

-Save This Page as a PDF-

The People Began to Mourn and No One Put On any Ornaments

33: 1-6

The people began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments DIG: Why does God say he will not go with the people, but sends an Angel instead? In this decision, which is good news? Bad news? How will God resolve this dilemma? If God does not go with Isra'el through the wilderness, what are their prospects physically? Emotionally? Spiritually?

REFLECT: How has God kept His promises to you in the midst of your rebellion against Him? What separates us from God? How can we regain our fellowship with Him? Knowing that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), does it sometimes *feel* however, that He has left your presence? What can you do?

The intercession of **Moses** not only led to the softening of the wrath of **God**, but also to the reaffirmation of the covenant promise of **the Land**. **ADONAI promised** that **He** would fulfill the **oath** that **He** gave the patriarchs when **He** said: **Leave this place, you and the people** (not My people) **you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the Land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will send an ordinary angel** (not My Angel) **before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Go up to the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey (33:1-2)**. The Septuagint, or the Greek translation of the TaNaKh highlights the separation between **God** and **His people** by the translation. It says: **He will drive out the Canaanites**, and so on, referring to **the angel** as the one who would fulfill the promises of **God**. **ADONAI** would accomplish **His** purposes, but not in a wholehearted manner, only from a distance.⁶⁸²

We are left with the strong impression, by the book of **Exodus**, that **Moses** and **God** enjoyed an unusually intimate relationship. Earlier, **God** assured **Moses** of **his** personal presence (**3:12**), and power (**4:15-17**), so **Moses** was no doubt surprised when **God** added that **He** would not continue with **him**.⁶⁸³ The whole purpose of the exodus was for **God** to dwell with **His people** in the Tabernacle. So when **He** said, "Go ahead, but you're going

without me," it wasn't merely a setback, it was the end of the road. **ADONAI** gave two reasons for **His** decision, they were **a stiff-necked people** and He **might destroy them on the way (33:3)**.⁶⁸⁴ That meant that all the instructions for building the Tabernacle were canceled. **He** would drive out **the Canaanites** and **He** would not destroy **Isra'el**, but **He** would not dwell among **them** either.



Having broken the covenant **they** had made only a few weeks before (**19:3-9, 24:4-8**), **the people's** response was appropriate. They began to **mourn and strip off their ornaments at Mount Horeb**. This was a hopeful sign, because the removal of the **ornaments** implied a change of heart (**Genesis 35:4** and **Ezeki'el 26:16**). From the tomb paintings in Egypt, it was known that both men and women wore various types of **ornaments**. From this point on, however, they did not wear them during their wilderness wanderings (**33:4-6**). As a result, we are left somewhat in limbo at this point in the story. We don't really know what will happen to **Moses** or **the Israelites**. But for now, the worst was over. **Moses** had interceded for **the people** and **God** was appeased. There was a collective sigh of relief, but the relationship had not yet been fully restored.⁶⁸⁵

John Chrysostom, the archbishop of Constantinople and an important father of the faith, once commented, "To be separated from **God** is greater punishment than a thousand hells." No wonder **the Hebrews** went into great mourning over **God's** decision not to go with **them**. There is no greater punishment in the universe than separation from **the** love of **God**.⁶⁸⁶