

**LESSONS FROM EXODUS**  
**YAHWEH: THE GOD OF GLORY**  
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“Almost everything said of God is unworthy, for the very reason that it is capable of being said”—so spoke Pope Gregory the Great (Lived: c. 540-604; Pope: 590-604) who is commonly regarded as the father of the medieval papacy.

When I mention the word “glory,” what comes to your mind? The first thing I thought of were song lyrics:

Let’s go out (let’s go out)  
In a blaze of Glory.  
All good things must end.  
Like three heroes in a story,  
Let’s go out like we came in—  
In a Blaze of Glory.

For some reason, I remember these words well and I can even sing the tune (although I’m not going to do that). But when I recalled these lyrics, I could not remember when or where I had heard them, or even who sang them. So, I consulted some music experts . . . my sons. They were quick to point out that I was thinking of Jon Bon Jovi’s song *Blaze of Glory* that was in the movie *Young Guns II*. They played the song for me. Yes, I thought it was a cool song and I understood why it was nominated in 1991 for an Oscar, and why it won a host of other awards. But it was not the song that I was thinking of. I merged on to the information highway—the internet. I instantly discovered that the phrase “blaze of glory” is a fairly popular expression. Finally—by way of Bon Jovi to Joe Jackson to Kenny Rogers—I found the folksy melody *Blaze of Glory*, written by Slate, Morrison, and Keith; and sung by *The Band*—Danko, Fjeld, and Andersen.

On a somewhat more substantial note, how could I *not* think of the 19th-century American folk song the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*?

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord . . .  
[And then that well-known refrain—]  
Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!  
Glory, glory, hallelujah!  
His truth is marching on!

Speaking of the Republic, one of the most prominent displays of patriotism since the tragedy of September 11th is the flying of the American flag. And I remembered that “the Stars and Stripes” are sometimes referred to as “Old Glory.”

Shifting my focus from the secular to the sacred, some of the first scriptures that came to my mind were Isa 6:3, John 1:14, and 1 Cor 10:31. Isa 6:3—the prophet Isaiah’s vision of the Lord and the winged seraphs who were calling to one another,

“Holy, holy, holy!  
Yahweh of the heavenly hosts!  
The whole earth is full of His glory.”

John 1:14—the Apostle John’s depiction of Jesus becoming one of us:

And the Word became flesh  
and pitched His tent among us [OR, made His dwelling among us],  
and we beheld His glory,  
glory such as belongs to the only Son from the Father,  
full of grace and truth.

This statement would have reminded John’s readers of the Tent of Meeting or Tabernacle, which was filled with the glory of God. Lastly, 1 Cor 10:31—the Apostle Paul’s admonition,

So, whether you eat or drink,  
or whatever you do,  
do everything for the glory of God (NRSV).

Now, let’s turn our attention to the Book of Exodus which has been the primary source for our series of studies about Yahweh, the LORD God. The term “glory”<sup>1</sup> is used three times in one context to denote recognition, respect, and reverence. Look with me at chapter 14 of Exodus. The Israelites have left Egypt and they have come to the Red Sea. Most, if not all, of us know this story. Yahweh will part the waters, permitting the Israelites to pass through on dry ground. The Egyptians will pursue the Israelites, only to perish when the walls of the sea come crashing down upon them. Let’s begin reading at verse 3 (Yahweh is speaking to Moses):

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<sup>1</sup>כְּבוֹד (kavedh).

Pharaoh will conclude that the people of Israel are wandering aimlessly in the land, that the wilderness has closed in on them. Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will come chasing after them, so that I will gain glory for Myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh (Exod 14:3-4). . . .

[Jump now to verse 16. Yahweh says to Moses,]

You raise up your staff, and thrust out your hand over the sea and split it, so that the people of Israel may march through the sea on dry ground. As for Me, just watch Me as I harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they go in after them; and so I will gain glory for Myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh, when I have gained glory for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen (Exod 14:16-18).

The Egyptians, indeed the whole world, will know that Israel's God—Yahweh—is the Lord of all the earth. The word for “gaining glory” belongs to the same Hebrew root as one of the verbs for hardening.<sup>2</sup> Pharaoh's hardening leads to Yahweh's honoring. The point of the wordplay is that the defeat of the evil oppressor will bring public glory and honor to God. This public recognition, respect, and reverence is voiced in the Song of Moses in chapter 15. Yahweh's liberating action leads to a hymn of praise before all the earth.

There is another way in which the term “glory”<sup>3</sup> is used in the Book of Exodus. Nine times in six settings it refers to the immediate presence of Yahweh among His people. The *Tanakh*, the English translation of the Hebrew Old Testament produced by the Jewish Publication Society, renders all these occurrences with the word “Presence”—spelled with a capital “P”. Let's examine these occurrences.

In chapter 16, in connection with the gift of manna, the Israelites are told, “in the morning you will see the glory of Yahweh” (v. 7), and they do: “they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of Yahweh appeared in the cloud” (v. 10). Note that glory and the cloud are associated. In chapter 24, verses 16 and 17,

The glory of Yahweh settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; then on the seventh day [Yahweh] called out to Moses from the midst of the cloud. Now the spectacle of the glory of Yahweh was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel (Exod 24:16-17).

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<sup>2</sup>כָּבֵד (kavedh).

<sup>3</sup>כְּבוֹד (kavodh).

Once again, glory and cloud are together, and the people see the glory. The same thing is said with regard to the Tabernacle. In verse 43 of chapter 29, Yahweh states that the Tent of Meeting “will be made sacred by My glory,” and then in chapter 40 the Book of Exodus concludes with these words:

When Moses had finished the work, the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Yahweh filled the Tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of Yahweh filled the Tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was raised up from upon the Tabernacle, the people of Israel journeyed forth in their various travels; but if the cloud was not raised up, they did not journey forth until the day when it was raised up. For the cloud of Yahweh was upon the Tabernacle in the daytime, and fire was in the [cloud] in the nighttime, in the view of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys (Exod 40:33b-38).

So then, what we have seen is that the “glory” is what can be seen of God’s presence. With this in mind, now let’s explore the fascinating passage, in Exodus chapter 33, where Moses asks Yahweh, “Please show me Your glory” (Exod 33:18).

This profound and puzzling event takes place within the context of the Golden-Calf story—a story we studied in detail several weeks ago. Because of Israel’s sin, Yahweh has informed Moses that He cannot dwell among the people. Yahweh’s absence from the midst of Israel means that the order to construct the Tabernacle has been cancelled. In effect, God is saying, “Don’t bother to build Me a house, because I’m not moving into your neighborhood!” Moses, then, is feeling “left out in the cold” and “holding the bag” (so to speak). He intercedes for Israel, and Yahweh graciously promises to be with Moses. We pick up the story at verse 18 of chapter 33.

Then [Moses] said [to Yahweh], “Please show me Your glory.” [Yahweh] replied, “I will make all My goodness pass in front of you, and I will call out the name Yahweh in your presence. I will grant the grace that I will grant and show the compassion that I will show. But,” He continued, “you cannot see My face, because no one may see Me and then continue living.” Yahweh went on to say, “Look—there is a place near Me where you may stand on a rock. When My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will shield you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove My hand and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen (Exod 33:18-23). . . .

Yahweh came down in a cloud, and He stood there with [Moses] and called out the name Yahweh. Then Yahweh passed in front of Moses and called out: “Yahweh! Yahweh!—a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, overflowing with loyal-love and faithfulness, extending loyal-love to a thousand [generations], taking away guilt and transgression and sin; yet, [a God] certainly

not neglecting just punishment, punishing the children and the children's children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generations" (Exod 34:5-7).

The last two verses constitute Yahweh's response to Moses' two requests: Moses has asked that he may "know" God's ways (33:13) and that he may "see" God's glory (33:18). Yahweh's mysterious passing before Moses answers the second request, and the recital of the divine attributes answers the first request. What God gives to Moses is a description, a description not of how He *looks* but of how He *is*. Yahweh reveals to Moses His *character* rather than His *countenance*.

Many, if not most, interpreters understand Moses' request to see Yahweh's glory as a desire for a direct vision of God Himself. But this presents us with perplexing problems. First, Moses appears to have "gotten carried away" and—in the words of John Calvin (1509-1564)—to have "inconsiderately proceeded further than he should." Second, Yahweh seems to rebuke Moses rather than reassure him. I do not believe that this is the best understanding of this incredible event. In light of the fact that elsewhere in Exodus "the glory of Yahweh" refers to the presence of Yahweh among His people, I think we should see the same meaning in this passage. The request of Moses to see the glory of Yahweh is a request that Yahweh demonstrate the reality of His promise to be present, indeed that He prove His presence once again, as was the case in the covenant that has since been broken by Israel. Moses wants, indeed needs, visible proof of Yahweh's presence. And this is precisely what Yahweh gives to Moses, following which the covenant with Israel is restored, and the building of the Tabernacle takes place.

From Exodus chapter 34, verses 29 through 35, we learn that this manifestation of God's glory had an astounding and amazing effect on Moses; and through him, on all of Israel as well. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, "he was not aware that the skin of his face was shining because of Yahweh's speaking with him" (v. 29). So when Aaron and the Israelites saw Moses' shining face, "they were afraid to come near him" (v. 30). As a result, Moses wore a veil at appropriate times.

Perhaps some of you have seen Michelangelo's statue of Moses or at least a miniature of it. In the statue, Moses is holding the tablets of the law, but on his head, Moses also

has two small horns. That comes from the fact that the verb for “to shine”<sup>4</sup> in the Hebrew text could also be translated “horn”:<sup>5</sup> the two terms share the same Hebrew root. “Horn” was the reading of the Latin Vulgate that Michelangelo followed. However, the Exodus passage is clear that Moses did not have horns, but that “the skin of his face was shining.”

The skin of Moses’ face shines with the reflected light of the fiery glory of Yahweh. The Exodus story emphasizes Moses’ authority to deliver Yahweh’s commandments to the children of Israel. Moses has received the commandments directly from God Himself, and he faithfully passes on the words of God to the people over whom God has given him charge.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul uses this story in the third chapter of 2 Corinthians. Due in no small part to his own conversion, Paul realizes that the law has only a fading splendor, because fulfillment of the law cannot bring salvation. Once the law had a splendor about it. It was intended to bring life, but it brought only death instead (v. 6), because in fulfilling the law, men and women were relying on their own works rather than relying on God. Therefore Paul maintains that Moses veiled his face in order that the Israelites would not see the law’s splendor fading (v. 13).

Furthermore, Paul writes that not only Moses’ face was veiled. The minds of the Israelites were veiled too when they heard the law, and the minds of Paul’s fellow-Jews are still veiled when they read Scripture, because they did not accept Jesus Christ and they do not find Jesus Christ in their own Bible. Only “in Christ” is the veil removed and the law heard correctly (vv. 14-16). Then the law is understood in the Spirit, and then the Spirit gives freedom (v. 17). It is in the face of Jesus Christ that we find the true glory of Yahweh (2 Cor 4:6), and it is in the Spirit of Christ that the commandments lead to freedom and to life.

We—yes, you and I—have seen “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). Yahweh in His untouchable glory has stooped to our condition and has walked among us in Jesus Christ. And by His Spirit working in us, says Paul, we can be transformed into His likeness “from one degree of glory to another”

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<sup>4</sup>קָרַן (*qaran*).

<sup>5</sup>קֶרֶן (*qeren*).

(2 Cor 3:18). Christ's Spirit can make us good, as He was wholly good. And in that Spirit there is life and freedom and eternal life in the company of the Father.

I do not believe that Paul is so much putting down the old as he is praising the new. Mount Sinai was a stupendous spectacle of Yahweh's glory, but it pales in comparison to the revelation of Yahweh's glory in Jesus Christ. Paul urges his readers to see that the glory of God is to be sought now, not in the law or the Temple or the priesthood, but in the face of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> At the risk of being too blunt, allow me to modernize Paul's argument. Today, we are *not* to seek God's glory by faith in a checklist religion; that is, a list of dos and don'ts for our beliefs and behaviors. Today, we are *not* to seek God's glory by a fervor to rebuild the New Testament Church—our equivalent to the ancient Temple. And today, we are *not* to seek God's glory by following a group of preachers that we deem to be sound in doctrine. No! Today, we must seek God's glory—the glory of Yahweh—in the face of Jesus Christ. As important as other things may be, we must not permit them to veil our minds so that we are unable to see Jesus.

2 Cor 3:18 says it all:

And we, all of us, with faces uncovered, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image [of God] from one degree of glory to another; this is the work of the Lord, who is the Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Beholding and becoming—that's what it's all about. As we behold God's glory, we are changed by it into God's image. *We become what we behold!* What do you behold? What do I behold? There is no need for us to give a verbal answer; our lives *are* the visual answer. Focus on the face of Jesus and His face will be seen in yours.

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. Titus 2:13; John 1:17; Heb 8.

<sup>7</sup>Translation suggested by Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Waco: Word, 1986), 57.

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