
Replacing Stones, Renewing the Covenant

Exodus 34

Introduction Replacing broken things...
Restoring broken treaties...
Remaking broken promises...
Moving forward as God's people...

The Replaced Stones **(v.1-9)**

The two tablets of stone are the symbolical center of the covenant between God and Israel. Though the covenant has been broken, God now moves in response to Moses' intercession to renew the covenant by replacing the two tablets.

Through Divine Instruction **(v.1-5)**

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. ² 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. ³ 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." ⁴ 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. ⁵ The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.

The whole cycle of the giving and receiving of the Law was to be repeated. The instructions are similar, but not as detailed. It is repeated again not only for Moses' sake, but also for Israel's sake. Moses knew that he was to go up. Israel knew that this was a mercy from God.

Moses was to cut the stones himself. Moses was to come to the mountain alone; that is, without Joshua. These instructions differ from the first giving. There, God cut and gave the stones. Then, Joshua went as an aide to Moses. Being there also gave him Moses' perspective in the God and the covenant.

Moses obeyed the instructions he had been given. He cut the stones and went up into the mountain as God required. There God met with him and revealed Himself. He did so by proclaiming His Name to Moses.

By Personal Revelation **(v.6-7)**

⁶ 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, ⁷ 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."

God did as He promised earlier. He passed by Moses and revealed Himself to Moses. Moses had asked to see the face of God. God could not grant that now. So, He promised to show Moses His glory and would make all His goodness to pass before Moses. He could no longer look directly upon God's glory, but would be allowed to see from a sheltering rock, the glowing contrails from God's passing by.

So, God revealed Himself by declaring His character. God's glory and goodness are here revealed in how God's character engages the sinful need of God's people. They are in trouble. God has shown His wrath. If all that God is only causes wrath in the face of disobedient, sinful covenant breakers, then they are doomed. This may be glory, but it is only goodness if that wrath protects the character of God and people God redeems.

The glory and goodness of God is revealed in His Name. He is the LORD. It is repeated for emphasis. He is the sovereign over the whole universe. His Lordship is not because a people bow to Him and acknowledge Him as their Lord. He is simply the LORD, LORD. To those who recognize His Lordship, He is revealed in the steadfastness of His great love that then leans toward His people with mercy, grace, faithfulness, forgiveness and in judgment against sinners. The promise keeping God will also be a merciful, forgiving, loving God when His people are disobedient and sinful. Here is the glory and goodness of God.

But, He is also revealed as One who does not excuse sin and will by no means simply clear the guilty. The judgment of God will fall directly upon the one who sins. But the consequences of their sin will impact generations of their children.

Now, this does create a great difficulty. How does God forgive sin without simply clearing the guilty? This is the great problem of sin and the great genius of the plan of salvation. God puts the guilt, the charge of sin on another and then punishes that one. Then, because the sin has been punished, the sinner no longer has a charge against him and is forgiven. Thus, because Jesus took our sin and its guilt, was punished on behalf of those whose sin was put on His account, then we are forgiven because of another has borne our guilt. What a glorious truth and what a humbling truth. He has truly forgiven us because our sins have truly been reckoned with.

With Humble Intercession

(v.8-9)

⁸ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. ⁹ 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."

Moses responded to this divine revelation with self-humiliation. He bowed to God in worship. Understanding the greatness of God *in reference to the greatness of our sin as sinners* is an enormous motivation to humbling ourselves before God. It is the loss of this in modern churches and modern preaching that has destroyed God centered and God pleasing worship. There is an attempt to celebrate both God and man. This is not worship. My worship is best when I am bowed before God in awe and gratitude for all that He reveals Himself to be.

Moses responded to God's revelation by believing what He had been told and banking on it. He took God at His Word and confessed their sins as the nation's mediator. What use is it to learn that God is a sin punishing and sin forgiving God and then turn away in our sin? No, a thousand times no. When we believe that God has dealt with our sin and will forgive us our sin, then we must confess our sin and sins to Him. We must acknowledge our own sinfulness; that apart from God's saving work we are depraved, dead and damned. We must acknowledge our acts of sin and confess them to Him. 1 John 1:1-2:2 is written to those who believe. We continue to walk in the light and have fellowship with God and others as we confess the sins we commit.

Yet, I find in myself and in those I shepherd and counsel that we do not do this as we ought. We do not actually confess to God our sins. Sometimes, we are even hesitant to acknowledge that we have sinned. But forgiveness is conditional: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleans us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

The Renewed Covenant

(v.10-28)

With the tablets prepared and sins confessed, God now moves to renew the covenant itself. As He does so, He highlights how this renewed covenant interlocks with the intercession and mediation of Moses. What God does here is a direct answer to Moses' prayers in Exodus 32 and 33.

As their Exclusive Relationship

(v.10-16)

¹⁰ 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.

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. ¹² 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. ¹³ You 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), ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.

What God intends to do by making this exclusive treaty with them will go way beyond the bare words of the covenant He renews with them. Through what God will do for Israel as He honors the covenant, God will demonstrate His greatness. He will bring about great marvels. He will do "an awesome thing" with them.

God demands that they make no other peoples or gods their ruler. They are to make no covenants with anyone else. Their relationship with God is an exclusive relationship. As God defeats their enemies through them and on their behalf, they are to guard their hearts lest they go after those nation's false gods. They must not make treaties or covenant with the people's they are sent to conquer. They are not to intermarry. They are to keep themselves wholly and exclusively for God.

In their Distinguishing Requirements**(v.17-26)**

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. ¹⁹ All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the first-born of cow and sheep. ²⁰ The 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. ²² You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end. ²³ Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. ²⁴ For 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.

²⁵ "You 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. ²⁶ The 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."

The renewed covenant has the full scope of the first one which they had broken. These commands are a summary of the full range of all that Moses gave in Exodus 20-31. It is assumed that the full covenant requirements are enfolded into this summary. And, these commands exposed the sin leading to the breaking of the covenant. So, while the covenant has been broken, the demands of the Law do not change. They cannot change for in keeping them is life and blessing. Until Jesus comes, no one will keep them. But when he lives a life holy before God and keeps the whole covenant, He receives the life and blessing that is promised by the covenant. All those who are then placed in Christ, also participate in the blessings His perfect covenant obedience has earned or procured for us.

These commands set Israel apart. They make them different from the nations around them. What set them apart from the world around them and solely unto God?

They were to know, love, worship and obey God through faith in what they could not see. They were not to make idols and worship other gods. Nor were they to make any representation of the true God in order to worship Him. Jesus Christ alone is the "exact imprint of His [God's] nature" [Hebrews 1:3] and is "image of the invisible God." [Colossians 1:15] When we have seen Christ we have seen all there is to see of God.

They were to obey God in celebrating the Sabbath and the cycle of Festival Sabbaths. The Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant, the national constitution of Israel. If they were to be a people, a nation, before God, then they must keep His Sabbaths.

They were to give careful attention to the details of the Law they had been given. I use this sentence as a way to summarize verse 26. True worship of God and obedience to Him under the Old Covenant was loaded with intricate

ritual and detailed requirements. It was a burdensome slavery from which we have been set free to the glorious liberty of the New Covenant.

They were to honor the covenant by bringing in their firstfruits. They were to express their faith in God and their fealty to the covenant by bringing in their tithes to God. These offerings were defined and described in the agrarian terms they were living in and familiar with. As a people of the covenant and a nation under God, they owed God the firstfruits of all that God in His providence blessed them with.

From the beginning to the end, this was a renewal of the covenant. From “no idols” to “don’t boil the goat kid in its mother’s milk” the whole law was being re-given. Thus, the fame and reputation of God as He is Lord over His people will be upheld. God will go with them and as they maintain obedience to the covenant.

Yet, we know from the rest of the Old Testament narratives and from the book of Ezekiel, that they failed. They broke every item in the Law in virtually every generation they existed. Finally, in one of the most amazing scenes in all the Bible, the glory of God leaves the ark of the covenant, moves out of Solomon’s Temple and leaves the city while yet appearing at times in Babylon. That glory never returned until Jesus walked the courts of the Temple again.

By a Written Revelation (v.27-28)

²⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” ²⁸ 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

Moses records that he was to record these words. God is revealing Himself renewing the covenant *through a written record*. He engraved on the tablets of stone. Moses was to write down all the words that God gave Him. For another forty days, Moses rewrites all the commandments, requirements and laws that God had given. Thus began the first five books of our Bibles, the Pentateuch.

Even in the age in which God would directly reveal Himself by speaking face to face with Moses, God requires written revelation *as a means to protect, preserve, and preach* what God has revealed. Note this carefully. People in the church down through the ages have often longed for a direct revelation and experience of God *apart from God’s written revelation*. Peter, as the canon was being closed and the apostles dying off the scene, said that “we have a more sure Word” than even their own personal eyewitness accounts of the transfiguration. While it was a grand privilege to be on the mountain at that time and see it with their own eyes, they needed the Word of God rightly interpreted by the Son of God to rightly understand what just happened. So, in giving them a written record through Moses and us the whole Bible, God has preserved His revelation. Now, it is our duty to learn it, love it and live it.

The Removed Veil**(v.29-35)**

At the end of forty days, the revelation is complete, the Law is given and the two sets of stone tablets are engraved. Moses now comes down from the fearful and fenced mountain. But something strange has taken place.

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. ³² Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. ³³ And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

³⁴ Whenever 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, ³⁵ the 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.

A Shining Face of Glory**(v.29-33)**

The glory Moses saw, even the contrails of the passing of the glory of God, illuminated his face. His face shone. This had not happened when he came down the first time. Everyone who saw him was afraid. It is hard for us to imagine this. They had no explanation. They did not understand. And because they did not understand, they were afraid. They ran from him. And initially, Moses did not know why. He was unaware that his face glowed. But certainly, the people pointed it out to him.

So Moses gathered the leadership of Israel along with Aaron and talked with them. We don't know what they talked about, but they certainly became comfortable with him. Maybe Moses explained more about what had happened on the mountain. Maybe just the normalcy of talking with him helped them to recognize that this was OK.

Once all the people gathered around, Moses stood to address them and to give them all that God had commanded them. As he stood communicating the Law and the Covenant, his face shone with glory of the presence of God. When he was done speaking, he then put the veil over his face.

A Hidden Fading of Glory**(v.34-36)**

So, until the tabernacle was built and possibly for the rest of his life, whenever Moses spoke with God, he would remove the veil. When he would go out to speak with the people. After he finished speaking with the people, he would put the veil back on. For the next months until they built the tabernacle and all that went with it, for the following months until they arrived at Kadesh Barnea, then for forty more years, Moses led them veiling the glory that illuminated his face.

Conclusion Paul picks up this text in 2 Corinthians 3:4-18 as he speaks of the privilege, power and place of the New Covenant ministry.

⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷ Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? ⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. ¹⁰ Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. ¹¹ For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

¹² Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

There are a number of great truths here in this text which illuminates the one we have studied from Exodus. The transition from the fading glory of the Old Covenant under Moses to the fulsome glory of the New Covenant in Christ is being highlighted. We are on this side of the cross. What Moses experienced and how he ministered is great. But what Christ has done and how we minister is ever greater. Here is Paul's flow of thought developed by a Christ centered reading of Exodus 34.

We are ministering in the New Covenant. We are neither under nor in the age of the Old Covenant. Since the death and resurrection of Christ, those who have been placed in Christ are under the New Covenant.

The Old Covenant ministry was glorious. Make no mistake that what God did in His grace and mercy for Israel through Moses in giving them the covenant was wonderful and glorious. It guided them and guarded them and eventually, through Christ's obedience, granted us all the blessings promised in the Old Covenant.

The New Covenant ministry is immeasurably more glorious. This is Paul's classic, "If that was great, then how much greater is this." What makes the New Covenant's glory so much greater than that of the Old?

It brings life instead of death. Because of disobedience and because it is law, the Old Covenant only consigned every disobedient person to its curse and death. But the New Covenant in Christ's blood and through His resurrection brings life to those who are born of the Spirit of God and placed into Christ.

It is a ministry of Spirit not Law. In the promise of the New Covenant in the Old Testament and in the giving and implementation of the New Covenant through Christ, the ministry of Holy Spirit becomes the primary focus. We do not live by the Old Covenant Law; we live by walking in the Spirit.

The veil covered Moses' face because of the glory shining on his face. He was hiding the glory there from the people of Israel and yet with open face spoke to God.

He veiled his face not so that they would not be blinded. If you read the text in Exodus carefully, *Moses did not cover his face until after he spoke to the people.* So Moses was not covering his face to keep the glory from blinding or frightening the people.

Moses wore the veil so that they would not see that the glory was fading. While this may be an insight that comes on this side of the cross, I believe Paul is simply very carefully reading the text. He asks himself a question, "Why didn't he veil his face when he spoke with Israel?" The answer: because the glory was fading away just as the covenant would be fading away.

The same veil lies over hearts today. Paul shifts the veil from the glory on Moses' face to the eyes of unbelievers and some believers.

Their hearts are veiled so that they do not see the greater glory of Christ in the New Covenant because they cannot see the fading glory of the Old Covenant and the Law. The veil over their hearts hides the greater present glory of Christ and the New Covenant. Therefore, most Jews would not be saved because they would refuse to move away from the Law and embrace Christ. And many of those who professed Christ wanted to go back to living under the Old Covenant and Law.

The veil is removed, in Christ. Those who are saved and are placed into Christ have this veil removed. In other words, we are able to see that the glory of the Old Covenant has faded and embrace the greater glory of the New Covenant.

So, we will reflect the glory of Christ as we gaze on His glory by the Spirit. But that transformation, according to 2 Corinthians 4 comes as we go through great trials, difficulties and troubles. So, gazing on Christ is glorious while at the very same time becoming transformed is painful process.

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.