

## Exodus 34

This chapter can be divided into three segments. These segments are God's self-revelation, the new covenant, and Moses' shining face.

We begin with the self-revelation of God. Moses has been trying to get a handle on God's identity and God's "ways" ever since the burning bush. The central question in this moment is, is God the kind of God who can forgive (and by extension travel with the Hebrews once again)? The answer to that question is only answered after Moses remakes the Ten Words on stone tablets. In a sense this is a reminder that God's self-revelation and God's ways will be defined not only by what Moses is about to hear, but by what is written on the tablets. The self-revelation of God is that God can forgive because God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love...forgiving iniquity, transgressions and sin..." God however is not a softie in that God does not "clear the guilty" but visits the iniquity of the parents on the children. This does not mean that God directly punishes the children, but that what the parents do wrong has lasting effects on the children. In response Moses asks for the forgiveness not of the people's sins, but of "our" sins and asks that God take "us" for an inheritance. Moses now identifies with the people.

The second section of this chapter has to do with the covenantal renewal. This is a two-way covenant. God will perform certain acts and the people are to respond by obeying God's rules. This is a covenant similar to a king-vassal agreement. God will perform marvels including driving out all the people presently occupying the land which has been promised to the Hebrews. The rules which shall govern the people can once again be summed up under ten headings. 1) Don't make covenants with other people/gods. 2) Don't make molten gods. 3) Keep the feast of unleavened bread. 4) the first born belong to God. 5) keep the sabbath 6) Keep the Feast of Weeks (first fruits). 7) Males shall appear before God three times a year. 8) No sacrificial blood and leavened bread/no Passover sacrifice left till morning. 9) the best of everything will be offered to God. 10) you shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk. These ten rules/words can then be divided into three categories. The first category (1-2) are rules which will assist the Hebrews in not falling prey to the Canaanites. They focus on not being absorbed into a culture which worships other gods and follows other practices. This separateness includes no inter-marriage. The second category (4) focuses on insuring that God is seen as creator and that there is no worship of creation itself. The third category (5-10) focuses on insuring that the sabbath and time itself is not ruled by nature, but by God's commands. In other words, it is God that sets the idea of time, not the sun, moon, stars, and seasons.

The third section of this chapter has to do with the strange glow emanating from Moses after his encounter with God. The word translated as shining, can be translated as beam, beaming light rays, or horns (Michelangelo carved Moses with horns). More to the point, the description implies that the very creative light of God is being transmitted by Moses to the people. In this way, the people who could not go to God (too dangerous), are approached by God through Moses and the new covenant (where their fear can be set aside).

**Reflections:** Each of us carries with us an image of the "Old Testament" God. Often this image is of an angry, wrathful God, who is about war and death. This text reminds us that God is the God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. This is the God who forgives. At the same time though this is the God who allows people to suffer the consequences of their iniquities (violations of God's loving law). This is the God who cares about people and about God's plan for the redemption of the world. Thus, we have one God in both testaments...who is love.

Questions:

1. How would you describe God to someone who has never read the scriptures?
2. Which of the ten new rules makes the most/least sense to you, and why?
3. Who transmits God's "light" to you?