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Moses and the Tent of Meeting

33: 7-11

Moses and the tent of meeting DIG: Why was this tent needed? What did they think of Moses at that time? Why would Moses seek God's face at a time like this? What were the people expecting?

REFLECT: How much do you hate sin? Do you hate it enough to separate yourself from it? Are you a closet believer? Do people at your place of work, or your neighborhood know you are a believer? How and when do you talk to God as one speaks with a friend? How do you feel when your sin has separated you from God? What can you do about that?

Up to now **the Sh'khinah glory**, in the form of a **pillar of cloud** by day and a **pillar** of fire by night, was over the camp of **Isra'el** (**to see link click Ep - The Camp of the Twelve Tribes of Isra'el**). And **Moses'** own **tent** was within the camp. But **now Moses** took a **tent and pitched it** for **himself outside the camp some distance away, calling it the tent of meeting. The rabbis teach the distance was about a thousand yards as defined in Joshua 3:4.** The **tent of meeting** was temporary until the completion of the more permanent **Tabernacle**, which, because of our topical approach to organizing the book, had not yet been completed. But as soon as **it was, it** took on the status of the **Tent of Meeting**. It immediately became the place where **Isra'el** was to meet with **YHVH**.

The purpose was to impress upon **the people** the separation from **God** as a result of **their** sin. **ADONAI** would communicate only with **Moses** and only **outside the camp of Isra'el**. The structure of the Hebrew language at the beginning of this verse indicates that **Moses** went out to **the tent** many times **(33:7)**.⁶⁸⁷

In the opening scene of the golden calf incident, **the Hebrews** spoke disparagingly of **Moses**. **Their** disrespect was clear when **they** called **him: this Moses (32:1)**. But after **God** had judged **them** and **Moses** had interceded on **their** behalf, **they** had a new respect for **him**. So **whenever Moses went out to the tent of meeting, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, and watched him until he entered it (33:8)**. This probably reflected respect, reverence, and remorse on **their** parts. **But** it also

demonstrated separation, because **the tent of meeting** was always outside the camp of Isra'el.⁶⁸⁸



The Sh'khinah glory, the visible manifestation of **God's** presence, **would come down and stay at the entrance of the tent of meeting**, whenever **Moses went** inside. How true are the words: **those who honor Me I will honor (First Samuel 2:30)**. Thus, **ADONAI** was still with **His people**, although somewhat removed. **Moshe's** submission and faith were greatly rewarded. **God** never disappoints those who seek **His glory** and rely on **His** grace.⁶⁸⁹ **ADONAI would speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks with his friend (33:11a)**. This expression should not be taken literally, since we are also told that **Moses** was not allowed to see the face of **God (33:20-23)**. The meaning of speaking **face to face** here means **as a man speaks with his friend**, that is, openly, without holding anything back. In **Numbers 12:8** we are told that **ADONAI** spoke **to Moses face to face**, literally *mouth to mouth*. The expression is immediately explained to mean **clearly and not in riddles**. That meant that **God** spoke to **Moses** in Hebrew words, not in dreams or visions like **He** spoke to other prophets. It is interesting that although **Moses** did not literally see **the face of God**, he did see **the form of ADONAI**, because **His** presence was **in the pillar of fire (13:21)**.⁶⁹⁰ The conversations between **God** and **Moses** were intimate, and the sensitive heart of **Moses** made it easy for **God** to speak to **him (Deuteronomy 34:10)**.⁶⁹¹

The tent of meeting was guarded by **his young aide Joshua**, who had served as field commander of **Israel's** army when **they** fought the Amalekites (**17:9**). **He** was the man that **God** was preparing to succeed **Moses**. **Joshua** would later lead **Israel's** military conquest of Canaan. When **Moses** returned **to the camp**, **Joshua** would guard **the tent** to prevent **the Hebrews** from making **the tent** into something to be worshiped like **they** had the

golden calf (**33:11b**). **They** were prone, and **they** would continue to be prone, to idol worship.

Moses' temporary **tent of meeting** was similar in many respects to **the Tabernacle**. It was a place for meeting with **God**, a place where **God's Sh'khinah glory** was shown and communicated with **Moses**. It was a pure place removed from the camp of **Isra'el**. It served as a temporary sanctuary in which **Moshe** could seek **the LORD**. Therein **YHVH** would meet with **him** and **speak with him face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend (33:11)**. Yet it fell far short of the ambitious **Tabernacle** project which was destined to replace **it**. It was inferior to **the Tabernacle** in several ways. First we notice that it was **outside the camp**. It was not dedicated among **the people**. It did not possess the intrinsic holiness which would allow **God** to dwell in the midst of **Isra'el**. **The Tabernacle**, by contrast, was at the center of the camp. Furthermore, we notice that only **Moshe** and **Joshua** had access to **Moshe's tent of meeting**. Those seeking direction from **the LORD** were able to leave the camp and bring their questions to **Moses** and **Joshua**, but **they themselves** had no direct access to **Moses' tent of meeting**. **They** could only watch from a distance. Whenever **the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his or her tent (33:9-10)**. **The Tabernacle**, by contrast, allowed for **all Isra'el** to draw near to **ADONAI** and worship in **His** presence.

Paul uses the Hebrew phrase **face to face** when **he** commented on the differences between our understanding of the here and now, in contrast to our understanding of the coming Messianic Kingdom. Paul says: **Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (First Corinthians 13:12)**. Not that what we see **now** is untrue, but it is an imperfect **reflection**. One day we shall look straight into the **face** of **God** and have unhindered communication with **Him**. In the Eternal State (see my commentary on **Revelation Fq - The Eternal State**), believers **will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads (Revelation 22:4a)**. **Moses** was closer to that day than any human who has ever lived, because **God** spoke to **him face to face** through **the Sh'khinah glory**.

When we consider the function of **the Tabernacle**, we quickly realize how the term **Tent of Meeting** is an appropriate description. If a man wanted to meet with **God**, he was to go to **the Tabernacle**. If a man had a petition for **Ha'Shem**, he brought his prayer to **the Tabernacle**. If a man wanted to give thanks to **ADONAI**, he brought a thanksgiving offering to **the Tabernacle**. Those seeking direction from **the LORD** brought their questions to the priests in **the Tabernacle**. A difficult legal problem or question of interpretation was

brought before **the Holy One in the Tabernacle**. If **God's** voice or a word of prophecy was sought, it was sought in **the Tabernacle**. If the covenant was to be renewed or restored, it was done in **the Tabernacle**. **The Tabernacle** was to be a place where **the people** came to **meet with God**.

Furthermore, **the Torah** commanded **the men of Isra'el** to present **themselves** before **ADONAI** in **the Tabernacle** three times a year: At **the Festival of the Passover** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Ee - Pesach**), at **the Festival of Pentecost** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Ec - Hag Shavu'ot**), and **the Festival of Booths** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Eg - Hag Sukkot**). It was mandatory for every able-bodied **Israelite man** to travel to **the Temple to meet with God** for those **three pilgrimage festivals**. The phrase **Tent of Meeting** is the Hebrew word *moed*, which is commonly translated as **festival** or **appointed times**. Therefore, remember that all of **God's festivals** are **appointed times**. **The Tabernacle** (and later **Jerusalem**) is the appointed place at which **the appointed times** are to be celebrated. In as much as **the appointed times** are **God's** designed **times** for **meeting with His people**, so too **the Tabernacle (Jerusalem)** is **His** designated place for meeting with **them**. Therefore, **the Israelites** were commanded to go to **the Tent of Meeting** (*moed*) and meet with **ADONAI** at three **appointed times** (*moedim*) every year: *the moed of Pesach, the moed of Shavu'ot, and the moed of Sukkot.*

The Tent of Meeting was to be a place where mankind and **God met** each other. We learn from this that **God** wants interaction with **His people**. **He** wants to **"meet"** with us, and **He** desires to do so at the **appointed moed**. When we show up to assemble and worship **Him** in community we are keeping the *moed*. To the best of our ability, we are entering **the Tent of Meeting** at the **appointed time** of **meeting**. When we keep **the festivals**, we are encountering **ADONAI** at **His appointed time**. We present ourselves before **Him** and celebrate our relationship with **Him**. Of course, we long for that day when **Messiah** reigns out of Jerusalem and all **the Gentile nations** will go up to **the appointed place**, Jerusalem, the City of **the Great King**, at the appointed time for **the festival of Sukkot** (**Zechariah 14:16**). Until then, we continue to **meet Him** wherever **He** will **meet** us.⁶⁹²