

# EXODUS—WEEK 27

## LOVE BEGETS THE BIBLE



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is The Worship of the Golden Calf by Jan Havicksz Steen (1626–1679)  
on display at The North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC (!!)*

Time to replace the Ten Commandment tablets that Moses broke. But Moses impetuously also asks to see God's glory. This shows his heart, and God rewards him—and all Israel. He gives some new instructions, particularly emphasizing the importance of the Sabbath.

Lastly, God launches Moses into a 40-day writing task. This begins the Bible.

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Thank you.

Exodus 33:18–34:28 — Love Begets the Bible  
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1 Exodus 33:18–34:3 (ESV)

*Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”*

*The LORD said to Moses, “Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain.”*

Moses’ request to see God’s glory is almost childlike. He just made a wonderful personal appeal to God’s mercy and won a reprieve for the people of Israel. God’s going to accompany them on their journey to the Promised Land. Now he just blurts out a request to see God’s glory.

What does “*show me your glory*,” mean anyway? From God’s response, we see that it must mean seeing God without veiling. Seeing His face would be more glory than even Moses can handle, so he only gets to see the LORD’s back. Still, God does grant this unique request.

God also gives Moses a mulligan on the stone tablets. Moses never asked for permission to destroy God’s handwork, nor for forgiveness for doing it. He doesn’t ask for replacements either.

But God replaces them, while letting Moses off the hook for his impetuous temper tantrum. This is beautiful “child of God” stuff. Sure, Moses is imperfect—he has been and will be error-prone—but here, he’s just being himself. He loves the LORD, and he’s speaking from the heart. He’s following the greatest commandment, which he will later record in Deuteronomy 6:5 (ESV).

*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*

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There’s a curious twist to this. “Love God *with all your might*,” sounds like it takes effort. Yet Moses asking to see God’s glory doesn’t take any effort.

Right; this part doesn’t take any effort. Simple infatuation-love is a gift, one we should ask for.

The other part of loving God is obeying His commands. That does take work. Still, it isn’t exactly effort-based either. Sure, if we make a mockery of Jesus’ lordship, that’s a disaster, but if we rely on our own strength to be the Christians He wants us to be, we fall into a trap.

We need to ask for the strength and the focus to grow in Christ so as to serve Him better. Ask for that too.

2 Exodus 34:4–9 (ESV)

*So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”*

We’re all familiar with the typical portrayal of the two tablets. Unfortunately, that image is probably pretty far off.

They are usually depicted as two large stones with round tops. They are often shown with five commandments written on each one—which we’ve already pointed out is wrong.

There’s no indication that they were large—and the rounded tops are unlikely. The Bible doesn’t detail what the tablets looked like; it’s just says that Moses *took in his hand two tablets of stone*.

In a Hebrew Bible, the Ten Commandments take up a space less than 4 x 4 inches on the page. Even if the finger of God writes in much larger letters, the Ten Commandments would still fit on both sides of a 12x12-inch tablet. Two of those would be plenty heavy. Consider these details.

While God made the first set of stones, this time Moses has to cut them. With primitive tools, this would involve splitting off pieces of shale or some similar rock. These stones would be like flagstones (which are heavy). If they’re big, they have to be thick or they’ll break when split off. Smaller ones can be thinner though. Also, rounding the tops would be difficult (not to mention pointless).

So, unless Moses can carry a couple of fifty-pound stones *in his hand*, they’d have to be small.

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Pray for our nation’s leaders. They bear a heavy burden too.

But we live in an age of partisan fervor. This can keep us from praying for them. It shouldn’t be that way; they need our prayers now more than ever.

Yes, they are often frustratingly inept. Who knows, they just might be as sinful as we are! Yes, they did volunteer for this line of work. Yes, yes, yes, a lot of things aren’t as they should be.

Ask the LORD to bless our leaders and their families. Ask Him to give them courage, wisdom, and peace.

3 Exodus 34:10–16 (ESV)

*And he said, “Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.*

*“Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.*

The psychological details here are fascinating. God says, “Behold, I am making a covenant.” As part of the covenant, He *will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation*. But the Israelites must keep their side of the bargain too. So, what exactly is their side of the bargain?

The LORD says, “Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst.” The words, “Take care,” indicate that there’s some kind of hazard or slippery slope involved. God confirms this by ending with, “lest it become a snare in your midst.”

Between these bookends, God warns them not to *make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land*. This is the slippery slope God tells them to *take care* to avoid. This is the snare.

Notice the specifics of how they are to avoid this slippery slope. They are to *tear down their altars and break their pillars*. All the “other gods” must go. And notice the ending— “lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land.” If they let people keep their false gods, it sets up the snare.

Then He explains the psychology of how this snare works. “*When they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.*”

It’s a three-step process. First you eat with them; then your sons marry their daughters; then your sons are led astray. That’s the slippery slope in detail. It’s a classic case of how people slowly fall away.

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“Lead us not into temptation,” is part of the Lord’s Prayer, but do we pay attention to what it says? This made it into the Lord’s Prayer because it is one of the top things to pray for. We deceive ourselves if we’re not attentive to spiritual dangers.

That attentiveness is the foundation of many essential prayers. Ask God to keep you from temptation.

Don’t just pray about the temptations you’re aware of; ask Him to open your eyes to the ones you aren’t.

4 Exodus 34:17–21 (NKJV)

*“You shall make no molded gods for yourselves.*

*“The Feast of Unleavened Bread you shall keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, in the appointed time of the month of Abib; for in the month of Abib you came out from Egypt.*

*“All that open the womb are Mine, and every male firstborn among your livestock, whether ox or sheep. But the firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb. And if you will not redeem him, then you shall break his neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.*

*“Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.”*

This section basically repeats, with some clarifications, commands the LORD gave before. First and foremost, God says, “You shall make no molded gods for yourselves.” Just in case it’s not obvious, the golden calf was **not** okay.

It’s funny how sometimes stating the obvious is useful, even necessary. My favorite example of this is from *Please Don’t Eat the Daisies* by Jean Kerr.

*“Christopher gets up ahead of the rest of us on Sunday mornings and he has long since been given a list of clear directives: ‘Don’t wake the baby,’ ‘Don’t go outside in your pajamas,’ ‘Don’t eat cookies before breakfast.’ But I never told him, ‘Don’t make flour paste and glue together all the pages of the magazine section of the Sunday Times.’ Now I tell him, of course.”*

We love children who do this, just as God loves His people. Still, it’d be cute if there was a Hebrew expression for “piece of work”, because that describes the Israelites (and us) to a tee.

One other clarification is a thing of wonder. “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.”

The Sabbath rest is more important than any deadline.

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People bend rules. We make up clever excuses for why something doesn’t apply to us or doesn’t mean what it sounds like it means. At harvest time, the Israelites will think, “Surely God wouldn’t want us to jeopardize the harvest.”

Wrong! Honoring the Sabbath means taking it seriously. We don’t kid around with the, “Thou shalt not” commandments. Why kid around with this one?

Ask God to show you where you’re bending the rules. This doesn’t mean you should keep the Sabbath the way everyone else does. You should rest from whatever is work for you. Studying history is work for some people (e.g., students) but a pastime for others. Dedicate the day to God and ignore the rat race.

And make sure you put your deadlines on hold.

5 Exodus 34:22–28 (NKJV)

*“And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year’s end. Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the LORD God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders; neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.*

*“You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover be left until morning. The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”*

*Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.*

The New King James is better here because it capitalizes “He” in the last verse. This makes it clear that God wrote the Ten Commandments on the tablets (which He said He would do in 34:1). Thus, we know that the LORD wasn’t talking about the Ten Commandments when He said to Moses, *“Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.”*

Earlier (in verse 24:4) we saw Moses write down what the LORD had said up to that point. That was on his own initiative in reaction to the people saying, *“All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.”*

Now the LORD tells him to *write these words* down. It appears that this took Moses forty days and forty nights, while he neither ate bread nor drank water. The expression “forty days and forty nights” makes it sound like Moses didn’t sleep either, but “forty days and forty nights” is just a common Hebrew colloquialism for a forty day span of time.

This is only the second time God has instructed Moses to write something down, and the other time was about a single incident (the defeat of Amalek).

*Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” — Exodus 17:14 (NKJV)*

This time feels more significant. Moses is getting down to the task of writing the Bible.

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Moses surely thought that leading Israel to the Promised Land was a big deal. Little did he know that his writings would be just as significant.

Do you keep a record of your walk with the Lord, particularly your prayers? I did this with my fellowship group, and it turned out to be more significant than we could have imagined.

Every time I review that journal, I am bowled over. God’s hand, and His strategic priorities, just leap off the pages.

Record your prayers. I cannot recommend this too highly.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What does it mean to love God with all your strength?
2. Does politics corrupt people?
3. Have you ever caught yourself on a slippery slope?
4. How is your honoring of the Sabbath different or unique?
5. Have you ever journaled anything?