

## FINAL SERMON IN SERIES ON MOSES & EXODUS

### Exodus 32-34

John 1:17, "For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

#### Introduction

Just after the second world war it was still popular in many scholarly circles among biblical scholars, and some church people generally to claim that there was a significant contrast between the OT and the NT. Especially was this the case between the God of the OT and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ - the former being a God of wrath, judgment and punishment, the latter being one of mercy and kindness.

The view is not a dominant one today though it is still to be found in some pockets of various denominations. The discontinuity between the Testaments is set forth in a different light. I refer to that which the Lutherans have highlighted - the dichotomy between "law and grace". This is seen as an absolute contrast and understood in Pauline terms, especially with reference to the letter to the Galatians (though whether it fairly represents Paul is another matter: "legalism and grace"?). "Works of law"?

Many interpreters (esp. continental and Lutheran) then use this catchword as a yardstick, or as a "canon within the canon", transferring the dichotomy to other parts of the NT, for example to Matthew's Gospel, and to our text in particular, John 1:17.

1. But our *studies in Exodus 32-34* have shown us that as far as Moses personally was concerned, that Lutheran dichotomy of law and grace does not apply. The text refers to the Lord speaking with Moses "face to face". He is in a close personal relationship with the living God, even when Israel are about to be cut off. He enjoys an unique relationship with Yahweh, and earnestly desires that Israel might stand in a similar position.

According to Exod 33:18-23 the Lord reveals himself wonderfully to Moses as merciful and compassionate. But this is not all: for according to Exodus 34, where the covenant is renewed (partly in answer to Moses' petition) there is a magnificent theophany in 34:6 - basis of later statements, Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 86.15, etc. - a magnificent revelation of the Lord who is merciful, gracious, slow to anger, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin, yet paradoxically he does not leave the guilty unpunished - a magnificent revelation for Israel. (No such dichotomy there.)

"Grace and mercy" actually for Moses, potentially for Israel. The very words of this text, John 1:17, are found there in the OT "through Moses".

2. Let us turn to *our text, John 1:17, in detail:*

a. **The Structure of the Sentence and its Context**

Is there really a contrast? (Context) Well, first let us note that the οἵτι ("for, because") explains v. 16, either the whole of it, or I suspect that final words, "grace in place of/instead of grace". Say more about this later.

What is surprising, however, is that there is no word (Greek conjunction) in the second half of the sentence: no *dev*, no *ajllav* or anything like it. Now if the fourth evangelist had wanted to indicate a sharp dichotomy between the law given through Moses and grace and truth coming through Jesus Christ, then he had several ways of doing it. He has chosen not to use one of those ways. Very strange.

Some have said that the contrast is so obvious it doesn't need to be mentioned by means of a conjunction. But although this is possible, why is it so obvious? Because interpreters have read their Lutheran or other dichotomy into it? I suspect so.

In fact, the more natural reading of the original (Greek) is to understand the second as building upon (not contrasting) the first.

b. **Moses and Christ**

Again said that there is a contrast. The name "Moses" conjures up for us all that stands for law, legalism, justification by works, etc.

Whereas "Christ" represents grace, all that stands for mercy, justification by faith, and forgiveness.

But if we examine the occasions on which the name of Moses occurs in the Fourth Gospel, then we discover it is used in a positive way (except when the Jews are speaking).

1:45           the one of whom Moses spoke in the law. Moses through the law pointed to Jesus.

5:45, 46       the one who accuses the Jews is Moses. Had they believed Moses then they would have believed in Jesus. Testimony of Moses to Jesus. etc.

c. **The Law/Grace and Truth**

Note the *source of the Law* - graciously given by God. The Fourth Evangelist goes out of his way to draw attention to the gracious activity of God - passive of verb "give". If the law is being sharply contrasted with grace and truth then this is a strange way of going about it. But anyway, cf. OT context of Exodus 19 and 20.

*Grace and Truth* - first used in the paragraph at v. 14. Either that the only-begotten is full of grace and truth, or that his glory is full of grace and truth. Either way there is not much difference in meaning. Furthermore, many commentators recognise that the cluster of terms used here is found in the OT, of all places in Exod 33 and 34. Read passage. Moses asked to see God, and the Lord says that he will make all his goodness pass before him. His glory. The background to understanding vv. 14-18 is the Torah, and especially these important chapters of Exodus.

d. **Not a Contrast: Rather Promise and Fulfilment**

From his fullness the Evangelist can say he and his believing friends have received. Grace in place of grace. May be one supply of grace. More than could ever be needed. This is no doubt true. (But grace of Christ - grace to Moses)

In the light of Moses. Then v. 18 makes sense. Moses did not actually see God. He was hidden in a cleft in a rock as the Lord passed by. But we, in fulfilment of those adumbrations, now receive that full revelation in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. Promises and fulfilment.