

EXODUS—WEEK 18

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Cover Picture is Moses' Descent from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments by Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680) on display at the Royal Palace, Amsterdam

God starts setting up the mechanism of His personal relationship with His people. First, He (in the person of His angel) draws closer to Moses and to the elders. Then He lets them see some of His glory, and then Moses dumps commitment on them in the form of covenantal blood.

Lastly, Moses goes up on the mountain for 40 days of direct instruction.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

Exodus 23:20–24:18 — The Presence of the LORD
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1 Exodus 23:20–22

“Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.”

This passage contains valuable clues to one of the great mysteries of the Old Testament. Often the appearance of an angel leaves the reader wondering, “Was that just an angel, or a theophany, or what?” Some passages are clear; others are not. Here, God is sending an angel, but he carries great authority.

God equates the angel’s voice with God’s voice when He says, *“Beware of Him and obey His voice.”* The angel’s words are God’s words. That’s not surprising, since “angel” means “messenger”. Relaying God’s words is pretty much what angels do.

But God says, *“My name is in Him.”* What does that mean? Obviously, *“My name is in Him,”* means something important. So, who is this guy?

Many commentators think that this is the LORD himself. That’s why the New King James’ Version capitalizes the pronouns in this passage. God also says, *“do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions.”* At minimum, God has given this angel some kind of judgement power. Also, any rebellion would be *against Him*.

On the other hand, the LORD Himself appears many times in Exodus (e.g., in a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night) and Moses simply describes those incidents as the LORD appearing. Sometimes Moses uses “the angel of the LORD” (Ex 3:2) or “the glory of the LORD” (Ex. 24:16) to describe the LORD showing up, instead of just an “angel.” It seems that God entering His creation is more like “sticking His toe in” than His fully leaving eternity to come here. No description we can understand could be comprehensive.

So, we’re not going to fully understand this side of eternity. All we can be sure of is that *“My name is in Him”* conveys significant power and authority.

That fits. Names mean a lot.

We are called Christians. God’s name is in us too. Do not take this lightly. We have more power and authority than we realize; the great saints certainly had plenty. If Jesus is our Lord and the Holy Spirit lives in us, then we are His messengers. So, what are we supposed to do with that?

Well, it’s definitely not to just sit back and enjoy God’s blessings. That’s for sure. We were saved for a purpose. Do you know your calling? Have you figured out your Personal Mission Field?

<https://www.ailbe.org/resources/videos/item/8441-personal-mission-field>

2 Exodus 23:23–33 (ESV)

“When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces. You shall serve the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. None shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land. And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

This passage begins and ends with warnings against serving other gods. Good grief, what could possibly possess an Israelite to do something like that? What’s the temptation? The Israelites have seen—and continue to see—signs and wonders that confirm that the LORD is the one true God. They have watched the Egyptian gods get mocked, overwhelmed, and destroyed. Why would they want to worship “gods that are not gods”?

Well, it turns out that the references to other gods not being gods at all will come later in the Bible—specifically 2 Kings 19:18, Jeremiah 16:20, Acts 19:26 and Galatians 4:8. Up to this point, the LORD is only described as being dominant. For example:

“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” — Exodus 15:11 (ESV)

“Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.” — Exodus 18:11 (ESV)

The Israelites have been enslaved in a polytheistic culture for twenty generations. Now they’re slowly being peeled away from that mindset.

Our secular culture of hedonism and affluence may be even worse. We need a revival. Political attempts to make marginal improvements haven’t worked. We need radical change brought by the Holy Spirit.

We can’t get this done; only God can. We need to pray for this—and be patient.

It’s a big project.

3 Exodus 24:1–4a (ESV)

Then he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.”

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD.

The vote was unanimous. They all *answered with one voice*.

“All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.”

And this was after *Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules*. They knew what they were agreeing to; there was no fine print.

So *Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD*.

Good. Better to get this in writing. If they had had paper, and if the people were literate enough to write their own names, Moses would have had them sign it. That would have come in handy later.

The Israelites won’t just go on to break these rules; they’ll forget them. They will even make copies of what Moses wrote down and then lose those copies. Later, they will find them again and get all excited.

And Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.” And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. ... When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. — 2 Kings 22:8 & 11 (Also 2 Chronicles 34:14 & 19.)

How can this happen?

Complacency. Anything wondrous is exciting at first, but then it gets old.

The wonder of seeing all the miracles of the exodus hasn’t faded yet. But it will.

The same thing happens to us. Newborn Christians are, like newlyweds, full of excitement. But the things that were exhilarating when new become repetitive and boring later. We even get used to answered prayer.

Ask the LORD to rekindle your enthusiasm. The spark can come in many ways. You may think you need a particular prayer request granted to be reenergized, but God is more creative than that. That said, it’s okay to ask for a particular sign or a particular kind of sign. Don’t pretend you’re stronger than you are.

God loves admissions of weakness. He often honors an honest request for what a weak person needs—or even just wants.

4 Exodus 24:4b–11 (ESV)

He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

Covenants sure were bloody affairs. Before the invention of contract law, people had to make a big show of their covenant promises to give them an aura of legitimacy. Unfortunately, the most they could really achieve was to make it impossible for someone to say, “I didn’t think you were serious.” Enforcement was up to the individuals involved.

But since God is one of the individuals here, enforcement isn’t a problem. If an Israelite breaks this covenant, he sure isn’t going to say, “Yeah, so what are you going to do about it?”

Thus, this yucky ceremony seals the deal. When Israel later disobeys, there won’t be any debate about whether that qualifies as breaking a covenant.

The second paragraph is interesting because we know some things could not have happened. What exactly does, “*they saw the God of Israel,*” mean?

“*But,*” he said, “*you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.*” — Exodus 33:20 (ESV)

The passage only mentions God’s feet and the sapphire stone pavement He’s standing on. Then it notes that *he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel*. This conveys a sense of great size and intimidation—as if they could only see His feet while His head was above the clouds. *They beheld God, and ate and drank*, despite apparently wondering if God might *lay his hand on* them at any moment.

That’s about as unforgettable as an experience can get.

We need something just as unforgettable too. In our cushy, prosperous, free country with all our inalienable rights, we forget how tough life can be for persecuted Christians around the world. If we could actually experience, for just one day, what they experience, it would change our attitudes forever.

But that’s a missions trip no one has figured out how to take.

Would you sign up? For even just one day?

5 Exodus 24:12–18 (ESV)

The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. And he said to the elders, “Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them.”

Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

It seems that it’s okay for all the others to see the LORD’s feet but not His glory; only Moses gets to see that. So, what exactly does “*the glory of the LORD*” mean? Some references make it seem that seeing His glory is not far from seeing His face (something man cannot do and live).

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. — Exodus 34:29 (ESV)

And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. — Exodus 40:35 (ESV)

Other references are less dramatic.

And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. — Leviticus 9:23 (ESV)

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. — Luke 2:9 (ESV)

The glory of the LORD is always a wondrous, intimidating sight. But it appears at different times for different reasons and purposes. Thus, it can have different effects.

Life has different effects. We never know what’s in store for us next. That can be exciting or intimidating. Still, our goal must always be to seek God’s direction. That is the great challenge facing every Christian.

Thus, a big part of every Christian’s prayer life should be seeking His will. Every big decision should be laid before the LORD. If you feel so led, it’s okay to ask for a sign. There’s biblical precedent for that.

But, there’s one possibility that most Christians don’t think of. Sometimes the answer is, “You must choose; I’m not bailing you out on this one.” Making our own choices, even mistakes, can be essential.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. For what purpose did God save you?
2. What do people do nowadays that's equivalent to worshipping other gods?
3. What were you most excited about when you first became a Christian?
4. What would be the ideal mission trip for you?
5. Have you ever asked for a sign in prayer and then gotten one?