

What Makes God Tick?

Exodus 33-34

Signs

The other night Joel and I sat down to watch a movie called 'Signs', starring Mel Gibson. It is a movie loosely based around the crop circles that have appeared at certain times around the world. In this movie, the crop circles are made by aliens who are invading earth. However, the centre of the movie is not the alien invasion. Rather, the centre is on the character played by Mel Gibson. As the movie proceeds, we find that Gibson's character used to be an Episcopal or Anglican clergyman in a small regional town somewhere near Philadelphia in the US. However, in the movie, he has lost his faith because of a car accident in which his wife was killed. The story centres around his grappling with his faith. Now, as far as the story goes, he, his brother, and his two children live on a farm. This farm grows corn, and is one of many locations around the world where crop circles begin to appear. They are followed by spacecraft whose presence is made known through lights in the sky. The first appearance of these lights is in Mexico and Mel Gibson and his family see them on television. They are all apprehensive, if not scared. And so, late that night Gibson and his brother, Meryl sit late into the night talking about it while the children sleep. Meryl turns to his brother and says.
'Give me some comfort.'
Gibson thinks for a while and then says the following to his brother.
*'People ... break down into two groups.
When they experience something lucky...
Group number 1 sees it as more than luck, more than a coincidence.
They see it as a sign...
Evidence that there is someone out there watching out for them.
Group number 2 sees it as just pure luck, a happy turn of chance...
I'm sure that people in group number 2 are looking at those 14 lights in a very suspicious way.
For them, the situation is a 50/50.
Could be bad.
Could be good.
But deep down, they feel that whatever happens, they're on their own.
And that ... fills them with fear.
Yeah, there are those people.
But there's a whole lot of people in group number 1 and they see those 14 lights and they're looking at a miracle.
And deep down they feel that whatever's going to happen there'll be someone there to help them.
And that fills them with hope.'*

*So, what you have to ask yourself is what kind of person are you?
Are you the kind that sees signs, sees miracles?
Or do you believe that people just get lucky.*

The conversation goes on for a bit longer.

Meryl admits that he is from group number 1.

And finally, Meryl turns to Gibson and says,

So, which type are you?

Gibson dodges the question for a moment and tries to tell his brother that it doesn't matter what he is, as long as he has found comfort in what he has said to him.

But then the camera records Mel remembering his wife's death.

And finally he turns to his brother and utters the words.

There is no one, Meryl.

We are all on our own.

For those who have believed, there is nothing so crushing to the spirit than to come to the realisation that God is not present.

That God is not there.

Or that God has withdrawn his presence.

This is the situation that is being faced by the Israelites in Exodus 33.

The covenant has been broken.

God has withdrawn his presence.

And Israel faces his absence.

It is a terrifying prospect.

Let's see what happens.

Exodus 23-34

Remembering Exodus 32

Exodus 33

Exodus 34:6-7

- A response to the request of Moses
- The meaning of the words
- The words in their context

Exodus 34:6-7 and other parts of Scripture

Hosea 11:1-10

Romans 3:21-26

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| Introduction | Let's summarise what happened in Exodus 32. We saw how the people of God noticed the absence of Moses. They felt alone. They sought to compensate for these feelings by creating a god who could be visible and therefore present. |
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| | <p>But this desire backfired on them. The god they created simply alienated them from God. We heard how God sought to distance himself from them. Instead of being 'my people' they became 'your people'. We also saw how Moses intervened. He requested that God not proceed to cut his people loose. And we saw how the intercession of Moses was successful. God relented concerning judgment. He changed his mind. However, when we arrive at chapter 33 there is are still some outstanding issues. Let's see how they are dealt with.</p> |
| <p>¹The Lord said to Moses, "Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring I will give it.' ²I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ³Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."</p> | <p>The first issue arises in verse 1. Throughout the book of Exodus God has referred to the people of Israel as 'my people'. In Exodus 32 they sinned against him and broke the covenant. This was reflected in the statement to Moses that the Israelites were 'your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt.' In verse 1 some of this has changed. The Israelites are not 'your people'. Instead, they are 'the people'. Also, they are not the people God brought up out of the land of Egypt. They are still the people that Moses brought up out of the land of Egypt. However, they are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God is the God who swore an oath to give Abraham, Isaac, Jacob AND THEIR OFFSPRING the land. In other words, God is still their God. But the covenant has been breached. It is broken by sin. The problem is emphasised by verse 2. God does not promise to go with his people. He doesn't even promise that his angel will go with them. All he promises is that 'an angel' will go before them. And then, in verse 3 he makes himself clear. He will not go with them. He can't go with them. For they are sinful by nature and further sin in his presence would only incur further judgment.</p> |
| <p>⁴When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. ⁵For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.'" ⁶Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.</p> | <p>In verse 4 we are told of the people's reaction. They are shattered by it. After all, some of their sin in chapter 32 came out of this deep desire to have a symbol of his immediate presence with them. Now they not only don't have the symbol of God's presence. They also don't have his presence. And to make their isolation complete, they strip off their ornaments, which were reminders of the gold trinkets they used to make the idol out of in the previous chapter.</p> |

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| | <p>From now on they would be without ornaments and false gods. And they would also be without the immediate presence of the real god.</p> |
| <p>⁷Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. ⁸Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. ⁹When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. ¹⁰And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. ¹¹Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.</p> | <p>Verses 7ff take up the theme of the presence of God. You will remember that in Exodus 25-31, God had given Moses instructions about building the tabernacle. The tabernacle would be the symbol of God's abiding presence in the midst of his people. However, the tabernacle had not yet been built. And now it looked as though it might not be built because Israel was going without the presence of God in their midst. So Moses puts an extraordinary plan into action. He goes outside the camp of the Israelites and pitches a tent. It is a sort of private tent of meeting with God. There are not priests, no cult, no ritual. It is simply a place where Moses can meet with God. And in plain sight of all the people, God would come to him. They were without the presence of God. But Moses was immersed in the presence of God. And there in the tent, God would speak to Moses face to face. Where Israel was isolated and alienated from God, God would come to Moses and speak to him face to face, as friends speak with each other.</p> |
| <p>¹²Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' ¹³Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." ¹⁴And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." ¹⁵And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here." ¹⁶For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"</p> | <p>Verse 12 gives us an example of the sort of face-to-face conversations that occurred between God and Moses. And the one that is recorded takes up the very issue of God's presence. Moses starts by remembering that he is one to whom God says 'I know you by name and you have also found favour in my sight.' The only other person in the Old Testament who is said to have found favour in God's sight is Noah. But no one else in the Old Testament is said to know God by name. The relationship between Moses and God is very special. And on the basis of this relationship, Moses asks God for particular consideration. First, he asks to be able to know God's ways. In other words, he says that he wants to understand God's essential personality. He wants to know what makes God tick. He desires a full understanding of what it is that guides God's actions in the world, what controls the way he works, what lies at the core of his being. Moses wants to know that God has norms of working. He wants to know what those norms are. He wants to know what being God is all about. This is the first thing Moses wants – to know God's ways. But there is a second thing he wants from God. He not only wants something for himself. He also wants something for the nation of Israel.</p> |

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| | <p>He wants him to acknowledge that Israel is 'his people'. Moses wants God to restore relationship with Israel. He wants God to be their God and them to be his people. Moses not only wants God's favour to embrace him. He also wants it to embrace the nation of Israel. In verse 14 God responds. He neatly answers Moses's first desire. God will go with Moses and will give him rest. But Moses wants more. Verse 15 spells this out. He wants God to go with his people. This is what makes the people of God distinctive – God with them and God for them.</p> |
| <p>¹⁷And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."¹⁸Moses said, "Please show me your glory."¹⁹And 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."²⁰But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."²¹And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock,²²and 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."²³Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."</p> | <p>And God's response comes in verse 17. 'This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.' God promised Moses that he will grant his request. We can only presume that God means both requests – to know God's ways, and to go with his people. However, there is still some ambiguity. And this ambiguity has to be held in tension for a while longer. In verse 18 Moses puts a third request – he requests that he might be shown God's glory. In the Old Testament, God's glory is the thing that makes God shine. In other words, this is a development of the first request of Moses. Moses is asking to see God's very self. He is asking to see the very thing that makes God God. God's response is recorded in verse 19. Moses asked to see God's very self. God tells Moses that his goodness will be made to pass before him. He will make known to Moses the core of his being, which is his free giving of benevolence, mercy and grace. However, at the core of his being, God is God and humans cannot know the depths of God's glory. Therefore God will shield him from the absolute glory of his presence.</p> |
| <p>¹The 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."²Be 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."³No 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."⁴So 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."⁵The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of</p> | <p>Moses has now been assured of a private revelation of God's presence. He must prepare. The shattered tablets of commandments are to be replaced. The original words that were inscribed on them must be reinscribed. Moses must present himself alone on the mountain. Not even animals are to be within grazing distance. And so it is that Moses prepares. He cuts the two tablets of stone and rises early. He ascends Mount Sinai with the tablets in hand. And with this, we come to Exodus 34:6-7. These verses are the core of what these chapters are about. They contain one of the key revelations of God in the Old Testament.</p> |

the LORD. ⁶The 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, ⁷keeping 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." ⁸And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. ⁹And 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."

The number of times these words are repeated in full or in part throughout the Old Testament indicate that they were probably committed to memory and recited on a regular basis by individuals and groups.

Now, there are some important observations to make about what happens here.

First, we can look at how these verses respond to Moses's request.

Second, we can look at these verses from the perspective of the meaning of the words.

And third, we can look at what these verses mean in their context.

- A response to the request of Moses

Okay, let's start with these verses as a response to Moses.

Let's remember what Moses asked for.

He asked to understand God's ways.

And he asked to see God's glory.

Now when it comes to these verses, what do we find?

What is fascinating is that we don't find a description of what God looked like in terms of visual stimuli.

There is no visual description.

What we have instead is words.

We have words describing who God is in terms of his name and then who he is in terms of his character.

This observation is critical.

This is very important for Hebrew faith.

It is very important for Christian faith.

You see God reveals himself in words.

What he wants us to know about him can be communicated in words.

It is not fundamentally communicated in experience but by apprehending the meaning of words.

God is known through words.

This is why Jews and Christians spend so much time studying the Scriptures.

It is why the central part of what they do is hearing from the Scriptures and having them explained.

God reveals himself in words.

- The meaning of the words

Okay, having made this point, let's now take a look at the words he uses to describe himself.

There are seven statements about God here.

He is merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, faithful, keeping steadfast love, and forgiving.

The word 'merciful' is probably related to the Hebrew word for 'womb' and therefore probably means the sort of positive inclination that a mother has for her child.

It is a womb-like, mother love.

It is full of positive disposition.

It is warm and accepting and puts up with anything.

Gracious means a completely positive inclination.
It is something that is given without cause or warrant.
It is unmerited favour.
The term 'slow to anger' literally means 'long-nosed'.
In the ancient world anger was often associated with being breathed out through the nose.
Well, God's nose is long and therefore his anger has a chance to cool off.
We saw this in Exodus 32:10 and 12 where the Hebrew talks literally about God's anger being 'the heat of my nostrils'.
Here we are told that God's nature is to allow his anger to cool off.
The phrase 'abounding in steadfast love' contains a key Old Testament word 'hesed', which means love.
The use of this word throughout the Old Testament fills out its meaning. It refers to God's spontaneous, surprising, unexpected, unobligated and overflowing kindness, graciousness, and love.
And we are told here that God is full of this.
He abounds in hesed.
And verse 7 tells us that he is committed to 'keeping' steadfast love.
The word 'faithfulness' is often used in association with 'steadfast love' and refers to God's complete reliability.
Lastly, we are told that God is forgiving.
The word literally means 'to lift'.
The idea is that God relieves those who have broken the covenant from their burden of their sin.
He relieves them of the burden of punishment.
However, before we leave the meaning of these words, I probably need to explain the contrast that is in verse 7.
In verse 7 we are told that God keeps steadfast love for thousands and forgives their iniquity, transgression and sin.
However, we are also told that he will by no means clear the guilty but will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation.
The contrast is between him keeping steadfast love for thousands and his visiting iniquity on future generations.
To really understand this contrast, we need to understand the meaning of the Hebrew word for 'thousands'.
Our version of the Bible literally just has the word 'thousands'.
However, a parallel passage in Deuteronomy 7:9 adds the word 'generations'.
And this is implied here.
In other words, God is telling us here that while he does punish sin this punishment is limited, while his disposition to forgive is almost endless.
So, when we put all of this together, what is the overwhelming impact of these verses?
Well, on the one hand, God is saying that he is a God who cares about sin.

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| | <p>Sin is serious. Sin cannot be forgotten. It represents a breach of relationship and this is hardly trivial. However, on the other hand, God is saying that his overwhelming disposition is toward mercy and kindness. He will do whatever he can to deal with sin and forgive the sinner. He will be surprisingly gracious and kind and merciful. This is his fundamental disposition – for mercy to triumph over judgment.</p> |
| <p>¹⁰And 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. ¹¹"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. ¹²Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. ¹³You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim ¹⁴(for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), ¹⁵lest 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, ¹⁶and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. ¹⁷"You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal. ¹⁸"You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt. ¹⁹All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. ²⁰The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty-handed. ²¹"Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. ²²You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The words in their context</u> <p>Now let's have a look at these words in their context. The book of Exodus has told us that God promised an oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be their God and the God of their descendants. God has honoured that oath in Exodus by rescuing his people out of Egypt. He has formally adopted them in a contractual, covenant relationship. In Exodus 25 that covenant is signed, sealed, and delivered. But in Exodus 32 the people of God break the covenant. Since the covenant is broken, he has every right to walk away from it. He could continue his oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by continuing it through Moses. And this is what he threatens to do. But Moses intervenes. He pleads with God to change his mind. And he does. He will still fulfil his oath to the patriarchs by bringing them into the promised land. However, in chapter 33 he has not yet got to the stage where they are his people again. He has not yet got to the stage where he will be present among them as their God. We have got to the stage where he is willing to have the commandments written up again. In other words, the symbols of the covenant are going to be put back into place, indicating that the covenant is back on. However, God has not said anything definite. And this is where verses 6-7 come in. You see, in verses 6-7 God is revealing his character to Moses. He is telling Moses what makes him tick. And the clear word is that he is a God whose overwhelming desire is to forgive, to have surprising mercy, love, and kindness. In other words, when Moses pleaded with God, he was pleading</p> |

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| <p>²³Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. ²⁴For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.</p> <p>²⁵You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover remain until the morning.</p> <p>²⁶The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."</p> <p>²⁷And the LORD said to Moses, "Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." ²⁸So 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.</p> <p>²⁹When 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. ³⁰Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.</p> <p>³¹But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. ³²Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. ³³And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.</p> <p>³⁴Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, ³⁵the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him. (ESV)</p> | <p>correctly. He was urging God to follow his own disposition. He was urging God to be God. And the rest of this chapter and the rest of the book shows God to be what he says he is in these verses. He is in action the God he is in word. And so he restores the covenant despite Israel's breach of it. He forgives. He acts with surprising goodness and mercy. He does what he is under no obligation to do because of Israel's action. But he does what he cannot help but do – forgive and love. So, in Exodus 35 the building of the tabernacle is begun. And in Exodus 40:34-38 we read this... <i>³⁴Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵And 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. ³⁶Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. ³⁷But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. ³⁸For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys. (ESV)</i> The book of Exodus closes with God doing the surprising and unexpected. Given what Israel had done in the relationship, the expected thing would have been for God to have left them. But he does the unexpected, the unmerited. He acts in mercy and grace. He remains faithful though they are faithless. He remains loving. And gracious. And kind. And he accompanies them in their midst by day and night. He even gives them a physical reminder of this in the cloud and the fire.</p> |
| <p>Hosea 11:1-9 ¹When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. ²The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. ³Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. ⁴I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them. ⁵They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king,</p> | <p>What I'd like to do to wrap all of this up is to turn to the book of Hosea. I want you to look at Hosea 11. The setting for Hosea 11 is a courtroom setting. The protagonists are a father – God, and a son – the nation of Israel. The court is told that the Father has been a good father. He has been loving and kind. But the son has been rebellious and has continually broken relationship with the father. In verse 5 the punishment is announced – Israel will be led into exile in Assyria.</p> |

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| <p>because they have refused to return to me. ⁶The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them because of their own counsels.</p> <p>⁷My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all.</p> <p>⁸How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. ⁹I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. (ESV)</p> | <p>Judgment will come on the nation because of their sin.</p> <p>But then, in verse 8, God speaks again. God cries out in anguish. He asks how he can do it. He refers to two cities – Admah and Zeboiim, which were overturned in God’s judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. God knows that his people have done as much and more than these cities. But he struggles in his own being. The Hebrew word that is used for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is used for what happens in the very inner being of God. He turns his anger upon himself. He takes the pain and punishment for his people within his own being. And verse 9 summarises what happens as a result. He will not execute his anger. He will not destroy his people. For he is God, the Lord. And Exodus 34 has told us what this God is like. He is the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands and forgiving of iniquity and transgression and sin. Now I want you to notice what has happened in this chapter. For this chapter tells us how God can do what Moses asks him to do in Exodus 32. You see, to be truly just, God must be serious about sin. He must deal with sin. But to be truly loving, God must also forgive sin. And for his love and mercy to triumph over judgment, something must happen to reconcile these two facets of his existence. And Hosea tells us how God does this. It tells us that he can allow mercy to triumph over judgment by turning his judgment upon himself.</p> |
| <p>Romans 3:21-26</p> <p>²¹But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (ESV)</p> | <p>Now I want you to turn to Romans 3:21-26. You see, Romans 3 tells us how it is that God manages to turn his judgment upon himself. Romans 1-3 has told us that all humans are related to God and obligated to love and serve him. Romans 1-3 also tells us that all humans have failed to fulfil their obligations. Romans 3:23 sums this up. It says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But Paul then says that God acts in unexpected and unmerited grace. He allows his Son to become a human being and face God’s anger and suffer death on behalf of God’s people. He allows Jesus to be put forward as a propitiation by his death. He effectively turns his anger upon himself and takes it in his own being.</p> |

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| | And by doing this, God allows mercy to triumph over judgment. He deals justly with sin. And he allows the sinner to be justified and forgiven before God. |
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Can you see what is going on in Exodus 32-34?

In Exodus 33:12 Moses seeks to know 'God's ways.'

And in Exodus 34:6-7 God shows Moses his ways.

He is the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands and forgiving of iniquity and transgression and sin.

What Moses saw and experienced from the cleft in the rock was none other than what would later be seen in all its glory on the cross.

There God would be the Lord who takes sin seriously.

However, he would also be the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands and forgiving of iniquity and transgression and sin.

This is a God to stand in awe of.

And so, let's do that tonight by reading together Psalm 103.

And as we do, I want you to remember the story of Exodus 32-34.

But I also want you to remember how God has fulfilled Exodus 34:5-7 in the birth, death, resurrection of Jesus.

And last of all, I want you to remember that if God is like this we will never be alone.

For if this God is for us, who can be against us.

Psalm 103

¹Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!

²Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,

³who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,

⁴who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

⁵who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

⁶The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all who are oppressed.

⁷He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.

⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.

¹⁰He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth,

so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

¹²as far as the east is from the west,

so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

¹³As a father shows compassion to his children,

so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

¹⁴For he knows our frame;

he remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵As for man, his days are like grass;

he flourishes like a flower of the field;

¹⁶for the wind passes over it, and

it is gone,

and its place knows it no more.

¹⁷But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,

and his righteousness to children's children,

¹⁸to those who keep his covenant

and remember to do his commandments.

¹⁹The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,

and his kingdom rules over all.

²⁰Bless the LORD, O you his angels,

you mighty ones who do his word,

obeying the voice of his word!

²¹Bless the LORD, all his hosts,

his ministers, who do his will!

²²Bless the LORD, all his works,

in all places of his dominion.

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

(ESV)