

“¹³Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight.”

- Moses to the LORD, Exodus 33:13



The Israelites are almost ready to leave Mt. Sinai in this week’s story. They have camped safely in the shadow of the Lord’s presence for quite a while. In fact, it will be a total of 11 months that the Israelites will camp at Mt. Sinai. This story in Exodus 33 occurs somewhere in the middle of those 11 months.

Earlier during the encampment here, Moses spent 40 days on the mountain receiving the initial 10 commandments. After the incident with the golden calf, the rest of the time was Moses receiving from the Lord instructions on how to build a Tabernacle Tent and how to develop proper worship methods.

The people are not quite ready to leave, though the Lord is ready to send them away. The Lord has been telling Moses to take the people to the promised land already, and also saying they will not be accompanied by their God.

Moses doesn’t understand God’s reluctance to travel with them, and so Moses challenges the Lord to remember God’s own covenant, that these are God’s people, and the people will want their God to go with them. As Moses explains, all nations have their gods with them, why should Israel be the only nation without a god leading the way?

God relents to Moses and agrees to accompany God’s people on this journey and as a sign to offer Moses, the Lord passes by and gives Moses an opportunity to see God’s glory, even if just from the backside.

The glory of the Lord is not described here in Exodus 33. In fact, we are told what God will do. The story of it actually happening is left to our imaginations. It sure seems like the Lord goes through a lot of trouble remaining hidden and unseen. Think about this for a moment: Why would the Almighty God want to remain almost exclusively anonymous to our sight, while remaining clearly visible through the Words God speaks to us?



St. Catherine’s Monastery was built in the 6th Century CE on the site which is believed to be Mt. Sinai. In this picture, Mt Sinai is the background. The monastery is built on the northern slope of the mountain.

On the top of the mountain are two other holy sites: a Muslim mosque which is open to the public and a Greek Orthodox chapel which is not open to the public.

The site of St Catherine’s Monastery is also home to a plant believed to have been the very bush Moses saw burning.



Just shy of 7500 feet high, Mt Sinai is not the largest mountain in the area. Mt. Catherine is the next peak over, and it reaches over 8600 feet and that is the highest peak in all of Egypt.

Aside from this location, at least 10 other sites all have claims to be the mountain of God. The scriptures do not define the location of Mt. Sinai with certainty. Think on this for a moment:

Why would our ancestors of faith leave the exact location of Mt. Sinai as a mystery?

Where is “Mt. Sinai” today?

Mt. Sinai is a physical mountain in Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula, or it is in the Negev Desert, or it is any of 11 possible sites. It is a place where Christian pilgrims have been going since at least the 3rd Century. It is a place where faithful have placed monastery’s and other signs of faith.

But Mt. Sinai is also a metaphor. It is any place where we go to experience God’s presence. A place where God has decreed: “This is my home.”

Take a moment with your family and describe places you have found where God has declared: “This is my home.”

Talk about physical church locations ...

Talk about church camps

Talk about places you frequently visit where you have encountered God’s presence that are not a specific place like a church

Where is the most unusual place you have experience the presence of God?

What do you do to tell others about the places where you experience the presence of God?

What markers are there to say to other people, “This is a place where God is encountered”?

How is the Lord remaining with us today, leading our way, being present with us when we are not at “Mt. Sinai”?

When the Israelites arrived at Mt. Sinai, and camped there, maybe they would have preferred to remain at the place God called home. But God pushed them to go somewhere else, to not stay there. Initially God was going to not accompany the Israelites. Moses intervened and convinced God to leave the place God called home, and to accompany the Israelites to the place that would become their home.

How do we experience God pushing us away from those places which we call God’s home?

How do we know God accompanies us to the places we call home?

What symbols of faith help us to trust God’s presence with us, even when we are not at God’s home?

How do we tell others that God is with us, whether we are at home or not?

How do we tell others that God is with us, whether we are at God’s home or not?

If God is with us everywhere we go, not just at church, not just at church camp, not just at the pretty spot of woods we go for quiet walks, then does God really have a single home?

If God is everywhere, and all places are God’s home, how does that shape our way of thinking about caring for God’s home?