
Exodus 34:6-7 and 14: A jealous God

1. During the last weeks we have followed the people of Israel as God led them out of Egypt and on the road to their own land. They murmured in the desert when they lacked food and drink, but God provided. He made a covenant with them at Mt Sinai and gave them the Ten Words. Yet as soon as Moses lingered on the mountain, they broke that covenant by making a golden calf. Both God and Moses got angry in response, and Moses destroyed the two stone tablets of the covenant. Thanks to Moses' intercession, God relented and in our passage God restores the covenant (verse 10).
2. What follows in Exodus (chapters 35-40) only deals with the making of the tabernacle, so in the present chapter we expect a climax, and it looks like it. In Exodus 34 Moses receives new stone tablets and God takes his people back. God comes close to Moses on the mountain, although Moses does not really see him. In any case, what God says is far more important than what he might look like. First he repeats his name 'I am' (rendered as 'LORD'). He is the only real one, the living one, the one who exists eternally. We cannot really understand him. We are only created beings, after all.
3. The LORD then calls out all these other great things about himself (verses 6-7): he is compassionate, gracious (even when Israel has broken the covenant), slow to anger (quite unlike many of us) and faithful. All these words are covenant terms, which are also true of Jesus, who has brought us into covenant with God. In Jesus we know God even better than the Israelites knew him. What a privilege!
4. But then we hear that he also punishes, and verse 14 (like the second commandment) says that God is jealous. Is that not simply a bad characteristic? Is our passage then an anti-climax? No! God's punishment applies to those who stay outside the covenant, and it only affects the generations in a household, not all the world.
5. In Old Testament the word jealous is always used in connection with marriage. That is a relationship in which two people become one, inseparably. No third person is welcome in a marriage relationship. If a third person tries to intrude, the one partner is justly jealous. You fight for you marriage!

That's how God is, says the Bible. He has this unique relationship, the covenant, with us, and no-one should separate us from him. Nothing else should be ore important for us than our God.

(Although many TV shows and books thrive on infidelity, on third persons breaking up relationships, we can still understand this. And real life a partner-swap is definitely not our ideal.)

This means that God's jealousy is a virtue! He is a great partner who jealously guards our unique relationship with him! He is justly angry if we break the covenant.

6. God loves us dearly and he expects our love in return. Take a moment to reflect: How is your relationship with him? Is he glad over you? – and are you over him? Increasingly? Or have you disappointed him? Do you need to draw closer to him again? Then do so today!
 7. In Exodus Israel gets to know their God and he enters into a covenant relationship with him. A good relationship will grow, deepen, over time. How is your covenant with God doing?
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