



Further Reflections

Purpose of God?

By **Greg H. Parsons** Frontier Ventures staff since 1982, and currently serving as Global Connections Strategist.

Since you are reading this column, you are likely passionate about the cutting edge of the Gospel among the unreached. I wonder if you—like me—sometimes come to the Scriptures to find passages to “use” to justify our missions service and motivate others. It makes us feel better about what we are doing! But one of the biggest problems with that approach is that we miss other significant truths within the biblical story, because we are blinded by trying to justify ourselves.

If we consider the broader biblical story from Genesis 3 through Revelation 20, the focus is on God working with frail humans to find a way to dwell with us again. The amazing thing is that *He does not give up!* It turns out that the God of the Old Testament isn’t actually vengeful, as some complain; He just cannot dwell with sin. Yet, when we fail, He does not give up.

Have you wondered why?

The greatest reason is described when God speaks to Moses in Exodus. The role of the Exodus in the biblical story can easily be underemphasized. Many scholars believe that John had Exodus on his mind when he wrote his Gospel. Unlike Moses, who saved Israel from bondage in Egypt, but who failed and thus could not enter the land, Jesus did *not* fail. He built the bridge we can cross to restore our relationship with God. Because of that, God can and will dwell with us again—as Revelation 21-22 powerfully makes clear.

After the people of Israel leave Egypt, Exodus outlines the way God is establishing the nation of Israel—with a structure for how to live and be governed. This includes the Ten Commandments

(Ex. 20) and other laws after them. In chapter 34, while Moses is speaking with God again, God interrupts the conversation because people have just broken the first two commandments! God would be justified to destroy them, as He suggests to Moses. Moses offers himself in exchange for the people.

This exchange with Moses—who pleads for the people and for God’s presence to go with them—is profound. I encourage you to meditate on that afresh, starting in Exodus 31:18 (Watch for five times Moses pleads with God).

In chapter 34, God tells Moses to meet Him in the morning, alone, with two new tablets. Here He describes what His name means:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “[YHWH] a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Ex. 34:5–7, ESV, tetragrammaton substituted).¹

And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

¹ This does not mean that children are judged for their father’s sins per se. Other passages clearly link individual judgement to the disobedience of each person. See Exodus 20:5-6, showing a link between judgment on those who hate God, and love to those who love Him. Jeremiah 32:16-19 quotes Exodus 34 and concludes with *...rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruits of his deeds.* See also Deut. 5:9-10.

As we read the rest of the Scriptures, phrases from this passage are repeated over and over. In fact, this is the most quoted passage within the O.T. itself. Perhaps the best example comes from James, who likely understood the Old Testament better than we ever will...and Exodus 34 was clearly in his mind.² James 5:11 says:

you have seen the Lord's purpose, that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.
(Emphasis as in NETBible.org.)

I had never noticed that before. I don't usually connect *purpose* with compassion and mercy. I challenge you to meditate on that, as you memorize Exodus 34:1-8, especially 5-8.

I hope my reason for writing this is clear: *the love of God is our motivation for all that we do* in our relationships with our family, our neighborhood, and our mission work. I suggest you examine yourself and ask: "Does everything I do have a foundation of God's love?" 📖

² The reference in the NET Bible says this is an allusion to Ex. 34:6; Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:15; 102:13; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2. Many more passages could be included.

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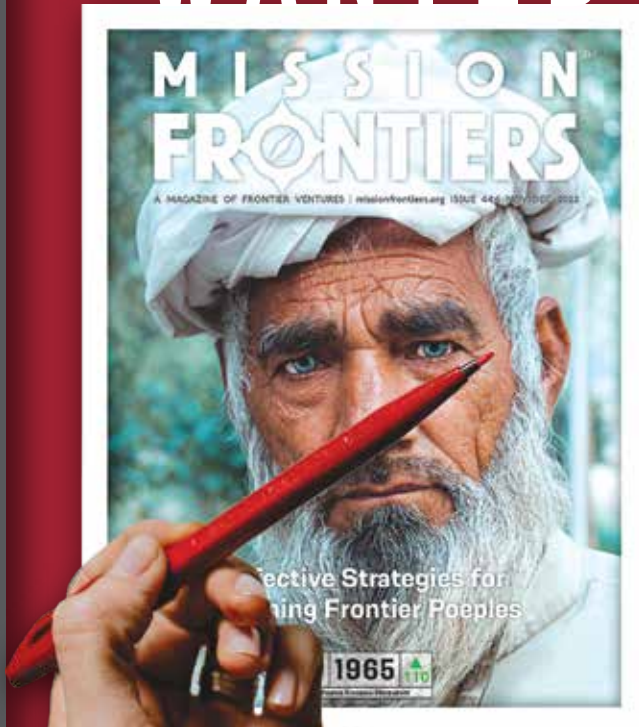
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