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The LORD said to Moses: Chisel Out Two Stone Tablets **34: 1-9**

The LORD said to Moses: chisel out two stone tablets DIG: Why was it so important to have another set of stone tablets? In the days before computers and instant copiers, what was involved in replacing the first set? Moses wanted to know more about God. Do you think he was surprised at what he found? Why or why not?

REFLECT: How has God revealed His name to you? What character traits of His have come to mean the most to you? When you learn more about the character traits of God, how does it affect your relationship with Him? If God has taken away your sins as far as the east is from the west, where have they gone?

The concrete symbol of the covenant between **God** and **Isra'el** was to be replaced. Earlier, **Moses** had destroyed the original tablets (**32:19**) because of the golden calf incident. Afterwards, **God** commanded that a similar set of **stone tablets** be made. **ADONAI** told **Moses** to **chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones** made by **His** hands (**24:12, 31:18, 32:16**). **God wrote the same exact words that were on the first tablets**. The first set of **stone tablets** were cut by **ADONAI**, but the second set **Moses** had to **chisel out** by **himself**. The fact that **Moses** had to **chisel them** may indicate **God's** displeasure with **him** for having destroyed **them** to begin with (**34:1**).

In any event, **Moses** was to **be ready by morning and travel up on Mount Sinai for the third and last time** to receive the Torah. **He** was to **present himself alone on top of the mountain**. As in **19:13**, all others, including **Joshua**, were to keep **their** distance from **the mountain**. **Moses** ascended to **the top of Mount Sinai**, and **ADONAI** came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed His name (**34:2-5**).

YHVH, YHVH Elohim

YHVH began **His** self-revelation to **Moses** by pronouncing **His** divine name twice, **YHVH, YHVH**, followed by the **El**, the biblical name for **Deity**. This is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where this exact formula occurs. The translators of the Septuagint apparently thought

the second **YHVH** was redundant, so they deleted it. Some have taken the double name as meaning, **YHVH, He is YHVH**. But however one interprets it, it seems clear that the double name emphasizes **God's** name, and causes the reader to pause and reflect on its meaning and the description that follows. Because the Jewish tradition forbids the pronunciation of **the Divine Name**, many choose to use **ADONAI** in its place (see **Ac - Introduction to Exodus**).

In the past, **God** had revealed **Himself** to **Moses** by **His** actions in relationship to **His people**. But now, as **He passed in front of Moses**, **He** revealed **Himself** through **His** character. **ADONAI, ADONAI, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, overflowing with kindness and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet, He does not acquit unrepentant sinners; He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations (34:6-7)**. Here we find the solution to the golden calf incident, and the fulfillment of what **God** said **He** would do in **33:19-23**. **He** said **He** would **pass in front of Moses**, reveal **Himself** in **His** grace, **mercy** and **compassion**.⁶⁹⁸

Compassionate: The first thing **God** revealed about **Himself** is that **He** is **El Hanun, the God of compassion**. This describes a deep love rooted in some natural bond. This love is usually that of a superior being (**God**) for an inferior being (us). The psalmist declared: **As a father has compassion on his children, so ADONAI has compassion on those who fear Him (Psalm 103:13)**. It is a deep and tender feeling that is aroused by the sight of weakness or suffering in those who are dear to us or need our help.

***God**, Your deep sorrow and sympathy for my suffering and troubles strengthen my resolve to press through. **You** bless me with perseverance and vigor so I can reach my goal.*

Another concept associated with **God's** compassion is **His** sovereign decision. **He** says: **I will show compassion on whom I will have compassion (33:19)**. **His compassion** is a sovereign decree to those **whom He** chooses. It is also linked to **His** faithfulness. **For ADONAI your God is a compassionate God; He will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which He confirmed to them by an oath (Deuteronomy 4:31)**. And because **He** is **compassionate**, **He** is also forgiving. The psalmist declared: **Yet He, being compassionate, forgave their sins and did not destroy them (Psalm 78:38)**. Through the exercise of **His compassion**, **God** spared the **Hebrews** who were deserving of judgment. **Deuteronomy 31:1-3** tells us that repentance from **sin** will be met with **God's compassion** and restoration to blessing. The prophets reveal that **God's compassion** provides the basis for **Isra'el's** future restoration (**Isaiah**

49:13; Jeremiah 12:15), national redemption (**Micah 7:19**), and far eschatological hope (**Isaiah 14:1; Jeremiah 33:26; Zechariah 1:16**). Anticipating the future blessings for **His** people Isra'el, **ADONAI** declared: **For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back (Isaiah 54:7).**

God is a **compassionate Father**. **He** loves **His children** and **He** will never abandon us. **He** will always be available in a believers' times of need, seeking their good for **His** ultimate glory. Although infinitely holy, His **compassion** allows **Him** to deal gently with weak and failing people. **He** is full of tender sympathy for the sufferings and the miseries of human frailty. Because of **His compassion**, **He** is always ready and willing to **forgive** sins and to restore fallen people to **Himself**.⁶⁹⁹

Gracious: The second fact **God** wanted **Moses** to know about **Himself** is that **He** is **gracious**. This tells us the basis on which **ADONAI** gives **His** grace. It has nothing to do with mankind, but solely because of **His** kindness. All of **God's** grace is a gift, freely given to a people entirely devoid of any worthiness.⁷⁰⁰ The **kindness** people extend to others may have some hope of reward. But with **God**, things are different. **He** has no ulterior motives. Because **God** is **gracious**, **He** will hear the cry of the poor (**22:27**). Since **God** is **gracious**, **He** will not turn away from the repentant (**Second Chronicles 30:9**). Given that **God** is **gracious**, **He** will not abandon **His** people (**Nehemiah 9:17** and **31**). **His** grace is featured throughout the Bible, from **Genesis** to **Revelation**, emphasizing the basis for **God's** **kindness** toward **His** people.

Slow to anger: Thirdly, the Bible reveals that **ADONAI** has a legitimate basis for **His** **anger**, because the sin and disobedience of **His** people dishonors and displeases **Him** (**32:10**). But **His** **anger**, though fierce (**Numbers 25:4, 32:14; Joshua 7:26; Jeremiah 25:37**), is not sinful or evil. It is grounded in **His** holy character, which is offended by **sin**. **God's** **anger** often results in **His** chastising (**Psalms 6:1, 38:1**) and punishing (**Second Samuel 6:7; Jeremiah 44:6**) **His** people. Yet while **God** may be rightfully angry over **sin** and disobedience, **He** is **slow to anger**. It is as if **He** takes a long, deep breath with **sin**, and holds **His** **anger**. Because of **His** character, **He** must punish **sin**, but **He** is in no hurry to do so. That doesn't mean **He** isn't serious about **sin**, rather, **God's** patience gives the wicked time to repent. As **Peter** wrote: **The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9)**. Yet, there will be a day when the wicked must stand before **God's** great white throne and be judged according to their deeds (see my commentary on **Revelation, to see link click Fo - The Great White Throne Judgment**). Meanwhile, **God** continues to demonstrate **His** patience and grace. Though **His**

anger is being kindled by human sinfulness, it is being kindled very slowly.

Overflowing with kindness: Fourthly, the Hebrew word translated **kindness** has the basic meaning of *unfailing love or loyalty* (see my commentary on **Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed**). **God's kindness** is demonstrated throughout the Scriptures. **He is kind** to all **He** has made (**Psalm 145:9**), even when **His** creatures are ungrateful and unworthy (**Matthew 5:45; Luke 6:35**). **His kindness** is intended to lead to repentance through **Him**, not rejection of **Him** (**Romans 2:4**). Therefore, it is the believer who can truly celebrate **God's kindness**, even in areas not related to salvation. This can be seen in the deliverance from physical or mental distress, fear and trouble. Nonetheless, our salvation comes from the **kindness of God** (**Ephesians 2:7-8**). What is true of **God** in general is also specifically true of **Christ**, who is gentle (**Matthew 11:29-30**). **God's** favor is based upon **His kindness** and **His unfailing love** (**Deuteronomy 7:8**).⁷⁰²

Abundant in faithfulness or truthfulness: Fifthly, the basic idea here is that of firmness, certainty and dependability. This word is frequently applied to **God** as a characteristic of **His Divine** nature. The chronicler used it in describing the **true God** (**Second Chronicles 15:3**). As a characteristic of **God**, it is the means by which **people** come to know and serve **Him** (**First Kings 2:4; Psalm 119:42**). Here, in **34:6**, the Hebrew word emphasizes **faithfulness** or **truthfulness**. Both, of course, are equally true of **God**. They are two sides of the same coin, because **He** is reliable and faithful, **His** words can be trusted. When you think about it, there is no reliable **truth**, or valid **truth**, apart from **God**. All truth comes from **God** and is true because it is related to **God**. **His** Word is as sure as **His** character. **Jesus Christ** acknowledged this truth about **ADONAI** when **He** said: **Your word is truth** (**John 17:17**).⁷⁰³

Maintaining love to thousands of generations: Sixth, **God's** attributes are not just theoretical, they are very practical. They are not revealed to us merely to be discussed and admired. They reflect the very nature of **ADONAI** and how **He** showers **His** grace and **mercy** to those in need. **God** continually maintains **His love** towards **His** children. The participle, translated **maintaining**, does not mean *retaining*. Rather, it means that **God extends His love** to those in need. **The rabbis teach that the word thousands means thousands of generations**. This fits the context, which mentions **generations** in **34:7**. Whereas the results of **sin** extend only **to the third and fourth generations**, **God's** covenant of **love** extends for **thousands of generations** (**Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 7:9; First Chronicles 16:15; Psalm 105:8**).⁷⁰⁴ So **God extends His** faithful and truthful **love to thousands of generations**, not only the distant **Israelites** who were with **Moses** on **Mount Sinai**, but to the multiplied **thousands** who need **His** help and deliverance every

day.

Forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin: Seventh, another great truth **God** wanted **Moses** and **His people** to know about **Himself** was that **He** was willing to **forgive**. Although this passage isn't the last of **God's** divine attributes in this section, it is probably the climax. The Hebrew word **forgive** means *to lift up, carry or take away*. The verb is used figuratively here and elsewhere of **God's taking away sin (Genesis 50:17; Numbers 14:19; First Samuel 15:25, 25:28; Psalm 31:1)**, so that the guilty receive pardon and forgiveness. **Sin** can be **forgiven** and **forgotten**, because it is *lifted up and carried away*.⁷⁰⁵

When we reciprocate **His** covenant of love, **ADONAI** responds by forgiving our **wickedness, rebellion and sin**, the three terms used in the TaNaKh to describe disobedience toward **God**.⁷⁰⁶ The first word, **wickedness**, refers to an action that involves crooked behavior, *a turning away from the straight and narrow way*. It is literally the *bending or twisting* of **God's** will and purpose. The second word, **rebellion**, can refer to a breach of relationships, civil or religious, between two parties (**Genesis 31:36; Isaiah 58:1**). The verb designates a revolt against rulers. In a religious sense, it refers to an *open revolt against God's authority and commands*. The third word, **sin**, which is by far the most common term, means *missing the mark, or missing the way* that **God** has set for us. Therefore, missing **His** standards, or failing to fulfill **His** requirements constitutes an act of **sin**. **Micah** thought about **God's** wonderful attribute of forgiveness when he said: **Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the rebellion of His people? You do not stay angry forever, but delight to show mercy (Micah 7:18)**.

Yet not acquitting unrepentant sinners: The eighth attribute is the other side of **God's** forgiving grace. Although **He** delights in **forgiveness**, **His** grace cannot abolish **His** justice. Those who refuse to repent are responsible before a holy **God**. The Hebrew could be translated, *He will most certainly not acquit the guilty*. The word **acquit** means *to be clean, pure or spotless*. In the context of the courtroom it means *to go unpunished*. **Proverbs 6:29** declares that the one who commits adultery with his neighbors **wife will not go unpunished**. In **34:7** it says that **God does not leave the guilty unpunished**. Because **God** is holy and just, as well as loving and forgiving, the **unrepentant** will face the most serious consequences of **their sin** and rebellion. **He** does not leave **unrepentant sinners unpunished (Exodus 20:7; Job 9:28; Jeremiah 30:11)**.⁷⁰⁷

Not erasing the consequences of sin: The ninth and last phrase in **God's** self-revelation to **Moses** reflects on the consequences of **sin**. While it is in **God's** nature to forgive the repentant (**First John 1:9**), it is not in **His** nature to remove the natural consequences of

foolish and sinful behavior. Some people believe that when the Bible says: **He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations (34:7)**, it means **God punishes children** for the **sins** of their parents or descendants. That would not be right. Yet that was exactly what people were saying in **Ezeki'el's** day, as expressed in their proverb: **The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge (Ezeki'el 18:2)**. They were saying that in allowing the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem, **God** was punishing **the Israelites** for the **sins of their ancestors**. **God** responded by saying: **As surely as I live, declares the ADONAI Elohim, you will no longer quote this proverb in Isra'el (Ezeki'el 18:3)**. Then, settling the matter for all time, **He** announced: **The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share in the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked man will be charged to him (Ezeki'el 18:20)**.

The fact that **ADONAI** will visit **the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations** means **the children** can expect to experience the *consequences* of sinful behavior of **their** parents. While **God** is willing to forgive and pardon, **He** does not interrupt the natural *consequences* of sinful behavior. And **children** and grandchildren experience some of these *consequences*. When a parent goes to prison, **the children** suffer loss. Unfortunately, many **children** have suffered the tragic *consequences* of growing up in a family with an alcoholic or abusive parent. **God** does not interrupt the natural *consequences* of foolish and sinful actions. **Children** do reap what sinful parents sow. Yet the influence of evil is limited to a few **generations, to the third and fourth generations**, while **God** extends **His love** for **thousands of generations**.⁷⁰⁸

Earlier, **Moses** had prayed: **Show me your Sh'khinah glory (33:18)**. In response **ADONAI** revealed **Himself** to **Moses** in a most unique and memorable way. **He** passed in front of **Moses** and proclaimed **His** name by revealing **His** attributes. How did **Moses** respond? **He** saw **himself** with new insight. **He** could no longer stand in **God's** presence, so he **bowled down to the ground at once and worshiped (34:8)**. The two verbs **bowled** and **worshiped** are often used together to convey a single idea - the reverence and humility before **One** who is far greater than the worshipper (**Genesis 24:26 and 48**). When **Moses** performed the three signs for the elders of **Isra'el** in Egypt, **the Hebrews** responded in the same way (**4:30-31**).⁷⁰⁹ Whenever we see righteous believers, or the four living creatures around the throne of **God** in heaven, they are continually falling **down** to worship **before the Lamb**.

Then **Moses** said: **ADONAI, if I have found favor in your eyes, then let the Lord go**

with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance (34:9). At that time, **Moses** was fully satisfied that all three of his petitions would be granted (**33:12-23**), and when the Tabernacle was built **God** would dwell with **the people of Isra'el**.

J. Wilbur Chapman, who wrote the song, *Jesus, What a Friend for Sinners*, told the story of a German mathematics professor who was converted under his ministry and became a member of his congregation. One morning during a men's bible study, Chapman commented that **ADONAI** had taken away our sins **as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12)**. He turned to the mathematics teacher and asked him, "How far is **the east from the west**?" The man responded in tears, saying, "Men, you cannot measure it, for if you put a stake here and keep **east** ahead of you and **west** behind you, you could go around the world and come back to your stake, and **the east** would still be ahead of you and **the west** behind you." The distance is immeasurable. And then he added, "Thank **God**, that is where my sins have gone."⁷¹⁰