

A Friend of God (Exodus 33:7-11)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

I. Review and Background

- a. Moses has descended from Mount Sinai with the two tablets on which were engraved the 10 Commandments, after being with the Lord for 40 days. Aaron and the people had constructed a golden calf, and referred to it as the god who delivered them from Egypt.
- b. After the golden calf is destroyed, three thousand people die as a result of their idolatry. Then Moses intercedes with the Lord to make atonement for the people, and even tells the Lord to blot his own name out of the Lord's book, the Book of Life, if the Lord is going to destroy all the Israelites.
- c. The Lord tells the people that He will not accompany them on their journey to the Promised Land, because they are stiff-necked. However, He will send His Angel with them, to drive out their enemies from Canaan. The people mourn at hearing this 'bad news', and follow the direction to remove their glorious/bright clothing as well as their ornaments, at Mount Sinai.

II. Meeting with the Lord at Moses' Tent

- a. Read **Exodus 33:7-11**.
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Moses set up his tent outside the camp.
 1. Keep in mind that in the LXX the same word is used that is translated either 'tent' or 'tabernacle'.
 - a. This "tabernacle", the "tabernacle of testimony" (**Exodus 3:7**), which was set up *outside the camp and far from the camp* is not the same as the tabernacle that would later be constructed *in the middle of the camp* according to the instructions given to Moses on the mountain.
 - b. This tabernacle set up outside the camp is also referred to (in various translations) as:
 - i. The *tent (or tabernacle) of meeting*
 - ii. The *tabernacle of the congregation* (KJV)

2. Moses would go out to his tent periodically, to meet with the Lord and speak with Him.
3. Referring to the faithful Jews, it says, "Everyone who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle (*tent*)."
4. When Moses went out to meet with the Lord, all the people stood at the door of their tents and watched Moses go out.
 - a. When they saw the pillar of cloud descend upon the tent, after Moses entered the tent, the people fell down and worshipped, each one at the door of his own tent.
5. The Lord would speak with Moses "*face-to-face*, as a man speaks with his friend".
6. After speaking with the Lord, Moses would return to the camp; however, his servant/assistant Joshua, a young man, would not leave the tent.
 - a. Recall that the original name of this young man was "*Hoshea*, son of Nun". It explains in **Numbers 13:16** (designated **Numbers 13:17** in the LXX) that Moses changed his name to "Joshua".
 - b. In the LXX Greek, the name Moses gave him is "Jesus", the same name that Mary was later told to give her son who was to be born, the Son of God.
 - i. So when people were reading this Old Testament story from the LXX in the days of Jesus and the apostles (and for the first few hundred years of the church), they read that Moses returned to the camp, but *Jesus* remained in the tent.
 - ii. In **Acts 7:45** and **Hebrews 3:8**, where most modern translations have the name of Moses' assistant and successor as "Joshua", in Greek it says "Jesus", exactly the same as the name of Jesus of Nazareth.
 - iii. Recall the role of this *first 'Jesus'* (a/k/a Joshua):
 1. He is first mentioned as the one who led the people to victory in **Exodus 17**, when Moses is up on the hill all day with his hands outstretched holding the wooden staff (making the form of the cross). It is

Jesus (Joshua) who leads the Israelites to victory while Moses maintains this unusual posture.

2. He was the only one who went up the mountain with Moses for the 40 days, when Moses was given the 10 Commandments on the stone tablets the first time. He descends with Moses and hears the noise of the people in **Exodus 32:17**, at first thinking it sounded like the sound of war.
 3. Later he would be one of only two faithful men, of the 12 who were sent to spy out the land of Canaan (**Numbers 13 & 14**).
 4. When Moses is told he would die and not lead the people into the Promised Land, he is concerned that the people not be "like sheep without a shepherd". He is told to lay hands on *Jesus* (Joshua), who would be his successor (**Numbers 27:17-18**) and will lead the people into the Promised Land. God provided a good shepherd, as He would with the ultimate Good Shepherd with the second *Jesus*.
 5. After Moses' death, when Joshua is left in charge, the Lord reassures him by saying "As I was with Moses, thus I will be with you." (**Joshua 1:5**)
- c. So, returning to our story, we find the first *Jesus* (Joshua) remaining in Moses' tent, remaining in the presence of God, a foreshadowing of the second *Jesus* to come!
- c. **Question:** Why did Moses have to go "*outside the camp/ far from the camp*" to set up his tent, to meet with the Lord?
- i. I don't know for sure, but I will offer a thought as a possibility, for your consideration.
 - ii. **Question:** Is there anywhere in the New Testament that mentions the phrase, "outside the camp"?
 - iii. Read **Hebrews 13:10-16**.

1. The point that the Hebrews writer is making here is based on the requirement to burn the hide, head, entrails, etc. of the sin offering bull *outside the camp*.
2. The point the writer is making is that the bull of the sin offering foreshadowed Christ, who would suffer and whose body would be crucified *outside the camp* (see discussion of the sin offering in **Leviticus 4**).
3. The application the **Hebrews** writer is making is that the tabernacle sacrifices were inadequate, and will not make us holy. The sin offering foreshadowed the One who would suffer outside the camp, to atone for our sins.
4. However, in **Hebrews 13:13** it says, "Let us go therefore to Him, outside the camp..."
 - a. Recall from **Exodus 33:11** that after Moses returned to the camp, *Jesus* (Joshua) remained in the tent, *outside the camp*.
 - b. Perhaps this is foreshadowing something for us as well, perhaps not. However, we know that:
 - i. Jesus was the name of the prophet who was to come who would be *like Moses*, as prophesied in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**.
 - ii. This prophet Jesus would have an intimate relationship with the Father, one that would surpass that of Moses.
 - iii. He would remain with God, the Father.
 - iv. He would suffer outside the Jewish camp, outside the city and temple/tabernacle of God.
 - v. We must go to where He is, outside the camp, to find Him.
- d. **Question:** What about that pillar of cloud that descended; what was that?
 - i. From **1 Corinthians 10**:
 1. "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses *in the cloud and in the sea*," (**1 Corinthians 10:1-2**, NKJV)

2. Paul explains that the sea (the Red Sea, which the Israelites had to pass through in order to escape Egypt) foreshadowed the water of baptism. Similarly, the cloud represented the Holy Spirit. The Israelite nation foreshadowed the church, those who have been baptized, who have escaped spiritual slavery.
 - a. “Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is *born of water and the Spirit*, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (**John 3:5**, NKJV)
 - b. Recall also that the pillar of cloud and fire first appeared *after the Passover Lamb was slain* (**Exodus 13:21-22**). With that in mind, consider the significance of what Jesus said in **John 16**:
 - i. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but *if I depart, I will send Him to you.*” (**John 16:7**, NKJV)
 - ii. He then refers to this Helper as “the Spirit of truth”. (**John 16:12**)
 - iii. Jesus tells His followers the He will depart (be killed) before the Spirit would come.
 - c. When the people see the pillar of cloud and fire, they “bow down and worship”, the same word in the LXX that we see in **Exodus 20:5** and **Deuteronomy 5:9** in the Lord speaking the 10 Commandments.
 - i. There the Lord says He is a jealous God, therefore they are not to make any idols or likenesses of any created things, nor to “*bow down to them* (in worship)”.
 1. This is the same word we find Jesus using in **Matthew 4** when He rebukes Satan by quoting from **Deuteronomy 6:13**:
 2. “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.”’” (**Matthew 4:10**, NKJV)

- d. **Questions:** Why was it permissible for the people to bow down and worship when they saw the pillar of cloud descend on the tent of Moses? Who or what descended, and who or what were they worshipping?
 - i. **My Answer:** If the pillar of cloud and fire represented the presence of the Holy Spirit, it was appropriate for them to bow down and worship here (unlike in the case of the golden calf, where the Lord was enraged) because this did not violate either the first or second commandment.
 - ii. As Paul explained, we worship and serve only the Creator, not created things (**Romans 1:18-25**). The Spirit was involved in the creation of all things; and being divine is not a created thing.
- e. **Question:** What does it mean when it says Moses “spoke with God *face to face, as a man speaks with his friend*”?
 - i. Recall that Abraham had lunch with “the Lord” in **Genesis 18**; however, this encounter with Moses appears to reflect an even closer relationship.
 - ii. Does this “face to face” encounter suggest that Moses somehow *saw the face of God*?
 - 1. Normally, when I say I had a face-to-face meeting with someone, it means that we were in the same room or space, looking directly at one another.
 - 2. However, as we will see later (**Exodus 33:13-20**) Moses did *NOT* actually see the face of God. That is impossible for *any* human. (See also **John 1:18** and **1 Timothy 6:15**.)
 - iii. **Question/Challenge:** Do you speak with God as with a friend? Are we *supposed to* speak with God like that? Is that kind of an extraordinarily close relationship *accessible to us also*, or is it reserved *only for the all-time greats* of the faith like Moses?
 - 1. Many believers think of God as their ‘close friend’, ‘co-pilot’ or ‘good buddy’, despite the fact that they are living worldly or immoral lives. How can we know that God sees us as a true friend, and not end up just *fooling ourselves*?
 - 2. Ironically, *it seems to me* that in general:

- a. The people who are the most careless in disregarding the commands of God tend to be the ones who express the most confidence that they are personally on very close, intimate terms with the Lord; while
 - b. Those who are most serious in striving to follow all the commands of God tend to fear God and see Him as distant from them personally.
- iv. Small children sometimes create their own 'imaginary friend', someone who exists only in their own imagination. I don't want to be like them, imagining I have a close relationship that *does noty exist in reality!*
- v. **Question:** How can someone become a true *friend of God*? What can we learn about this from the Scriptures?
- 1. Read **2 Chronicles 20:1-13**.
 - a. Jehoshaphat appealed to the Lord, on behalf of the Israelites, the decendants of Abraham. The people are in great distress; they are desperate. Jehoshaphat calls out to God for protection, reminding the Lord of the promise He had given to Abraham, that his descendants would inherit the land.
 - b. In his prayer to the Lord, Jehoshaphat says that the land was given to the seed of "Abraham, Your *friend forever*" (**2 Chronicles 20:7**).
 - c. Therefore, both Abraham and Moses are referred to in Scripture as being "friends of God".
 - 2. I assume that this passage from **2 Chronicles** is what James was referring to in **James 2**.
 - a. Read **James 2:14-24**.
 - i. This is a famous passage that explains the relationship between faith and works (obedient action). Abraham's faith was made perfect (= complete) by what he did.
 - ii. In reading this passage, let us consider what we can learn about being *a friend of God*.

- b. **Question:** What *made* Abraham a friend of God? Was it based on *subjective, warm emotional feelings* of being close?
 - i. Abraham was God's friend *because he believed and obeyed God.*
 - ii. Note that Jesus also said that his *friends* are those *who obey His commands*; and His family members are those *who do the will of His Father* in heaven.
 - 1. "You are My friends *if you do whatever I command you.*" (**John 15:14**, NKJV)
 - 2. "But He answered and said to the one who told Him, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers?' And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For *whoever does the will of My Father in heaven* is My brother and sister and mother.'" (**Matthew 12:48-50**, NKJV)
- c. Often we can learn about something *by considering its opposite*.
 - i. For example, sometimes if it is not clear what God wants me to do in a situation,
 - 1. I will ask myself the question, "What do I think *Satan* wants me to do in this situation?"; and then...
 - 2. I will do *the opposite of that!*
 - ii. Likewise, perhaps we can learn what it takes to become a friend of God by considering the opposite: what are the things that can turn us (Christians) into *enemies of God*.
 - 1. Could we then do *the opposite* if we want to become friends of God?
- d. **Question:** What makes us into *enemies of God*?
 - i. Read **James 4:1-10**.

- ii. If a Christian wants to become an *enemy* of God, here is how to do that:
 - 1. Fight and war with others.
 - 2. Live for pleasure.
 - 3. Love the world; be a friend of the world.
 - 4. Be proud. Resist God; don't resist the devil.
 - iii. If you want to be a *friend* of God, doing the opposite of the things that make us God's enemy would include:
 - 1. Resist Satan and temptation.
 - 2. Don't be a friend of the world.
 - 3. Live according to the promptings of the Spirit.
 - 4. Be unified with your brothers and sisters; don't battle or remain in conflict with them.
 - 5. Submit to God, purify your heart, mourn for your sin.
 - 6. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord.
- 3. **Question:** This "Friends of God" society or club that Abraham and Moses belong to (figuratively): is it an exclusive club with closed membership, or can I become part of it as well?
 - a. In **Wisdom of Solomon** we find encouraging news that *men from every age* can become friends of God. It also provides more insight regarding what we need to do to become true friends of God.
 - b. Read **Wisdom of Solomon 7:7-14** and **7:21b-30**. (Note that this wonderful discourse on spiritual wisdom continues into **chapter 8** and beyond.)
 - i. Those of any age who seek wisdom can become friends of God.
 - ii. Ask for it. Prefer it above anything.

- iii. See it as much more valuable than any worldly wealth or health or beauty.
 - iv. Hunger and thirst for wisdom and pursue it!
 - v. Wisdom will keep us from evil.
 - vi. **Isaiah 11:1-4** lists the first characteristic of the Holy Spirit as the spirit *of wisdom*!
- vi. Often I have heard people stereotype the '*God of the Old Testament*' as severe and distant, reflected in how He descended on Mount Sinai and terrified everyone in **Exodus 19-20**.
 - 1. However, let us also see the Lord as He revealed Himself in the same Old Testament book, in the intimate meetings with Moses at the tent in **Exodus 33**, "as a man speaks with his friend".
- vii. Take-aways regarding becoming a friend of God:
 - 1. Make it your goal to become (and remain) a true *friend of God*, like Abraham and Moses.
 - 2. Remember that the door is open to this exclusive club. All are welcome; this invitation is extended to those from every age of mankind.
 - 3. Being a friend of God is not just based on feelings. We must *do what the Lord says*, as Abraham and Moses did.
 - 4. Repent and clean out the sin from your life.
 - 5. Seek spiritual wisdom above all things. Dedicate yourself to this.
 - 6. Also, let us never forget that we have an advantage that the heroes of faith in the Old Testament did not have. We have Jesus the Son of God as our mediator, sitting at the right hand of God (as Joshua remained in the tent with God) and always interceding on our behalf (**Hebrews 4, 7-8**).