

Exodus 33:12-23ⁱⁱ

Moses said to the LORD, "See, you have 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 favor in my sight.' Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." 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, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth." The LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the 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 no one shall see me and live." And the LORD continued, "See, 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."

ⁱⁱ About the Exodus 33:12-23

This reading demonstrates Moses' close relationship with God. Exhausted from the burden of leading the people through the wilderness, Moses complains that he does not have enough help to accomplish his task. God responds by promising to be present in person to make sure that Moses and the people will go in safety.

But Moses is not satisfied with God's general presence and asks for a personal experience of God's "glory" (a visible manifestation of God's invisible being). God consents but indicates that this experience will have to be very limited because no human can confront God directly and survive. Moses' experience is twofold. First God utters the personal divine name YHWH ("the LORD"), revealing God's overflowing graciousness and mercy. Then after God's glory has passed, Moses is allowed to see only God's back.