

BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR

No man
cometh unto
the **FATHER**
but by
ME

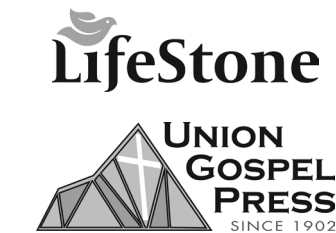
John 14:6

Winter Quarter
December | January | February
2025-26

Bible Expositor and Illuminator

WINTER QUARTER December 2025, January, February 2026

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LOOKING AHEAD

One of God's most distinguishable attributes is His holiness. Throughout this quarter, we will discuss various aspects of God's holiness and how they relate to the lives of His children.

In the first unit, we will investigate "His Holy Presence." Our first lesson is about Moses' mountaintop encounter with God when he asked to see God's glory (Ex. 33:12-23). That request, which God only partially fulfilled because showing His full glory would have proven fatal to Moses, later led to God's glory appearing in the tabernacle (40:1-11, 34-38), the subject for the second lesson.

Lessons 3 and 4 expound familiar passages from the prophet Isaiah. For Christmas, we look at a marvelous prophecy of the birth of the Child from the line of David who would lead the nation in God's righteousness (Isa. 9:1-7). The following week contains a glimpse of the incomparable greatness of God from Isaiah 40:21-31. Who can compare with our great God?

Our second unit peeks into "His Holy House." We begin lesson 5 with Jesus in the temple as He forcefully cleansed it from an infestation of hindrances to people's worship of the holy God (John 2:13-17). In lesson 6, we return to the days of King David, when he brought the ark of God into Jerusalem. The psalm of worship and thanksgiving is truly astounding (1 Chr. 16:23-33)!

Isaiah's view of God sitting on His throne in all His splendor is the subject of lesson 7 (Isa. 6:1-13). Then, in lesson 8, we turn to Psalm 113:1-9 to praise God, who looks down to provide care for the people He created while sitting high above the heavens.

Unit 3 investigates "His Holy Expectation" and begins with lesson 9 on Solomon's prayer of dedication at the completion of the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 8:22-30). In lesson 10, we look at God's instructions for Israel after they left Egypt (Lev. 19:1-4, 9-18). The instructions found in that passage explain that God's people must follow the example of holiness that God Himself provides.

Instructions for holy living are not restricted to the Old Testament. Lesson 11 returns to the New Testament to repeat the command for God's people, both Jewish and Gentile followers of Christ, to live holy lives (1 Pet. 1:14-17). We complete this quarter with an exhortation from Hebrews 12:1-17 to run toward holiness.

—Glenn Weaver

PLEASE NOTE: Fundamental, sound doctrine is the objective of LifeStone Ministries, Union Gospel Press. The writers are prayerfully selected for their Bible knowledge and willingness to submit to the Spirit of Truth, each writing in his own style as enlightened by the Holy Spirit. At best we know in part only. "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

The Glory of God

TOM GREENE

God's glory is a recurring theme throughout the whole Bible. The Old Testament often emphasizes the fact that we cannot approach God on our own. His glory would overwhelm us (Ex. 33:20). Though there are times in the Old Testament when God graciously granted individuals a glimpse of His glory, such glimpses are only the result of His grace (Judg. 13:22-23).

The New Testament agrees with the Old Testament and further reveals God's glory in Jesus Christ. Through Him, we see the Lord's glory in a way that was impossible prior to His coming (John 1:14). God's glory is revealed in His acts (Ex. 16:7) and in creation (Rom. 1:19-20; Ps. 8:1-9), but it is especially revealed in Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus both provides us access into God's glorious presence and perfectly displays who God is (Heb. 1:1-4).

In the Old Testament, God's glory was awe-inspiring and often terrifying (Ex. 20:18-21). How could a created being marked by sin and only having a lifespan of a few decades hope to come into the presence of the perfectly holy, almighty Creator and behold His eternal, infinite glory? Many of the prophets were overwhelmed and fell down in fear when they glimpsed the glory of God (Isa. 6:1-7).

But what *is* the glory of God? In general, glory means "praise, honor, or distinction" or "something that secures praise or renown" (www.merriam-webster.com). The nuanced difference between the praise someone receives and a person's worthiness of praise impacts the way we think about glorifying God.

God is not the only one who can receive glory. We can receive glory from one another or from God (John 12:42-43; translated "praise"). Athletes strive to earn earthly glory, but it quickly passes away (1 Cor. 9:24-27). Sometimes God gives His people honor and glory (Gen. 12:2). However, God's glory is unique because He is unique. God's glory is the display of His perfect, unchanging nature. Fashionable celebrities and cultural icons will grow old, get wrinkles, and eventually die. Even the strongest hall-of-fame athletes will retire, develop aches and pains, and die. Even the shrewdest political leaders who rule over vast empires will die, and their legacies will be quickly forgotten. (How many Egyptian pharaohs or Persian kings can you name?)

But God is perfect and unchanging, and His glory never fails (Jas. 1:17; Heb. 13:8). His glory does not wane throughout history (Ps. 102:24-27). His glory is unparalleled because He has all power, all knowledge, and all glory! Because He is perfect forever, His glory cannot fade.

But if God already has all glory, why are we called to glorify Him (1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31)? Do we somehow give God glory that He did not have before? Does this mean we could *lessen* His glory if we stopped praising Him? If we are talking about God's glory as His worthiness of praise or renown, the answer is obviously no. We do not add value or worth to God by praising Him.

When we glorify God, we recognize Him for who He truly is and worship Him accordingly. We recognize His infinite power, infinite goodness, and

infinite love. We marvel at the way He created the universe simply by speaking (cf. Gen. 1). Some scientists estimate that there are one septillion stars in the universe. That is 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000. A number so big that it defies our imagination! Some think there are even more! Scientists cannot be sure exactly how many stars there are, and yet God knows them all by name (Ps. 147:4). When we recognize how the Lord is infinitely greater than we are, we give Him glory that He deserves. The heavens declare the glory of God (19:1). Indeed, all of creation should inspire us to worship Him (cf. Ps. 8; Rom. 1:19-20).

When we admire the holiness and moral perfection of God, we glorify Him (cf. Isa. 6:1-5; Rev 4:8). No one else is perfectly holy as He is (1 Sam. 2:2). Because He is holy, He calls His people to likewise be holy (Lev. 19:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:14-16).

When we structure our lives in a way that acknowledges His holy wisdom and seeks to follow His commands and submit to His authority, we glorify Him. In this life we will never perfectly succeed in this. But even then, we can glorify Him by rejoicing in His forgiving

love. When we declare His merciful forgiveness and great name to those who do not know Him, we glorify Him.

In an *extremely* limited sense, then, we can add to His glory, in that we can give Him praise. We cannot add to or diminish His worthiness, of course. His magnificent grandeur is entirely independent of us, and we cannot affect that in any way. But we can acknowledge His perfections and praise Him for them. Further, we are commanded to do this!

God created us for His glory (Isa. 43:6-7, 20-21). Indeed, all things were created by Him and for Him (Col. 1:16). We are called to live every aspect of our lives for His glory (1 Cor. 10:31). To the puzzled philosopher musing about the meaning of life, the Bible provides the answer: to glorify God!

It can be difficult to apply such a grand idea as the glory of God to daily living. While there are many possible applications, start with this: Each week this quarter, pray and ask God to reveal Himself more clearly to you (cf. Eph. 1:18-23). Ask Him to help you love Him more as you come to see His love more clearly and to help you live in response to His great glory.

Be Holy

TOM GREENE

God is perfectly holy, without a hint of imperfection. No one can compare to Him. Some people emphasize God's "otherness" when talking about His holiness. While God is without a doubt different from any other being, the quality of being "different" or "other" is not the defining characteristic of holiness. When we talk about God's holiness, we talk primarily about His absolute moral perfection. A student with a

punk-rock haircut and unique clothing may look different from peers without necessarily being holy. Sinlessness, not "differentness," is the key issue when it comes to holiness.

God is completely devoid of any sin (Jas. 1:13) or darkness (1 John 1:5). There is no hint of evil in Him. Although no one can compare to Him in this since we are all sinful, we *are* called to imitate Him. Israel was called to eat,

dress, and live differently from the nations around them in order to highlight visibly the fact that they were different from the surrounding nations. We are likewise called to be different from those around us in a way that brings attention and glory to God. We are not commanded to be different by dressing differently from the people around us or by abstaining from foods the way ancient Israel did. Rather, we are called to live righteous lives and avoid sin (1 Thess. 4:7). When we avoid sin and live for God, it will surprise others and draw attention to Him (1 Pet. 4:1-5).

While none of us can match God's perfect holiness, we are called to live holy lives precisely *because* He is holy. God is holy, and His children are likewise called to be holy (Lev. 19:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:13-16). We are not surprised when the children of professional athletes grow up to be athletes themselves. Nor are we surprised when the children of gardeners, bakers, or mechanics carry on a family business. In many cases, it is expected of them. Likewise, it is expected that God's children will be holy, because He is holy. In fact, we are exhorted to make every effort to be holy, since without holiness no one will see God (Heb. 12:14). The call to holiness is not an optional recommendation; it is a serious command!

Given that we are called to strenuously avoid sin and put it to death, how are we supposed to do so? Is Christian living merely a matter of rolling up our sleeves or pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps? Absolutely not! Though holy living involves hard work, it is impossible to achieve through our own blood, sweat, and tears. We need God's power to live holy lives.

Fortunately, God gives us all the strength necessary to do so (2 Pet. 1:3-11). Through Christ and through the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to live in a way that pleases God. Jesus lives in believers (Gal. 2:20), and we are filled

with the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9). The Holy Spirit and the Son help us in our weakness and intercede for us in prayer (vss. 26-34). Because of this, we can be confident that despite our weaknesses and sins, God can help us persevere until the end (Phil. 1:6).

But what does holiness practically look like in daily life? Is it primarily characterized by a refusal to listen to certain types of music or movies, or by a dedication to only spending time with other Christians? Certainly not! Although wisdom will sometimes call us to avoid certain types of media, that is not the primary mark of holiness. Without downplaying the importance of the influences we allow into our lives, we should remember that Jesus Himself said that it is not what goes into a person but what comes out that defiles him (Matt. 15:11). Holiness is more about what we think, feel, and do than what we hear or see.

Jesus' own life illustrates this. He intentionally spent time with tax collectors (who were despised as traitors for serving the Roman Empire) and prostitutes. While the Bible urges wisdom in who we choose to be our friends and warns of the influence bad friends may have (Prov. 13:20; 1 Cor. 15:33), we are not to withdraw from the world entirely (1 Cor. 5:9-13). Instead, we are called to be a light to the world (Matt. 5:14-16), which is difficult to do if we hide from the world!

Holiness is about seeking to imitate God and to be free from sin (Eph. 1:4). Jesus told those who came to Him to follow the commandments (Matt. 19:17) and said that loving God and loving our neighbor were the greatest commandments (22:36-40). Of course, we cannot do that perfectly, which is why we need Christ's redeeming work. But that does not change the fact that we should seek to obey God, love Him, and love others.

(Editorials continued on page 186)

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

EX. 33:12 And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight.

13 Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation *is* thy people.

14 And he said, My presence shall go *with thee*, and I will give thee rest.

15 And he said unto him, If thy presence go not *with me*, carry us not up hence.

16 For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? *is it* not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that *are* upon the face of the earth.

17 And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also

that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.

18 And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

19 And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.

20 And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

21 And the LORD said, Behold, *there is* a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock:

22 And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:

23 And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

NOTES

The Glory of the Lord

Lesson Text: Exodus 33:12-23

Related Scriptures: Exodus 19:7-25; 33:1-11; 34:29-35;
2 Corinthians 3:7-18; Psalm 103:6-14

TIME: 1446 B.C.

PLACE: Mount Sinai

GOLDEN TEXT—"And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (Exodus 33:20).

Introduction

Our first unit of the quarter delves into the holiness of God's presence. One of the overarching themes of the whole Bible is God's unfolding plan to dwell among His people as their God (cf. Ezek. 37:27; Rev. 21:3). But a huge obstacle stood in the way of that plan: sinful humans cannot get near God's holiness.

Moses encountered that obstacle firsthand when the Israelites worshipped a golden calf in the wilderness and provoked the Lord to anger. The immediate consequences of that sin were bad enough, as many of the people died. But the worst part was the pronouncement God made in Exodus 33:3: "I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiff-

necked people; lest I consume thee in the way."

Moses' intercession in today's text came as a direct result of that gut-wrenching statement. In the process, Moses made three astonishing requests.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **ASTONISHING REQUEST #1—**
Ex. 33:12-13
2. **ASTONISHING REQUEST #2—**
Ex. 33:14-16
3. **ASTONISHING REQUEST #3—**
Ex. 33:17-19
4. **INHERENT LIMITATIONS FOR**
MOSES—Ex. 33:20-23

Exposition: Verse by Verse

ASTONISHING REQUEST #1

EX. 33:12 And Moses said unto the Lord, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast

also found grace in my sight.

13 Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation *is* thy people.

Moses was about to probe into the very heart of who God is. He needed the assurance that the Lord was truly the kind of God who could pardon sin and take Israel as His inheritance, even though Israel was a stiff-necked and idolatrous nation (cf. 34:9). {Everything was riding on God's character. So, in the first of his bold requests, Moses prayed that the Lord would make His ways known to him if he had really found favor in His sight (33:13).}^{q1}

Moses was pleading to know the hidden intents and purposes of the Lord for His people. It was unclear to Moses how God's glorious plan for His people could come to fruition if their sin would only provoke His wrath and judgment upon them. The Lord had indeed bound Himself to His people, but Moses did not see how that would end in anything but disaster in light of Israel's sin. Thus, Moses sought deeper knowledge of God's character and ways.

ASTONISHING REQUEST #2

14 And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.

15 And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.

16 For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.

Moses knew there was no point in Israel going anywhere if the Lord did not go up with them. Although the Lord agreed to accompany Moses (vs. 14), Moses pressed Him to make the same promise for all the people of Israel, not just for him personally. {Moses understood that if God's presence did not go with them, Israel would be just like any other nation, and their entire mission would be futile. Thus, he prayed that

the Lord would not send them forward if He was unwilling to go with them (vs. 15).}^{q2}

Moses was holding out for something unspeakable. This was his second astonishing request: that a holy God would have so much mercy upon a stiff-necked people that He would go up with them to the Promised Land and thereby make them distinct among all the peoples of the earth (vs. 16).

ASTONISHING REQUEST #3

17 And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.

18 And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

19 And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.

In response to Moses' request to accompany His people, the Lord answered in the affirmative (vs. 17). God would go up with this stiff-necked people. He would extend His grace not just to Moses but also to the rebellious people for whom Moses interceded. He went on to tell Moses that he had found favor in His sight and that the Lord knew him by name. That drove Moses to inquire ever more deeply into the nature of such a God who is lofty and exalted but also willing to show such favor to undeserving sinners.

Moses' request to see God's glory (Ex. 33:17-18). The only thing left for Moses was to look into the depths of God's goodness for the assurance that His promise could really happen for such a wicked people. {In other words, he needed to know what about God's own nature made His promise even possible.}^{q3}

Moses was on the brink of asking the unthinkable. {Like a person who stares into the heart of the sun or gets security clearance to a top-secret meeting, Moses desired the loftiest thing of all—to see the glory of the Lord Himself (vs. 18)! This was his most astonishing request yet.}⁹⁴

What did Moses mean by that request? What, exactly, did He want to see? What is the “glory” of God? Certainly, he was not merely asking for a special, mystical experience. He was not asking to see a physical manifestation because that would not be God’s essence. Rather, what Moses sought was a deeper understanding of the nature and essence of God. In asking to see the Lord’s glory, he meant something like: “Let me have a glimpse into Your divine nature. Let me see the meaning of Your great name. Show me the foundation of this amazing promise. Give me some assurance that You will indeed grant Your saving presence to this stiff-necked people!”

Thus, out of Moses’ need for reassurance that God would not abandon him or Israel, he asked for a God-given security clearance to understand the depths of the Almighty. Moses’ daring request, in other words, was nothing less than a desire to have God confirm His stunning willingness to show such favor to an often rebellious and defiant people.

Next, however, we must understand another level of Moses’ appeal, namely, the meaning of “glory.” What is the “glory of God” that Moses desired to see? Many may be aware that the Hebrew word “glory” carries the idea of weightiness. When applied to a person, it describes a person of gravity, weight, and significance. {When applied to God, however, glory describes all that He is that makes Him infinitely significant.}⁹⁵ In other words, God’s glory is nothing less than a summary way to describe the infinite worth and beauty of God

because of the innumerable attributes that make Him who He is.

That is precisely what we see in God’s response one chapter later. At the very moment when the Lord showed Moses His glory, He proclaimed His attributes, describing Himself as compassionate, gracious, slow to become angry, full of faithfulness and truth, and forgiving (vss. 6-7). That is the glory of God—His supreme worth because of His cumulative perfections that eternally define who He is.

Thus, the plea of Moses to see the glory of God was a daring (but right!) request to gain a deeper understanding of God’s nature. That, in turn, led to God’s affirmation of Moses’ appeal, as well as God’s own definition of His name.

The Lord’s response (Ex. 33:19). {The Lord affirmed Moses’ request by promising to cause all His goodness to pass before Moses and to proclaim His name as He did so.}⁹⁶ Here it is important to see the theology unfolding in God’s reply. Moses asked to see the Lord’s *glory*, and in response, the Lord affirmed that He would show His *goodness* and proclaim His *name*. Thus, God’s glory, goodness, and name are parallel and complementary (cf. Isa. 48:9-11). That tells us two things.

{First, the parallel between God’s glory and goodness tells us that at the heart of God’s essence is His moral beauty and perfection that always and only does what is best for His creatures. That inherent truth about God would provide Moses the assurance and hope that He sought.

Second, in ancient times, someone’s name was more than a self-designation. It was seen as something that revealed who that person was. Therefore, the parallel between God’s glory and name indicates that God was going to reveal to Moses something essential to who He is.}⁹⁷ That brings us, then, to the definition of God’s name and glory.

{Upon Moses' request, the Lord proclaimed, in concentrated form, His glory, goodness, and name. He told Moses, "I . . . will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy" (Ex. 33:19). Although God would add more detail in chapter 34, this statement *is* the glory of the Lord.}⁹⁸ It is who He is and the summary of His essential glory that Moses desired to see. What the Lord revealed here about Himself explains how and why God could dwell among such sinful, rebellious people without causing their extermination. Thus, such a profound theological statement from the Lord deserves a careful and thoughtful explanation.

Clearly, the Lord desired to make known to Moses that His bestowal of grace and compassion on unworthy sinners proceeds from the very nature of His glory. As God's expanded statement in 34:6-7 indicates, God is also glorified by His wrath upon the unrepentant, but even there the emphasis is on God's proclivity toward grace and compassion. His wrath only lasts a few generations, but His mercy lasts for a thousand generations. God is unapologetically just and willing to judge the wicked, but He is not a God who takes pleasure in the death of the wicked. Rather, He is pleased when they turn from their evil ways and live (cf. Ezek. 33:11).

Why did God so closely identify His glory with His grace and compassion? Three components of the Lord's compassion on sinners can help us understand how it brings glory to His name.

{First, God's extension of grace and compassion to sinners is unconditional. That is, no inherent merit or worth in the sinner is required to earn God's bestowal of grace and compassion. There are no previous conditions that unworthy sinners have to meet to somehow merit the mercy, compassion, or grace they so badly need. That was clearly

the case for Israel. By Moses' own admission, they were a stubborn and stiff-necked people (Ex. 34:9). They met no conditions that could in any way force God's hand to bestow His favor, love, compassion, or grace. And yet God still offered it to them.

Second, God's bestowal of grace and compassion upon sinners is always a free gift. He has the right to dispense grace as He sees fit. God's grace toward sinners is not the result of a bargain or negotiation between two parties; rather, God offers it of His own free will. That is God's prerogative. He has grace and compassion on whomever He wills (33:19).

Third, God's lavish bestowal of grace and compassion is relational. The Lord clearly revealed to Moses that He desires a people for Himself. The Lord does not merely wish for earthly agents to do His bidding. He wants people to love Him and delight in His ways. In other words, the Lord's compassion comes from His desire to supply a remedy for sin so that He may delight in His people. His compassion and mercy are a means to bring reconciliation between Him and a sinful people so that He may dwell among them and they may find in Him their deepest delight.}⁹⁹

INHERENT LIMITATIONS FOR MOSES

EX. 33:20 And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

21 And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock:

22 And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:

23 And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

God used anthropomorphic language in verses 20-23 to describe how He would reveal Himself to Moses. We know that God is spirit and thus does not have a physical body (cf. John 4:24), so He was obviously not talking about a physical “face,” “hand,” or “back.”

{By declaring that His “face” is a deadly sight to humans, God emphasized His holiness in contrast to human frailty.}⁹¹⁰ He seemed to indicate not merely that *sinners* cannot see Him and live but that *the human race* cannot see Him and live.

Confusingly to modern readers, just a few verses earlier, Moses is said to have spoken with God “face to face” (Ex. 33:11). There is no contradiction, though, because as the rest of the verse indicates, the phrase “face to face” was an idiom meaning that Moses spoke with God as one would speak with a friend—not at a distance but up close and unhindered. The anthropomorphic reference to God’s “face” is simply used in two different ways in chapter 33.

In summary, we see in this intense episode that Moses needed assurance. Knowing the people of Israel’s propensity to provoke God and rebel against His ways, Moses feared that the future of the nation was in jeopardy. And indeed, it was! The golden calf episode reflected the spiritual condition of the people and so was only a harbinger of more to come.

Although the Lord did promise to accompany the people in response to Moses’ appeal, Moses needed the deepest assurance that all of God’s promises would remain fully intact. Thus, Moses pleaded to see God’s very glory. That is, he desired to see and understand what makes God who He is. Moses understood that any rock-solid assurance of Israel’s great future had to come from God and His own incomparable nature and not from the shaky nature of a sinful people.

Thus, the Lord revealed to Moses (and reveals to us) that God’s very nature leads Him to have compassion and grace on whom He will. That, God says, is His very glory and name. In other words, it is the glory of God to grant His grace and compassion to sinners. That is what it means for God to be God, and that was Moses’ deepest confidence that God could and would dwell among an undeserving people. His essential glory, goodness, and name means that He grants compassion and grace to the undeserving. That remains the great hope of undeserving sinners to this day.

—Jerod A. Gilcher

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Moses ask the Lord to make His ways known to him?
2. Why did Moses not want Israel to enter the Promised Land without God’s presence going with them?
3. Why did Moses need to know something about God’s nature?
4. What was Moses’ most astonishing request?
5. What is God’s glory?
6. How did God promise to grant Moses’ final request?
7. What is the relationship between God’s “glory,” “goodness,” and “name”?
8. Which of His attributes did God emphasize when describing His glory to Moses?
9. How does God’s compassion bring Him glory?
10. What does God’s warning about seeing His face in Exodus 33:20 teach us about the relationship between God and humans?

—Matthew Robinson

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

In a world that tends to focus exclusively on love, God's holiness is often overlooked. We prefer studying God's fatherhood and His adoption of us as children—the ways He has brought us near to Himself. Yet if we are to nourish our relationship with God and deepen our worship of Him, we must study the glory of His holiness.

In our first lesson of the quarter, we see that God's holiness and glory are interrelated. Moses could not stand the full glory of God in part because of God's perfect holiness. At the same time, being in God's presence transformed Moses and worked in him greater holiness, just as it should for us.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to see how Moses interceded for the Israelites and how God responded by showing him His glory.

Principle: to understand that God's holiness and glory are an integral part of His character.

Application: to transform our lives by the glorious presence of God, which distinguishes us from those who do not trust in Jesus.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Have you ever been tempted to give up on someone who is difficult, perhaps ending a friendship or avoiding a family member? God could have given up on the Israelites, whom He had rescued from slavery in the land of Egypt. Instead of following Him, they constantly rebelled and treated Him like a false god.

Our passage for this lesson occurs after the incident of the golden calf (Ex. 32)—an idol the Israelites constructed for themselves while Moses received the holy commandments of God. Even though they had just seen the glory of God revealed at Mount Sinai through

smoke and the sound of trumpets (19:7-25), the Israelites quickly abandoned their reverence and created a tangible idol to worship. This idol was something they could approach without fear, something that lacked both holiness and glory.

After Moses discovered what the Israelites had done, he chose to intercede for their sin, meeting with God and asking for His mercy. He asked that God demonstrated that mercy by His continuing presence with His people. God's response to Moses showed His steadfast love and mercy while also highlighting His holiness and glory.

DEVELOPING THE LESSON

1. The guidance of God's presence (Ex. 33:12-14). Our passage begins with Moses' first request to God: to gain greater knowledge of and guidance from God. Moses rooted this request in God's own knowledge of him: "Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight" (vs. 12). Just as God knew Moses, so He knows us, and He has our best interests at heart. Our temptation may be to doubt Him or choose what is easy for us—as the Israelites did with the golden calf—but our best interests are to have a greater understanding of God Himself and to reflect His glory as a result. The Israelites thought it was best to have a tangible, easy-to-understand God, but our God's holiness and glory exceed the deepest reaches of our wisdom.

Moses chose a different way than the Israelites. He knew he needed God's guidance, so he asked for a deeper knowledge of God in order to lead the Israelites well. The sign of God's favor and presence with Moses would be wisdom, which comes from

a relationship with Him. Likewise, the more we come to know God, the more wisdom He will give us. Our lives will be transformed when we submit to God and ask Him to reveal Himself.

2. The holiness of God's presence (Ex. 33:15-17). Moses continued his dialogue with God with a second request: for God's presence to go with His people. Without God's presence, the Israelites would be like any other nation. Although God may not visibly go with us today, as He did with the Israelites in the pillar of smoke and fire, His presence still distinguishes us from the rest of the world.

The commandments God had just given Moses on Mount Sinai were intended to call the Israelites to holiness. By following these rules, Israel would be marked as different from the rest of the world. The false gods of the nations were not holy and did not require holiness from their worshippers. The living God, however, *is* holy and could only dwell in the midst of the Israelites if they maintained the holiness to which He called them. They would do this imperfectly (and already had), so through this request Moses was essentially asking for God's continued forgiveness.

God could have refused this request and been perfectly just in doing so, for no one can achieve perfect holiness through the law. But God showed mercy to His wayward people. That mercy magnified His glory while still demonstrating His holiness and the need for the Israelites' lives to be transformed.

Although we do not need to follow the commandments of the old covenant, such as the specific regulations regarding worship in the tabernacle, our lives should still be different from the world because God's holiness has not changed.

3. The glory of God's presence (Ex. 33:18-23). In the final verses of our lesson, Moses asked to see God's glory.

God again showed His mercy to Moses and agreed to make Himself known, thus fulfilling in part Moses' first request to know God more. The glory of the Lord reveals His character. He not only proclaimed His name to Moses; He revealed His sovereignty, His goodness, and His mercy. God's glory is also so powerful that Moses could not stand to be in His full presence. Our God is unlike any false idol; without His mercy, we cannot stand before Him and live.

ILLUSTRATING THE LESSON

Even though we cannot see the whole glory of God and live, it transforms us and calls us to a life of holiness that reflects God.



CONCLUDING THE LESSON

Even though Moses was only able to see a part of God's glory, it was transformative. When he would speak with God, his face would become radiant (Ex. 34:29-35). Likewise, we cannot encounter the glory of God and remain the same (2 Cor. 3:18).

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In the next lesson, we will examine the significance of the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle.

—Katherine Robinson

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We need a mediator to stand in the breach and reconcile us to God (Ex. 33:12-13; cf. Ps. 106:23).
2. God's presence gives the church its worth and significance (Ex. 33:14-16; cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17).
3. The indwelling Holy Spirit assures us that we are chosen children of God (Ex. 33:16; cf. Rom. 8:16).
4. We find favor in God's sight because our Mediator, Jesus Christ, has found favor in His sight (Ex. 33:17; cf. Rom. 5:2).
5. God wants us to make bold requests of Him (Ex. 33:18).
6. There will always be more to learn about our glorious God (vss. 19-23).

—Matthew Robinson

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How would you define God's glory? How does Exodus 33:12-23 change your understanding of God's glory?
2. Why is studying the character of God relevant for daily life? How can knowing more of God's character help you grow in godliness?
3. Think of some common struggles you regularly face in your life (such as fear, anger, laziness, or lust). For each struggle, which attribute of God acts as the best remedy? For instance, how does the sovereignty of God serve as a cure for fear? How does the love of God serve as a cure for selfishness?
4. If you could get to heaven and forever enjoy all its eternal blessings, but God were not there, could you still be happy? Why or why not?

—Jerod A. Gilcher

ILLUSTRATED HIGH POINTS

I know thee by name (Ex. 33:12, 17)

A youth group leader offered the following icebreaker question at the beginning of a Sunday school class: "If you could have one wish granted, what would it be?" The assistant leader of the class, who was also a missionary, had a surprising answer. She said she would wish to know the names of everyone in the world so that she could bring a smile to people's faces when she greeted them by name on the mission field.

It feels good to be known and called by name, especially by someone we would not expect to know it. We can derive great comfort and joy from knowing that the God of the universe is on a first-name basis with us, just as He was with Moses.

If thy presence go not with me (vs. 15)

When I was in high school, my band director asked me to attend the first annual National Brass Symposium with him in Atlanta, Georgia. Even though it was the symposium's first year, thousands of musicians showed up for it. The reason it was so successful was that dozens of the best brass players in the world were teaching and performing at it. No one knew anything about the symposium itself yet, but they did know the *people* involved with it. The presence of so many incredibly talented musicians distinguished the symposium from other band events.

In Exodus 33, we see a similar principle. Nobody in the ancient world would have thought much of one small nation coming onto the scene. And yet the surrounding nations knew all about Israel by the time they reached the Promised Land. They were terrified because they knew Yahweh was in the midst of the Israelites (Josh. 2:9-11).

—Matthew Robinson

Golden Text Illuminated

“And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33:20).

Exodus 33:20 reveals the depth of God's glory and emphasizes humanity's limitations in comprehending the fullness of His divine presence. It invites us to approach God with reverence and awe.

We learn from this verse that our finite human vision is incapable of fully perceiving the grandeur and splendor of God's glory. Our eyes are limited to the physical, unable to comprehend the immense magnitude of His being. It is a humbling realization that the presence of God is so majestic and overwhelming that gazing upon His face would surpass our capacity to endure.

While we may be unable to see God's face, His glory is pervasive and evident throughout creation. In verse 18, Moses pleaded to God, “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.” In His response, God granted Moses a glimpse of His goodness by allowing him to see His back, revealing a fraction of His glory. This encounter illustrates that while God's full glory remains unseen by human eyes, He graciously reveals aspects of His splendor to those who seek Him. This may occur even through His creation and other ways we sometimes fail to notice (cf. Ps. 19:1).

Exodus 33:20 calls us to approach the glory of the Lord with the utmost respect. We are invited to recognize God's incomparable majesty and holiness, acknowledging our limitations and submitting to His greatness. In the presence of His glory, we are compelled to fall on our knees in humility and worship, recognizing the vast chasm between the divine

and the human.

God's invitation to Moses was only by His graciousness. The fullness of God's glory would have been too much for Moses, or anyone, to see. No one can look on the full glory of God and live. The sinfulness of humanity keeps us from being able to see the fullness of God. Moses could only have a small glimpse of the glory of God.

Even without fully beholding God's face, we can still experience the transformative power of His glory. As we seek His presence, immerse ourselves in His Word, and surrender to His will, we become vessels through which His radiance shines. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul wrote, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Through our relationship with Christ, we are gradually transformed into His likeness, reflecting His glory to the world around us.

The limitations of our mortal vision to see the fullness of God's glory do not diminish the presence and power of His glory in our lives. We are drawn into a deeper intimacy with God as we embrace a posture of reverence and awe. Although we cannot fully see His face, we are blessed to experience glimpses of His glory (just as Moses did), and we anticipate the day when our faith is realized. We shall behold His glory fully and entirely. In the meantime, let us strive to live in the radiance of His glory, constantly being transformed into His likeness and reflecting His magnificence to a world in need of His light.

—Page Brooks

Heart of the Lesson

Have you ever looked at a light that was so bright you could hardly see? If you have ever looked directly at the sun, you know the feeling! Moses had such an encounter in Exodus 33:12-23 as God revealed His glory to him. In this passage, we see there is a deep connection between God's presence and His glory and holiness. Where God is, there also His glory and holiness are. They cannot be separated.

1. Moses seeks assurance of God's presence (Ex. 33:12-15). Earlier in chapter 33, God told Moses that He would not be in the midst of the Israelites as they advanced into the Promised Land (vs. 3). Still, Moses pleaded for God's assurance that His presence would continue to guide the Israelites on their journey. As Moses emphasized the importance of God's presence, he intuitively recognized the holiness of God.

Moses understood that the presence of the holy God brings confidence and security to His people. In seeking assurance of God's presence, he recognized that God's holiness guarantees the fulfillment of His promises and the protection of His people. This realization invites us to trust in the holiness of God. We can rest knowing He will indeed do as He has promised to do in our lives.

2. Moses desires a revelation of God's glory (Ex. 33:16-19). Responding to Moses' request, God promised to show His goodness to Moses and to proclaim His name before him. Moses audaciously asked to see God's glory, wanting to witness firsthand the holiness of the Almighty.

In God's response to Moses, He explained that while He would pass by Moses and reveal His glory, no human can see His face and live (vs. 20). This

highlights that God's glory and holiness are beyond us as humans. God's glory is so awe-inspiring and transcendent that human beings cannot withstand it. The passage reinforces the eternal truth that the glory and holiness of God is beyond human comprehension, calling us to approach Him with reverence and a sense of wonder.

3. Moses encounters God's holiness (Ex. 33:20-23). Agreeing to Moses' plea, God instructed him to stand in a cleft of the rock while He passed by. As God passed, Moses was permitted to see His back but not His face.

Moses' glimpse of God's glory was transformative. It left an indelible mark on his life, reflected by the radiant glow on his face after the encounter (34:29-30). Even a glimpse of God's holiness has the power to change us, empowering us to reflect His divine radiance into the world. May we seek moments of encounter with God, embracing His holiness and allowing it to shape our character and actions through our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Exodus 33:12-23 illuminates the glory of God through Moses' earnest pleas and subsequent encounter with the Almighty. It highlights the significance of God's presence in shaping our confidence, reverence, and transformative experiences. God's glory is not a distant quality that is only in the heavens; it is a very real comfort to us as His people.

By recognizing the presence of God as a source of confidence, we are propelled into a deeper understanding of and reverence for Him. As we journey with God like the Israelites and Moses, may we constantly seek His holy presence and allow our lives to radiate His holiness to the world.

—Page Brooks

World Missions

What would it mean to see God's glory, or His glorious presence? In a direct sense, the Scriptures make it clear that this would be deadly. Moses asked to see God's glory, and God famously responded, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (Ex. 33:20). And yet, just a few chapters earlier, following the initiation of the covenant with the people of Israel, the Lord invited Moses and the elders of Israel to ascend and meet with Him. The text then notes, "Upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink" (24:11).

This makes sense when we consider it in light of the words of 2 Corinthians 4:6: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Jesus is the public face of God, and the glory of God is revealed in Him. John 1:14 notes that Jesus' disciples "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Jesus' role as the visible display of God's glory has a special place in missions. Many people from various backgrounds have given accounts of encountering Jesus in visions that led them to place their faith in Him. One powerful account is the testimony of the late Messianic Jewish leader David Chansky. After growing up in Boston in an Orthodox Jewish family, he joined the military as a young man. Chansky had a roommate who was straightforward in saying that he followed Jesus. Although he was genuinely living out what he believed, he was also respectful of Chansky's faith and culture.

The roommate began sharing Christ with Chansky, but Chansky wanted

nothing to do with Christianity or Jesus. In fact, when the roommate gave him a Bible, Chansky leafed through it and then ripped out the New Testament, handing it back to his roommate. He began to have questions, however, especially after reading Isaiah 53. He wondered whom the prophet could be talking about, thinking, *Can this be the Messiah? Can it be someone else? Can it be Jesus?*

One night, Chansky had a disturbing and radical dream. In his dream, he was rising up into the sky and found himself walking on top of the clouds. There he met a man and knew He was Jesus. Chansky told Him that he would leave everything and follow Him and that he would know that his dream and Jesus were genuine when three very specific requests were fulfilled. All three were fulfilled! For the final request, he found himself at a low-budget movie on the life of Jesus. As he looked at the screen, the actor's face changed, and he found himself looking at the same face of Jesus as he had seen in his dream. He then believed and trusted in Christ.

Chansky went through significant rejection and persecution from his family in Boston, but after some struggles, he entered the ministry and eventually became involved in the Messianic Jewish movement with congregations of Jewish people who believed and trusted in Jesus (Rosen, *Jesus for Jews*, Messianic Jewish Perspective). It is a remarkable story. God revealed His glory to Chansky in a dramatic manner through the Messiah. Chansky's response to that glory is also noteworthy, as he sought to live the gospel he had come to know and to share this good news with Jewish and Gentile people he encountered.

—Matthew Friedman

The Jewish Aspect

Exodus is not merely an exciting tale of liberation from a hostile enemy; it is the dramatic forming of a nation for God's glory. God promised to make Abraham a great nation (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-6; 17:1-8), and the miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt was God making good on that promise. That salvation act set the people apart as the special possession of Yahweh. The covenant given through Moses after that solidified and made explicit the relationship between God and Israel (cf. Ex. 19:5-6). Thus, Exodus is the historical record of God making good on His covenantal promises to make Israel a kingdom of priests, a prized possession, and the nation that would serve as His representatives on earth.

After four hundred years of captivity in Egypt, God powerfully delivered Israel through staggering plagues and signs. The nation then proceeded to form their new identity in the Sinai desert as the chosen people of the Lord. In order to do so, however, they needed to unlearn their pagan habits of the past through a complete renovation of their approach to life and theology.

In Exodus 20 through 31, the people received abundant instruction—first through the Ten Commandments (20:1-17) and then through copious regulations that taught them how to reflect the Lord's glory in every area of life in their particular context. That included laws about issues like enslavement (cf. 21:1-11), personal injuries (cf. vss. 12-32), property rights (cf. 21:33—22:15), the national feasts (cf. 23:14-19), and instructions for building the tabernacle (chaps. 25—31).

God delivered all those laws, decrees, and commandments directly to Moses at the top of Mount Sinai. Growing impatient and concerned,

the nation of Israel began to believe they would never see Moses again. They naturally went to Aaron, the designated leader in Moses' absence (cf. 24:14). They told him they wanted an idol constructed, apparently fearing that without a visible deity, they had no supernatural protection. After making a molten calf, Aaron proclaimed a feast for the next day, during which the people brought offerings and ate and drank. Then they "rose up to play," possibly a reference to immoral activity (32:6). They thought they could do these things while still worshipping Yahweh (cf. vs. 5), not recognizing the gravity of their actions.

That act of corporate idolatry in the camp of Israel led to the Lord's announcement that He would destroy the entire nation and begin again through Moses (vss. 9-10). Moses then quickly appealed to the Lord to stay His hand, not on the basis of Israel's worth but on the basis of God's worth and the covenant He had made. Moses reasoned that God's name would be profaned among the Egyptians if He abandoned His redeemed people so quickly after miraculously delivering them (vss. 12-13). The Lord agreed to spare His obstinate people but refused to dwell in their midst. In His place, He would send an angel (33:2-3). Why? If the Lord went into the midst of such a sinful people, they would be destroyed (vs. 5).

The situation created a very real dilemma that Moses could see. The Lord's refusal to dwell among His people obscured His purpose to distinguish them from all the nations of the earth (cf. vs. 16). That is what drove Moses to make his astonishing requests in chapter 33 that are the focus of today's text.

—Jerod A. Gilcher

Guiding the Superintendent

In today's text, Moses made two bold requests of the Lord. Learners will grasp the import of Moses' two requests more thoroughly if they consider what prompted the requests and how God answered the requests.

DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

1. Moses' request for the Lord to show His ways (Ex. 33:12-17). Moses' requests did not occur in a vacuum. The Lord had just solemnized His covenant with Israel (24:9-11) and given Moses instructions for living in a relationship with the Lord (24:12—31:18). But by the time Moses came down from the mountain, Israel had already broken the brand-new Ten Commandments by worshipping a golden image of a calf (32:1-6).

That breaking of faith occurred right before today's text. Moses made his requests because he wanted to know what unfaithful Israel's future would be with the Lord. As Israel's intercessor, Moses stood before God on their behalf to see whether the broken relationship could be restored and whether God would still dwell in their midst as He had promised while Moses was up on the mountain (29:45-46).

2. Moses' request for the Lord to show His glory (Ex. 33:18-23). Moses asked to see God's glory, but the Lord would respond by proclaiming His "name" as He passed by Moses (vs. 19). In the Old Testament, "name" connotes one's reputation (cf. Gen. 11:4) and character (cf. Ps. 33:21). In Exodus 34, when the Lord fulfilled His promise to Moses, He proclaimed His name through seven divine attributes. He is merciful, gracious, long-suffering, full of goodness, full of truth, forgiving toward repentant sinners, and just in punishing unrepentant sinners (vss. 6-7). In this

way, the Lord supplied a fitting answer to the question behind Moses' two requests: Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord would be possible because of His gracious character.

Moses showed that he viewed the Lord's response as satisfactory when he quoted Exodus 34:6-7 back to Him the next time Israel jeopardized their collective relationship with God (Num. 14:17-19). The Lord's answer to Moses' two requests satisfied later biblical writers as well (cf. Ps. 103:8; Mic. 7:18; Neh. 9:17; 2 Chr. 30:9).

Modern believers often wish they could experience the glory of God as Moses requested in Exodus 33:18 and experienced in 34:5-7. That warrants two responses. First, since God's answer to Moses' two requests came in the form of proclaiming God's character, any believer who experiences God's forgiveness experiences the substance of Moses' experience.

Second, the New Testament teaches that those who behold "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4) encounter a greater glory than Moses experienced (cf. 3:12-18). Further, believers "are changed into the same image from glory to glory" (vs. 18). Of course, we experience that glory "by the Spirit of the Lord" rather than by a literal mountaintop experience. Nevertheless, by grace through ongoing faith, Moses' experience is replicated in modern believers' lives.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Teachers often tell children to ask any question they have because others might have the same unspoken question. In a similar way, Moses asked what all subsequent biblical writers wanted to know: What is God like, and how does He interact with sinners?

—Matthew Swale

FOR DAILY MEDITATION

MONDAY, Dec. 1. Deut. 5:22-29.

God's glory at Sinai. The Israelites heard God's voice and were so frightened that they thought they might die if they heard it again, so they asked Moses to go near to God and hear all that He would speak. Whatever Moses relayed to them, they would do. Their posture of reverent fear pleased God. He wanted them to listen and to obey His commandments so it would go well with them and their descendants. It pleases God when we listen to His voice and obey His commands.

TUESDAY, Dec. 2. Ex. 33:1-6.

Unable to live in God's presence. Sometimes the truth hurts. God refused to accompany His chosen stiff-necked people after they made a golden calf to worship. He did provide an angel, and He fought off their enemies, but He withdrew His own dear presence so that they would not be destroyed. Our holy God is an all-consuming fire who will not bless disloyalty.

WEDNESDAY, Dec. 3. Ps. 85:1-9.

Revive us again. The psalmist recalls God's favor on the land and extols God's forgiveness of sin. God withdrew His wrath and turned from His anger to restore and revive His people. Remembering God's steadfast love, the psalmist requests God to do the same for his generation so that they might hear His words and rejoice in God, their salvation. May we remember God's steadfast love and call upon Him to revive us so that we too can hear His words and rejoice in His salvation.

THURSDAY, Dec. 4. Ps. 27:1-14.

Living in God's presence. We can be confident and not fear because the Almighty Creator saves, sustains, and

shields us. He covers us and keeps us safe from enemies. David asked God for one thing. He wanted to live close to the Lord, to dwell in God's house so he could seek His face and gaze upon His beauty. Is that what you want too?

FRIDAY, Dec. 5. Ex. 34:29-35.

God's glory reflected. The forty days and nights Moses spent fasting and communing with the Most High God changed him. Everyone noticed his radiant face after he descended Mount Sinai—everyone, that is, but Moses. He had been wholly focused on the Holy One, listening to His commands. We may not climb a Mount Sinai as Moses did, but we too will reflect God's glory when we spend time in His presence and focus on Him.

SATURDAY, Dec. 6. 2 Cor. 3:7-18.

God's glory unveiled. When Moses met God at Mount Sinai, his face shone with God's glory. That encounter introduced the law—a law that was glorious but could not come close to the glory of the righteousness revealed in Christ by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings freedom. The Lord Jesus removes the veil so believers can see Him and His glory. As we gaze upon Jesus, we are transformed and conformed to His image.

SUNDAY, Dec. 7. Ex. 33:12-23.

Beholding God's glory. Moses had experienced intimacy with God when he fasted on Mount Sinai (cf. 34:28). He knew God's presence and goodness, but he wanted more. He wanted to see God in all His glory. God showed Moses more, but He did not show Him the fullness of His glory because Moses would not have been able to endure it. Often, like Moses, we do not realize the weight of what we are asking. One day we will see His full glory when we see Jesus face to face.

—Lynda Kopacz