

# The Compass

Week 6

OT Readings – Exodus 23:14-35:9  
NT Readings - Matthew 24:29-27:31

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## Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

### Old Testament

- Ex. 23:20-39 looks ahead to the conquest of the land and the great danger of worshipping the gods of the peoples who live in Canaan.
- Ex. 25-31 gives detailed instruction about the construction of a “tabernacle” or “tent of meeting.” As the name implies, it is a place for God to be with His people thus reflecting His heart’s desire to be close to them (Ex. 29:43-46).<sup>1</sup> Don’t get lost in the details.<sup>2</sup>
- Ex. 32-34 relates one of the great tragedies of the OT, the worship of the golden calf, and the resulting consequences.<sup>3</sup> These chapters are filled with insight on God and how He interacts with humanity; see more below.
- Ex. 34:6-7 is one of God’s few direct, “autobiographical” statements. You will find these words repeated throughout the OT.

### New Testament

- This week’s readings continue the story of Jesus’ final days. Situated in Jerusalem, these events include His betrayal, arrest and trial appearances.
- Note the nature of the parables in Matt. 25 – exhortations to His followers to be faithful.
- Many of the short “video clips” of narrative here - Judas betrayal, Peter’s denials, Gethsemane, the last supper – all are familiar. Don’t miss the pathos and the direction these will take us – all point toward the climatic events of human history, the cross and resurrection.<sup>4</sup>

## Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

In a world where everyone has an agenda, it might be difficult for us to believe that God just wants to be *with us*. What could He possibly find in me that interest Him? The OT passages this week are filled with God’s longing to be *present* with His people. He moves from Mt. Sinai to the tabernacle so He can be closer. The tent Moses erects before the construction of the more permanent tabernacle becomes a place to meet with God and everyone is welcome (Ex. 33:7-11). In Exodus 33, even after their sinful rebellion the people come to realize how important is to have God present; Moses pleads with God not to leave them.

Is it not reassuring that God really does love us right where we are, with all of our foibles and failures? He really *wants* to be near us! Are we creating spaces and places in our life to welcome His presence? Do we long for Him?

## Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”

“Idolatry” becomes the paramount issue of the OT, beginning with the golden calf. What is idolatry? Idolatry is “anything that hinders or substitutes for my/our wholehearted devotion to God.”<sup>5</sup> God forbids idols because God alone is the true God. But there is more. He is “jealous” (zealous) for us. He hates anything that might hurt or ruin us and all false worship always does.

Is there anything today which “hinders or substitutes for” God in your heart and life? If you’re not sure, then ask; because of His passion and jealous love, He will certainly show you.

### Difficult Question of the Week

#### Ex. 34:7. “Q. Does God really “lay” the sins of one generation onto the generations that follow?”

This passage, and others that are related (e.g., Ex. 20:5), have brought about much discussion and in some cases unfortunate speculation.<sup>6</sup> The word used for “lay” in the NLT is the Hebrew word *paqad*.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the word can be used in a positive way, to “visit” someone with a blessing (e.g., Gen. 12:1, Ps. 106:4). Perhaps, in this passage the best translation might be something like, “visit, attend to, inspect with care.”<sup>8</sup> If this be true, we might understand this passage as follows:

- Remember that the context is Moses request to experience and know God’s “glory.” This follows after the incident of the golden calf where Moses’ intercession changes God’s mind about bringing judgment on the people.
- God reveals Who He is to Moses. He is a gracious God, full of mercy, compassion, faithfulness. Yet, in His showing mercy toward the people’s horrendous sin of the golden calf, He should not be misunderstood – He hates sin and will deal it.
- Thus, in His love for the generations to come, He will “watch over” them, taking special “care to see” what the implications of their father’s sin (having not dealt with it fully in the present time) will have on the generations that follow. We might paraphrase Ex. 34:7 as follows: “I forgive and show mercy and faithfulness to thousands of generations. But be aware, I hate sin and will hold those who sin accountable. Because I have been merciful to those who sinned with the calf, I must now pay careful attention to see the implications for their children; for I love them and am concerned how their father’s sin might hurt or ruin them.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> If you think about this tabernacle relationally, you will begin to understand its purpose. All relationships require a “place” where those involved can be together. Perhaps you have such special places for the significant and important relationships in your life. God’s desire to be close to them would require that there be a tangible, concrete location for this to happen. In a sense, the construction of the tent of meeting was as much for God as it was for them! (See Terence Fretheim, *Exodus* (Interpretation Commentary).

<sup>2</sup> The details given here are what they appear, specifics for the construction of a place of worship and of fellowship with God. While it is true that the details have purpose and significance for God and His people, please avoid the temptation to “spiritualize” by finding some kind of “meaning” for today, “this means that.” All such attempts are mostly speculative.

<sup>3</sup> Their actions in the making and worshiping of the calf are inexplicable. How could a people who have been shown such grace, such blessing, such revelation of God’s heart and character, so quickly turn away? Charles Finney has rightly called sin “moral insanity.”

<sup>4</sup> By human appearances, Jesus ministry is over. He will die, like any other traitor against Roman authority, soon to be forgotten, like so many other would be “Messiahs” (Acts 5:36-37). Imagine the surprise of the Jewish leaders when His followers emerge after Pentecost, enflamed with the Spirit’s power, continuing the same Jesus ministry! The religious leaders thought they had solved the Jesus problem, only to discover that it had multiplied! (Acts 4-5) He was not dead, but quite alive.

<sup>5</sup> Why would God ask for such a thing? Is He an ego maniac? He might be if it was not true that He is Who He is and deserves that we acknowledge the truth of Who He is. Humility is to tell the truth about ourselves. God, if He is honest and humble must tell the truth about Himself. He is the most valuable thing in the whole universe and we are responsible to acknowledge that fact – with our everything! (Ex. 20:3)

<sup>6</sup> Much of the teaching about “generational curses” utilizes these passages. I find this untenable, for several reasons. While it is clear that the sins of one generation *do* impact or influence those that follow (note that the idea in this passage is collective, not individual), God holds each person individually responsible for their sin (Ezek. 18). Also, in this passage, this “laying” or “visiting” (NAU) is something **God** does. The whole context of this passage, and others similar, are intended to show God’s character of mercy, faithfulness and longsuffering to those who sin in the present and to those who impacted by that sin in the future. God wants the best for generations to come.

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<sup>7</sup> Scholars have long wrestled with this word and its very diverse meanings in the OT, “there is probably no other Hebrew verb that has caused translators as much trouble as pqd.” (Speiser, *NIDOTT&E*, Vol. 5, p. 658.)

<sup>8</sup> John Durham, Exodus, *Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 53, note 31c., commenting on the use of paqad in Ex. 4:31.

<sup>9</sup> There is a great deal more to discuss here! The theological perspective is this: God is *both* just and merciful. He, as the responsible Creator and Governor of His universe, is gravely concerned about the implications of sin – wherever and whenever it occurs. He longs to show mercy; however, we should never presume upon such grace and think that He will not hold people accountable. After all, sin is extraordinarily costly – it cost God His Son and the Son His life in order to forgive us.