

This week is the third installment of an unusual series.¹ Moses gets three glimpses of God at Sinai (Exodus 3; 19; 32-34). As we encounter these texts in The Gospel Project, we will stop and consider what they show us about God. The series will be spread out by the events of the Exodus story (January 26; February 23; March 8). If you have any questions, email me at benjamin.j.williams@gmail.com

Sermon Outline

“The Third Revelation” EXODUS 32-34

INTRODUCTION

1. EXODUS 3: Burning Bush
2. EXODUS 19: Return to Sinai
3. EXODUS 32-34: Catastrophe
4. TODAY’S GOAL: I want to understand God as well as Moses does in this story.

THE THIRD REVELATION

1. WRATH
 - a. EXODUS 32:1-6, The people turn to the gods of Egypt in the absence of Moses.
 - b. EXODUS 32:7-10 “... let me alone, that my wrath may burn ...”
 - c. God is intolerant of infidelity.
 - d. Could I ever have a relationship with this God?
2. CHANGE
 - a. Awesome Moses Moment #1: “But Moses implored the LORD ...”
 - b. EXODUS 32:11-14 “... the Lord relented ...”
 - c. There is no satisfactory explanation for this text except to say that God changed His mind because of the petition of Moses. He found another way to keep His promise.
3. CONSEQUENCE
 - a. Awesome Moses Moment #2: “Moses’ anger burned hot ...”
 - i. 32:19, *Broken tablets, broken covenant*. Moses attempts to reveal to the people the consequence of their actions. He is never rebuked for this action.
 - ii. 32:20, *“made the people of Israel drink it”*: Moses attempts to get the people to take ownership of their action.
 - iii. 32:24, *“and out came this calf”*: Aaron makes the most laughable excuse ever.
 - iv. 32:26, *“Who is on the LORD’s side?”*: Moses demands a choice of loyalty.
 - v. 32:28, *“3000 men fell”*: Moses unleashed a terrible consequence.
 - vi. 32:30, *“perhaps I can make atonement”*: Moses realizes the previous day’s events did not yet square the people with God.
 - vii. 32:32, *Moses’ sacrificial offer*: Moses recognizes that a consequence remains.

¹ Primary source for this series and the commentary quotations which follow: Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction*, Library of Biblical Theology (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008).

- viii. 32:34, *"I will visit their sin upon them"*: God will not ignore the consequence of evil.
- b. EXODUS 33:3-5 *"Go ... but I will not go up among you"*: God keeps His promise, but He refuses to continue their relationship. Sin harms our relationship with God.
- 4. LOVE
 - a. Awesome Moses Moment #3: *"If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here ..."* (EXODUS 34:6-10)
 - b. *"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness ..."*
 - i. merciful – *"womb"* love
 - ii. gracious – unmerited love
 - iii. slow to anger – patient love
 - iv. steadfast love – covenant love
 - v. faithfulness – reliable love

CONCLUSION

1. Awesome Moses Moment #4: *"Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God ..."*
2. Moses interceded for the people. Moses offered himself for the people. Yet for all that, all Moses can accomplish is making the God atop Sinai a little more approachable.
3. HEBREWS 12:18-29

As always, feel free to skip any of this you want and just cover the parts you find interesting.

Sermon Questions for Classes:

1. WRATH

- a. Many Christians feel a pressure to distance themselves from the image of God who burns with anger and wrath. Is that possible?
- b. How does Christianity make sense of the wrath of God?
- c. Would we be happier with a God who had no anger toward evil? (Hint: No, we would not like a god who looked at rape and murder with indifference.)

2. CHANGE

- a. Deciding whether or not God can change is a difficult theological topic. Even the word “change” is hard to define.
 - i. Thought experiment: Imagine a man is sitting on a park bench all alone and unmoving. A dog walks up with a ball in its mouth and stares at the man. Did the man change?
 - ii. The answer is of course: “sort of.” The man is the same. He didn’t move. Nothing is intrinsically different about the man, but because the dog changed (moved closer), the man’s relationship to the dog is different than it was before.
 - iii. Likewise, perhaps God’s character is ultimately changeless, but His actions may appear to change simply because our relationship with Him changes.
- b. Passages about the changeless God focus on God’s covenants.
 - i. **Malachi 3:6-7** seems to say that God would keep covenant with Israel even when they sinned. He is trustworthy.
 - ii. **James 1:17** seems to be talking about God as Creator and Provider. That “creation covenant” does not change. God blesses the creation even when we don’t deserve it.
- c. Passages about the changing God tend to focus on His mercy toward humans.
 - i. In both **Exodus 32:7-14** and **Judges 10:10-16**, God changes a promised curse into a merciful blessing.
 - ii. God never desires to harm us. God consistently shows mercy toward people that repent. God “changes” consistently!

3. CONSEQUENCE

- a. What does it mean for us that God insists on “consequence”?
- b. What would it mean if God made a world without any consequences? What if every time you tried to hurt someone God just prevented it (turned your bullets into bubbles)? Can we have any free will at all in a world without consequences?²
- c. Do forgiven sins still have consequences? Why or why not?

4. LOVE

- a. Does the description of God’s love contradict the description of God’s wrath? In other words, what should Christians think about Exodus 34:7?

² C.S. Lewis makes this argument in his book *The Problem of Pain*.

- b. If you want a fun side note, notice that Jonah mentions this verse and is actually unhappy about it (Jonah 4:1-4). Do we ever get frustrated by God's merciful love?