

I Will Dwell in the Midst of You  
(Part 2)

Read Exodus 34:1-9

A sexual orgy below the towering heights of Mount Sinai demonstrated Israel's callous attitude toward her covenant with Yahweh, her God. What made the idolatrous deed before a golden calf even more despicable was its timing. It occurred merely three months after Yahweh had delivered them from the Egyptian bondage at the Red Sea, and soon after their oath to keep God's commands. At the base of Mount Sinai, the people had clamored, "All the words which the LORD has said will we do" (Ex. 24:3). Because of this covenant, God chose to dwell in the midst of His people.

The covenant between Israel and Yahweh at Sinai had not been solidified by signing a document, as we do today. In the Old Testament era, all contracts—religious compacts, business transactions, legal contracts, or betrothal arrangements—were made binding by a covenantal meal. This covenantal meal took place after Israel's agreement to obey Yahweh. It was here that Moses and seventy elders representing the Israelite community sat on the slopes of Mt. Sinai and partook of a covenantal meal with Yahweh (Ex. 24:11).

Forty days later, however, the people "sat down to eat and drink" before a golden calf (Ex. 32:6). And, as in the sensual pagan rituals of neighboring nations, they "rose up to play." Yahweh's wrath at the broken covenant was quenched by Moses' petition. Moreover, Yahweh appeared before Moses on the mount and announced that He was, "Yahweh, Yahweh God, **compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness**... who **forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin**" (Ex. 34:6-7). Despite Israel's heinous sin, Yahweh forgave the transgression and continued to dwell in the midst of His people.

Yahweh's proclamation of compassion and forgiveness echoes throughout the remainder of the Old Testament. Bits and pieces of His merciful claim, revealed in Exodus 34:6-7, are present in a number of Biblical narratives, psalms, and prophetic books. The rebellious incident at Kadesh Barnea is one example of Yahweh's proclamation in a narrative (Num. 14-15).

Twelve men were sent as spies into the Promised Land from Kadesh Barnea. When they returned to the Israelites waiting in the wilderness, ten were prepared with a negative report. Israel's response to their report was to "appoint another leader in place of Moses and return to Egypt" (Num. 14:4). Yahweh was ready to "smite them" for unbelief, as He had been ready at the golden calf debacle (14:11). This time, Moses pleads with Yahweh, reminding Yahweh of His own words: "Yahweh is **slow to anger** and **abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression**..." (v. 18). When Moses completes his prayer for Yahweh to relent, Yahweh said, "I have pardoned them" (v. 20).

David's confession of his affair with Bathsheba provides a second example of the OT use of Yahweh's proclamation from Exodus 34:6-7. Perhaps David saw his own sin in light of Israel's transgression before the golden calf. In his remorseful admission of guilt, recorded in Psalm 51, we again have the words of Yahweh mirrored. David entreats God, pleading, "Be **gracious** to me according to your **lovingkindness**; according to the greatness of Your **compassion**" (Ps. 51:1). He asks that God would "blot out..., wash..., and cleanse" his "**transgressions**..., **iniquity**..., and **sins**" (vv. 1-2). David must have

been aware that he was appealing to the God who had been willing to pardon Israel's great sin, and this gave him hope.

The prophets' frequent use of God's proclamation found in Exodus 34:6-7 is a third example of its use in the OT. Often, in the midst of prophetic speeches concerning judgment, a prophet would speak out some of these words of graciousness. Joel, who warns his people of future judgment and the "great and awesome day of the LORD," pleads with Israel to "Return to Yahweh your God, for He is **gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness** and relenting of evil" (Joel 2:12-14a).

Idolatry and its sexual companion nipped at Israel's heels throughout her history; the golden calf seemed to follow her. Though Israel would repeatedly agree to do "all the words which the Lord has said," she broke the covenant Yahweh had made with her with regularity; she would fall into iniquity, transgression, and sin. How was it that God would forgive and dwell in the midst of her? Precisely because He is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness.