

Exodus 33:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

Analysis

And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen—Moses sees God's אַחֲרָי (achorai, 'back parts' or 'afterglow')—the diminishing radiance after God passes, not the direct full-frontal glory. This is maximum revelation possible for mortals in unredeemed state. Some interpret this anthropomorphically (God's 'back'), others as aftermath/echo of glory. Either way, it represents mediated, limited revelation that protects while satisfying. Moses receives more than any other Old Testament figure, yet even he sees only partially (1 Corinthians 13:12). This provisional revelation awaits its fulfillment when 'we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2).

Historical Context

Exodus 34:29-35 describes the result: Moses' face shone so brightly from this encounter that Israelites couldn't look at him, requiring him to veil his face. Paul uses this in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 to contrast Old and New Covenant glory.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does this 'partial seeing' increase your longing for the day when 'we shall see him face to face' (1 Corinthians 13:12)?
2. What does the progressive nature of revelation in Moses' life teach about God's patient unfolding of knowledge of Himself?

Interlinear Text

וְהִסְרֹתִי	אֶת	כַּף יָדִי	וְרָאָהְךָ	אֶת	אֲחֻזֵּי
And I will take	H853	away mine hand	and thou shalt see	H853	my back parts
H5493		H3709	H7200		H268
וּפְנֵי	לֹא	וְרָאָהְךָ			
but my face	H3808	and thou shalt see			
H6440		H7200			

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 33:20 (Parallel theme): And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

John 1:18 (Parallel theme): No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

1 Timothy 6:16 (Parallel theme): Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

Job 26:14 (Parallel theme): Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?

Job 11:7 (Parallel theme): Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?

1 Corinthians 13:12 (Parallel theme): For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

