

# OpenTheo

## March 26th: Exodus 33 & Matthew 26:57-75

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Moses intercedes for Israel. The trial of Jesus and Peter.

Some passages referenced:

Exodus 30:11-16 (atonement for the numbered persons, lest there be plague); Genesis 6:8 (Noah finding favour in the eyes of the Lord).

Matthew 12:6 (something greater than the temple is here); Acts 6:13-14 (the charge against Stephen concerning Jesus' threat to the temple); Jeremiah 7:1-15 (Jeremiah's challenge to the temple); John 2:19-21 (destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days); Isaiah 53:7 (as a sheep before its shearers is silent); Matthew 27:39-42 (the accusations against Jesus repeated while he is on the cross); Daniel 7:13-14 (the vision of the Son of Man); Leviticus 21:10 (the high priest not to tear his clothes); Isaiah 50:6 (I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting); Matthew 5:39 (turning the other cheek).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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### Transcript

Exodus 33 The Lord said to Moses, Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom

you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, To your offspring I will give it. I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey.

But I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people." When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. For the Lord had said to Moses, Say to the people of Israel, You are a stiff-necked people. If for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you.

So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you. Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward. Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting.

And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses.

And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

Moses said to the Lord, See, you said to me, Bring up this people, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight. Now therefore, if I have found favour in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favour in your sight.

Consider too that this nation is your people. And he said, My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. And he said to him, If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.

For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth? And the Lord said to Moses, This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name. Moses said, Please show me your glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord, and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

But he said, You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.

Exodus chapter 33 comes at an extreme crisis point in the narrative. Israel has sinned with the golden calf, and Moses has dissuaded God from destroying them. By, in part, enacting wrath against Israel on the Lord's behalf.

Then he has asked for forgiveness, insisting that if God is going to blot out the Israelites, he must be blotted out too. This is an extremely daring and risky move. God responded by saying that he would send his angel before them, and that his presence would not accompany them.

And when he did visit them, he would visit their sin upon them. The bond between God and his people seems to be severed. So God is going to fulfil his promise, he's going to send an angel before them, but ahead of them, not in their midst.

God is not going to associate with them. If God comes near to them, they will be destroyed by him. God refers to them also as the people, not his people anymore.

And this is underlined again at the beginning of chapter 33. They are the people that Moses has brought out of Egypt. God is practically disowning them.

God won't go with them, lest he destroy them or consume them. He will bring them to the place he said, but he's no longer going to do so as their God. And the part played by Moses in this story is incredibly important.

Moses is the intercessor, the intermediary, the one who interacts with God on behalf of the people on the basis of God's character, purposes and covenant. And it's reminiscent in some ways of Abraham in his intercession for Sodom, but it goes even further. God says that in the day that he visits the people, he will visit their sin upon them.

And this is followed by a plague being sent upon the people because they made the calf. There's something about that particular passage that should remind us of something that we heard just a couple of chapters earlier concerning the census tax. God says whenever there is a numbering of the people, a census of the people, there must be this poll tax paid.

Every single person must bring forward half a shekel. And this will make atonement for the people, lest God visit them with a plague. And the word for plague here is the same.

Likewise, the word for numbering the people or counting the people is the same for God visiting the people at the end of chapter 32. And there seems to be a connection. And I

think it helps us to understand the logic of that particular law concerning the census.

The logic being that when that person is being counted, they are being brought into sight. They are being brought into God's attention as a distinct person, not just a member of the mass, but they are being brought to God's mind. And as a result of that, atonement must be made for them, lest in counting them up, God visit their sin upon them.

We might think of it in part as, as the people are being reckoned up, the numbers of them, there is also a reckoning that occurs. And if they're not prepared for that, God will visit them with a plague. And this is what happens at the end of chapter 32.

As people are being reckoned up and counted, God takes personal note of them and God will judge those who do not have atonement made for them. And the challenge that Moses had at this point is that of rehabilitating the broken relationship between God and his people. It's dangerous for God to be near such a sinful people because his holy presence threatens to destroy them.

But we should notice that there is some softening of the tone in the statement at the beginning of chapter 33. And also note the way that Moses is associated with the people. He has thrown in his lot with them.

God speaks of them as you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt. So Moses and Moses' people, he is associated with them. He has thrown in his lot with them and they will go to the land.

But God is not going to go with them. Nevertheless, whereas in the previous statement that the Lord made, he spoke about the place about which I have spoken to you, even distancing himself as it were from the land of Canaan. Here he declares the nature of the land of Canaan in a way that reminds you of the promises that have been made earlier.

So maybe there's a softening that we can hear here. Also, while that earlier speech ends on a threatening note, nevertheless in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. This speech ends slightly differently with a statement that suggests that God would go with them if he could, but he can't because he would destroy them if he went with them.

And so it's for the sake of the people in part that he is not going with them. All of this should be seen against the backdrop of all that Sinai means. God has come close to his people.

He wants to be among his people, with his people. He wants to be their God and for them to be his people. It's a marriage ceremony and now the people have rejected him.

They've forsaken him and directly broken that command that was given to them at the

beginning. This is a fall event. So we've seen all the ways in which the seven-day pattern is playing out in chapters 25 to 31.

And then there is a fall and at this point there's a sort of expulsion. This is being thrown out of the Garden of Eden. But they've broken the primary commandments, the ways that God told them to worship him, to not have gold and silver idols before him.

The action with the golden calf is an action of spiritual adultery. It's as if the newly married man arrives back to his house to find his wife in bed with another man. The betrayal is severe and the anger of the Lord should be seen against the background of this.

It's not just that God is a holy God wanting pure justice. It's that God loves his people, has taken them to himself. God wants to be near to his people and his people, even after being taken out of Egypt, even after having God come close to them, even after God having led them through the wilderness and protected them and provided for them, they still turn their back on him.

They still go after other gods just as they've been told not to. The response of the people at this point though is encouraging. The people had taken off their jewellery to form the golden calf, but now they take it off in mourning for the Lord from whom they have been separated.

And there's a contrast between these two things and a connection as well. This is a reversal of what they did earlier. And the people are mourning the right thing.

They are still going to be led into the land, God says, but God is not going to go with them. And that is what they're mourning. They're mourning the fact that they have lost the relationship that they could have enjoyed with the Lord.

The golden calf had been a way to avoid having to deal with the living God, a blast shield that they could shield behind and not have to relate to God. But now they see what they have lost. They have lost the relationship with the living God and they mourn at that point.

Moses has to pitch the tent of meeting outside of the camp. This isn't the tabernacle, although the tabernacle is elsewhere called the tent of meeting because it functions in the same way. It rather becomes the tent of meeting when it's created.

But this is the place where he meets with the Lord and he intermediates between the Lord and the people. The Lord speaks to Moses and a man speaks to his friend. But Moses has to step away from the people in order to relate to the Lord.

So Moses has thrown his lot in with the people but he also can relate to the Lord and he does so by stepping away from the people and going to a place where the people are at

a safe distance. The Lord told Moses to bring up the people but never let him know whom he would send with him. And this is the key point that Moses presses here.

Is God going to go with them in their midst or is he just going to send an angel before them at some distance ahead of them and prepare the way for them but not have any dealings with them? The Lord had expressed his special regard for Moses, knowing him by name. And Moses asked to be shown the Lord's ways as evidence that he, Moses, has indeed found favour in God's sight. He's asking for some sort of reciprocation, that he too might know the Lord by name so that he might find favour in his sight in the future.

He asks the Lord then to consider that the people are his. Lord, you asked me to bring these people up. These are your people.

You commissioned me with this particular task. This people is your own people. You cannot disown them at this point.

The theme of knowledge is very important in Moses' speech. The Lord had not made known to Moses whom he would send with him. But he had known Moses by name and now he wanted to know the Lord so that he might have favour in his sight in the future.

And then he also wanted it to be known that he had found favour in his sight. To understand Moses' intercession within this passage and the passage that proceeds, it's important to see the way that Moses is using every bit of leverage that he has. His relationship with the Lord, the way that God has known him especially, the way that God has shown grace to him, the way that God has called him and commissioned him.

And every single bit of that he uses as leverage for the sake of the people so that God would forgive them, that God would restore them and that God would go up in their midst, that God would identify with them again, that they would be his people. Note the way that at the end he adds in something where we might expect Moses to say, for how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight? And for it to end there, it actually concludes with the statement, I and your people. It's not just Moses.

He wants to include the people. He has thrown in his lot with the people. And he wants God to recognise the people, that the people will be blessed with him on account of his relationship with God, that they too would be blessed and that they would be restored in relationship with God.

That God once more would identify with them and go up in their midst. Indeed, it's in God's presence with them that they are a distinct people. If God is not present with them, they're just like any other people on the planet.

It's the fact that God is with them, that they are his people, that makes them different. The divine presence is absolutely crucial. If God does not lead the people personally and with his presence in their midst, then what's the point? That's the evidence that they are

the Lord's people.

The chapter ends with God promising Moses an epiphany, a revelation of his glory, that Moses will see who God is and that in seeing this, something of the knowledge imbalance will be resolved, that Moses will know the Lord in some way as God has known him, that God has known him in a very intimate and special way and now he will know the Lord and that that knowledge will help him going forward to have favour in the sight of the Lord. We should be observing the continued allusions to the story of Noah within this particular account. We've seen them from the very beginning of the story at Sinai, the seven days, the seven days, the forty days, and then the ascending up the mountain, the way in which the Ark of the Covenant is described in a similar way to Noah's Ark.

And now we've seen a number of examples with God telling Moses that he would cut off the people and start a new people with Moses. That's similar to the story of Noah. In this chapter it continues, Moses finds favour in the sight of the Lord, just as Noah did in Genesis chapter 6. We can also think of God's statement about giving them rest.

That's another statement that reminds us of Noah. And so Noah is in the background here. Moses is playing the part of a Noah, but a Noah who intercedes and restores the people that God is about to destroy.

He's not a Noah that goes into the Ark. He's a Noah that stands and reasons with God and intercedes for a people that God is about to judge. The epiphany that follows is mysterious and we'll discuss it in much more depth when we talk about chapter 34.

But there are things to be noted. For instance, Moses talks to the Lord as a man speaks to his friend face to face. However, only a few verses later we're told that no one can see the face of the Lord and live.

What we need to recognise is that when we're using language about God, it's used in analogical ways. It is important to recognise that such language is accommodated to us. It's not something that should be taken literally in a way that would set up contradiction between these two statements.

Rather, such language of God is analogical. It's limited. It takes us a certain distance, but only so far.

And it needs to be held in check by those things we know about God. Those statements that show the ways in which God cannot be contained by his creation. That God is beyond his creation, exceeds his categories and is not limited by those things.

So when we read statements that God spoke to Moses as a man speaks to his friend face to face, we need to see in some sense God does speak to Moses face to face. But in another sense Moses does not see the face of the Lord, as we see later on in that chapter. And both of those statements need to be held together.

Neither one should be allowed to remove or evacuate the content of the other. A question to consider. What are some of the ways in which Moses, in this chapter and the chapter that precedes it, presents us with the type of Christ in his intercession for us and in his work in atonement? Matthew 26 verses 57-75 Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.

And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest. And going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus, that they might put him to death.

But they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days. And the high priest stood up and said, Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you? But Jesus remained silent.

And the high priest said to him, I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said to him, You have said so, but I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest tore his robes and said, He has uttered blasphemy, what further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy, what is your judgment? They answered, He deserves death.

Then they spit in his face and struck him, and some slapped him, saying, Prophecy to us, you Christ, who is it that struck you? Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant girl came up to him and said, You also were with Jesus the Galilean, but he denied it before them all, saying, I do not know what you mean. And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, This man was with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied it, with an oath, I do not know the man.

And after a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you. Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, I do not know the man. And immediately the rooster crowed.

And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, Before the rooster crows you will deny me three times. And he went out and wept bitterly. In the concluding part of Matthew chapter 26, Jesus is seized by the mob with Judas by night, and taken to Caiaphas the high priest.

The setting of night highlights the urgency and the underhandedness of what is taking place. The authorities are impatient, and they desire to do away with Jesus as soon as possible, as quickly as possible, rather than following a slower procedure of justice. The occurrence of these things at night also makes clear that the authorities are not people of the day, but people of the night, who desire the cover of darkness for their sins.



Jesus' resurrection, by contrast, will be associated with the rising of the sun. Earlier on, in the celebration of the Last Supper, they had celebrated a Passover meal in the evening, and now we are seeing the events of the Passover night. This is an inversion, or a reversal of Passover and its meaning.

The Sanhedrin, the Jewish council, brings forward false witnesses against Christ, seeking to get the conviction that they so desperately desire. But they repeatedly try and fail, until two come forward, and the accusations made against him focus upon Jesus' challenge to the Temple. Jesus has challenged the Temple on a few occasions during the final week in Jerusalem in particular.

He declared that it had been made into a den of robbers and a place of traders, a place where brigands would take refuge from justice. Jesus has declared himself earlier to be greater than the Temple, in chapter 12 verse 6. And later on in the ministry of the early church, the challenge that Jesus posed to the Temple is brought forward again. In Acts chapter 6 verses 13-14 we see this.

And they set false witnesses who said, this man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law. But we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us. In his challenge to the Temple, Jesus could be seen as a prophet like Jeremiah.

Think maybe of Jeremiah chapter 7 verses 1 following. This is the Temple of the Lord. Make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered.

Only to go on doing all these abominations. Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, says the Lord. Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it, because of the evil of my people Israel.

And now, because you have done all these things, declares the Lord, and when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer. Therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I give to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh, and I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim. Jesus then poses a very strong challenge to the Temple.

He's the one who cleanses the Temple. He's the one who declares that the Temple has become like a den of thieves. He alludes to Zachariah.

He alludes to Jeremiah, and all these other texts that speak about the way that the Temple will be cleansed, and that God will judge the Temple, and will remove trade from

it, and he will oppose and defeat those who have made it into a den of brigands. The charge that is made against Jesus here is not actually found in Matthew's Gospel, although we do find something like it in the book of John, chapter 2, verses 19 following. Jesus answered them, Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

The Jews then said, It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and will you raise it up in three days? But he was speaking about the Temple of his body. The witnesses then seem to make a true statement, but with the attempt to destroy, and with a twisting of Jesus' words. It's a false witness in the sense that it's designed as a malicious witness.

Yet the result is that Jesus is convicted by true testimony. They are judging Jesus' true message, not just something that's been misrepresented. It's not just Jesus himself who is rejected, it's his message too.

Jesus is silent before his accusers at first, as a sheep before its shearers is silent. In Isaiah, chapter 53, verse 7, this is the way that the servant is described. And the high priest commands him before God to tell him if he is the Christ.

That's a strange thing to ask. Is this a separate charge? No, I don't think it is. It's because the Messiah was the one to cleanse and restore the Temple, and so theologically it follows from the statement about the Temple.

Note the repetition of this charge when Jesus is on the cross, in chapter 27, verses 39-42. And those who pass by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, you who would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself. If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.

So also the chief priests, with the scribes and the elders, mocked him, saying, he saved others, he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.

In response to the high priest's request, Jesus affirms it, and he says that he is the Son of Man, and that the high priest would from then on see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven. Jesus here is alluding to Daniel, chapter 7. Daniel, chapter 7, verses 13-14 read, In response to this, something the high priest was explicitly told that he ought not to do in Leviticus, chapter 21, verse 10. They don't have the jurisdiction to carry out the sentence, though, so they must deliver him to Pilate in the morning.

Claiming to be the Son of Man goes beyond the status of a man. It's claiming a status that is more divine. And there also seems to be cultural blasphemy here.

He's opposing the temple and the religious leaders, too. So there's the greater charge, the charge that he has made himself the Son of Man, and then there's also the lesser charge of cultural blasphemy, opposing the temple and the religious leaders. And they

respond by spitting in his face, mocking him, slapping him, and we could maybe think to the mockery of Samson before his death, but also of Isaiah, chapter 50, verse 6, and the way that the suffering servant is described there.

One thing we should be noting here is that even in that great hour of darkness, the enemies of Christ are constantly and continually fulfilling prophecy. Also, Jesus is living out his manifesto. He's turning the other cheek, not avenging himself.

Peter's denial is paralleled with and contrasted with Jesus' trial. In verse 58, Peter's presence is described. He's there at a distance.

And then we see him come to the forefront again in verse 69. Both Peter and Jesus are questioned. One is faithful and the other unfaithful.

The two women who claim that he was with Jesus were probably with the arresting party, and we can see a gradual escalation. First, he's approached directly and personally and denies it to the entire group. He then tries to move location.

And there he's accused to the bystanders by another servant girl, and then he denies it strongly again. Then the bystanders accuse him together of association with the followers of Jesus. Note the way that Jesus is seen as an outsider from the north.

A man of Nazareth, a man of Galilee, and Peter, his accent giving him away, is associated with that region too. Peter's curse that he declares at this point is either an anathema upon himself or an anathema upon Christ, both of the very utmost seriousness. And it emphasises just how terribly and seriously he's fallen.

Hearing the crowing cock brings sudden and horrified self-recognition of his earlier pride and his current sin and startles him back to his senses. He now completely removes himself. He's been gradually moving out, and now he completely removes himself and weeps bitterly.

A question to consider. What are some of the ways in which the justice of Christ condemnation of the Jewish leaders a few chapters earlier is manifested in the various injustices that are involved in their condemnation of him?