequences of their misdeeds." Sarna, *Exodus*, 216. "God will not overlook or ignore violations of the covenant." Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus," 947. Simian-Yofre has suggested, "This apparent contradiction can be understood only if punishment and forgiveness are understood as separate stages. If punishment aims to restore an objective order that has been infringed, it should be treated as reparation in the metaphysical sense. Forgiveness, by contrast, is the restoration of a personal relationship between the offended and the offender on the free initiative of the former." H. Simian-Yofre, "פָּנָה," *TDOT* 449. Cf. also Cassuto, *Commentary*, 432; Laney, "God's Self-Revelation," 50.

of God, it would be a blight on his name.<sup>54</sup> The second allusion appears in the latter part of Exod 34:7, “visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations” corresponds to the second commandment, “You shall not worship them or serve them [other gods]; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me” (Exod 20:5).<sup>55</sup> Alternatively, if God were to remove all the consequences of sin what would be the impetus to repentance? Why would humans not live with impunity? How would the horrible effects of sin be known?

Consequences of one’s actions do follow to descendants; the effects of iniquity are often passed down from generation to generation, the guilt of one in the household naturally affects others in the household. Significantly, three generations would often be contemporaries (possibly even four generations).<sup>56</sup> Thus it should not be surprising that the consequences of one’s actions might affect multiple generations. Such responsibility is also pertinent within a wider context. Due to the intercomplexity of the world every action (and often inaction) by one human affects others.<sup>57</sup> Yet, even though both commandments were broken at Sinai in the worship of the golden calf, God’s mercy continues to flow to the people of Israel. Although the consequences of rebellion reach to the third or fourth generation, the  $\text{רַחֲמֵי}$  or mercy of God is kept to the thousandth generation (Exod 20:8; 34:7). The divine  $\text{רַחֲמֵי}$  is surpassingly magnificent, so great that there is no comparison with his brief anger. As such, the delicate balance between God’s mercy and longsuffering, and his holiness and justice, is maintained.

Accordingly, Moses’ immediate response to divine revelation is to prostrate himself before God (Exod 34:8). Whereas the people had “quickly”

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<sup>54</sup> See Num 5:31; Judg 15:3; 2 Sam 14:9. Thus, “it is God who assumes responsibility for the guiltless. Thus he holds himself responsible for innocent blood (Deut 19:10, 13; II Kgs 24:4; Jer 2:34f; 19:3f; 22:3ff; *passim*).” Fisher and Waltke, “ $\text{רַחֲמֵי}$ ,” 597. Thus, those who persisted in taking God’s name in vain with the golden calf received swift judgment. The others were spared from execution, but some effects on the covenant remain.

<sup>55</sup> Though Exod 34:7 omits the clause “those who hate me” the Hebrew reader would likely have it in mind because of the allusion to Exod 20:5. It is those who remove themselves from a right relationship with God that must receive due penalty.

<sup>56</sup> Thus, “the sins of one family member will bring suffering on the whole family, all the generations now alive (we know that is true), but that person’s iniquity will not be visited on unlimited number of generations.” Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 238.

<sup>57</sup> For instance, life on earth is a zero sum “game.” This means that there are not endless resources. The human who uses more resources necessarily leaves less of the resources for others. In this way, the actions of one affect all the others. There is no injustice in this; life could not be lived in relationship in any other way.

turned from God and worshiped an idol, Moses “quickly” worships God (Exod 32:8; 34:8). The contrast is striking. After such appropriate worship, Moses seeks one, final unambiguous response.<sup>58</sup> It seems that God’s revelation of his character emboldens Moses to ask for what he really wants, forgiveness, reconciliation, and provision for future sin.<sup>59</sup> Thus, he refers again to his original requests, bringing the pericope full circle, and yet goes beyond them. He once again leads with the familiar phrase, “if I have found favor in your sight” and requests once again God’s presence in the “midst” (בְּקִרְבֵּנוֹ) of the people. This he asks despite their “stiff-necked” disposition, again recalling the incident with the golden calf where such language appears four times (cf. Exod 32:9 ff.).<sup>60</sup> Identifying himself with the people,<sup>61</sup> Moses explicitly requests forgiveness of their sins and that God would “take” them as his “own possession” (לְקַחֵנוּ) or “inheritance” (Exod 34:9).<sup>62</sup> This is covenant language; Moses is asking “nothing less than complete acceptance of the nation” as God’s special people, despite their rebellion and the surety of future sin as a “stiff-necked” people.<sup>63</sup> God responds in v. 10 with the promise, “Behold, I am going to make a covenant,” thus effectively assuaging all of Moses’ concerns (Exod 34:10). That God will make a covenant (future) means that God is effecting a total reconciliation and reclaiming Israel as his covenant people, his inheritance.<sup>64</sup> That the covenant is restored is clear in the foreground of this passage where the stipulations of Exod 20–23 are reiterated in a brief summary (Exod 34:11–26).<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, the sanctuary

<sup>58</sup> While some have suggested that Moses here exemplifies a lack of faith in God’s promise. Enns, *Exodus*, 585. However, it might rather be that Moses is continuing with his pattern of seeking to leave no ambiguity in regards to the relationship between God and his people.

<sup>59</sup> Perhaps this was the divine intention of the “negotiations” between God and Moses all along.

<sup>60</sup> This verse “picks up all the various themes of the last two chapters: ‘finding favor with God’, ‘going in our midst’, ‘stiff-necked people ... iniquity and sin’, and ‘your possession.’” Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 612.

<sup>61</sup> “Such is Moses’ solidarity with the people that their sin becomes his sin, and in his confession they make their confession.” Janzen, *Exodus*, 256.

<sup>62</sup> See Exod 23:20; 32:13 for further usage of this word.

<sup>63</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 719.

<sup>64</sup> Some have thought that God does not actually respond to the request of Moses. See, for instance, William H. Irwin, “The Course of the Dialogue,” 635. However, if Moses is in fact referring to the covenant by his language, as it seems, then God’s response in Exod 34:10 is direct, “I am going to make a covenant.” For Cassuto, “The answer to this petition is given in v. 10 (it is not missing as many scholars have supposed); God not only agrees to the request but even augments it.” Cassuto, *Commentary*, 441. Cf. Sarna, *Exodus*, 214.

<sup>65</sup> While this covenant has significant continuity with the covenant the Israelites had rebelled against, there is also newness. It is thus “new in the sense of renewed.” Janzen, *Exodus*, 259. cf. Stuart, *Exodus*, 719. At the same time, it is also a new thing in its own right. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 308.

will be built and established in the midst of the people and thus God himself will be present amongst them. Beyond this, his miraculous actions for the people will be a marvelous sign for all nations to see.<sup>66</sup> God, because of his gracious and compassionate character, will make a way for the covenant people to remain in his presence and will yet use them to accomplish his purpose for a world that likewise needs reconciliation.

### **Conclusion**

Exodus 33:12–34:10 presents a narrative of beautiful unity and grand scope, with literary and thematic connections that steadily build tension with regard to the primary questions at hand: will God remain “with” his people? Will he still be their God? The tension already in place in the aftermath of the golden calf apostasy heightens in the back-and-forth dialogue between God and Moses, with God’s repeatedly vague and partial responses serving to draw Moses to yet more persistent and significant intercession, culminating in a request to behold the very glory of God, to which God responds with the promise of intimate encounter and the manifestation of all his goodness. The tension continues to rise as the law is re-formed, the first tangible hint that God will renew his covenant with his people. The narrative finally climaxes in the display of God’s beauty and the proclamation of his character and purpose.

Therein the divine proclamation and theophany provide the solution to all of the issues that have so troubled Moses, the confirmation of God’s continued favor toward his people, sought so relentlessly by Moses. The intimate presence of God amongst his people, put in jeopardy by Israel’s idolatrous apostasy, is ultimately reaffirmed, grounded in the free and unbounded love of God. The solution is found in God’s own action, which itself flows from his character of compassion, grace, longsuffering, faithful love, and truth, all of which amount to the explication of the divine name. The God who manifests himself here is relational and responsive to human pleas, desiring true communion with his creation, a limited mutuality where his creatures can partake of the abundance of his love and live in harmony with his holiness. This God is also the God of forgiveness, a forgiveness that reaches any kind of sin as long as it is not clung to; a forgiveness which is especially necessary in the context of this grand narrative of the Exodus.

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<sup>66</sup> In this way, the sight (ראה) that Moses has repeatedly asked for will thus be extended to the sight (ראה) of the nations.

Because of his loving faithfulness, God desires to continue to commune with this sinful people. At the same time, because of his staggering holiness such presence must be mediated. Yet, God Himself provides the mediation to restore the relationship, and concretely set his presence amongst them. Nevertheless, at the same time, God expects appropriate response going forward in order to maintain the relationship. His people must not think that God's compassion will annul his holiness and justice.

This wonderful revelation of God provides Moses with the assurance to press his original requests. The promise of God's presence is finally grounded in the constancy of his character. The surety of the continued presence of God "in the midst" of Israel is his character of compassion and loving faithfulness. The sanctuary will be built and God Himself will dwell with the people. Moses receives the assurance he has sought and, by extension, the entire human race may hope for reconciliation and communion with God. Ultimately, it will take God Himself, giving himself for alien sin, finally to make atonement between holy God and sinful humankind, the ultimate manifestation of his indescribable love.