

Emmanuel, God With Us

Bible study Prepared by Major Deborah Coles, January 27, 2021

In Exodus chapters 32 and 33 we read about the importance of God's presence with us. And we see that He is, indeed, Emmanuel, God with us.

A beautiful Salvation Army song, "Lord, if Your Presence does not go with us" can be found on You Tube. Here is a link: <https://youtu.be/jlWp8oWXnH8>

BACKGROUND

In Exodus 32, we read that God had told Moses to go up on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments for the people to follow.

Now Moses stayed up on the mountain longer than the people thought he should. So they went to Moses' brother, Aaron, and told him, "We want you to create gods who will go before us. As for this fellow, Moses, who brought us out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings you are wearing and bring them to me." So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took all the gold they had given to him and made it into an idol in the shape of a calf. The people were very happy with the idol that had been made for them.

When Aaron saw how happy the people were, he built an altar for the calf. He said, "Tomorrow will be a festival to the Lord and you are to rise up early and make a sacrifice of burnt offerings before the calf."

When God saw what the people were doing, He became very angry and told Moses that He was going to destroy the people because of their unfaithfulness. But Moses begged the Lord to remember the promise that He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and the children of Israel. Moses convinced the LORD and He changed His mind and did not do what He said He might do—He did not destroy them.

Moses tries to make atonement for the people (32.30). He loves God's people and is even willing to die for them. (32.31,32.)

READ CHAPTER 33.

What is distressing about God's response? (33.5)

33.3 Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. BUT _____, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.

Wow!

Moses AGAIN intercedes for the people. "Remember that this nation is Your people." (33.13)

And God relents. (When Israel repents, God relents.)

In 33.14 God tells Moses, "My Presence will go with you."

Imagine Moses' relief! Because, as he says, "How will anyone know that You are pleased with me and with Your people unless You go with us? WHAT ELSE WILL DISTINGUISH ME AND YOUR PEOPLE FROM ALL THE OTHER PEOPLE ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH?" (emphasis mine)

Like the people of Israel, we are to be distinguished from all other people BECAUSE of God's presence. What makes us different? Do we live in fear? Do we reach out to neighbours? Do we pray for our leaders, even if we didn't vote for them?

OPEN

- If you could ask God for anything, what would you ask?

DIG

- What does the presence of God (or the lack of it) mean to Moses? What ensures Israel's continuing existence? (33.15)
- What in Moses' 'bold' appeal do you think persuades God to do an "about-face"? ((33.18)
- what is Moses shown and told. Why does God set limits? When is Moses' prayer more fully answered (see Luke 9:30-32)?

REFLECT

- Which comes first, our obedience or God's mercy (see ch 32)?
- Where do you meet with God? (See 33:7-11)
- What does meeting God 'as a friend' mean for M? for you? (see 33.7-11) How will you become God's friend?

(Questions adapted from Serendipity Bible for Study Groups, NIV, Zondervan 1988)

