

PARASHAH #70
Torah: Exodus 32:15–34:26
Haftarah: 2 Samuel 22:10–51
Apostolics: Romans 9:14–16

The parasha this week is the aftermath of the Golden Calf incident. Because I am fairly positive last week's teacher spent time on the Golden Calf story, I will not review it. Rather I would like to focus on just two main points. First, we will catch a glimpse of key individuals in this story, taking a little closer look at them and their characteristics. That will be followed by look at the most important character of them all, the Lord God Himself, who provided us with a most amazing and unparalleled revelation of Himself. Hence, here is our simple outline:

- I. God's Special People
- II. God's Special Attributes

I. GOD'S SPECIAL PEOPLE

We will begin by going backward for a moment, back to Exodus 31, which is actually part of this parasha in a 1-year cycle. The first amazing person we encounter is Bezalel. What does his name mean and what kind of person was he?

A. The "Onion of God?"

At first glance, we could be humorously fooled! The first part of his name, *batzal* (בצל), in Hebrew means "onion" and the second part of his name, *el* (אל), means "God". Hence, it would seem that his name means "God's Onion"! However, that just couldn't be!

Sure enough, upon closer examination we find that his name is in three parts: *Be* (ב), "in" or "under", *tzel* (צל) "shade", "shadow", or "protection of", and *el* (אל), "God". Hence, it seems that his name really means "under the shadow of or protection of God."¹ That sounds better! After all, who would ever name their son "the onion of God"?!

This, then, was a man who was clearly under the shadow of God's holiness and goodness. Moreover, he was in charge of the construction of God's shadow copy of God's Heavenly House, the Mishkan. We read that God "filled him with a Godly spirit, with wisdom, insight, and knowledge" (Exodus 31:3). In Hebrew it reads that he was filled with *chakhmah* חכמה, *tevunah*, תבונה, and *da'at*, דעת. Chakhmah has to do with being skilled in technical matters, having experience, and being shrewd with worldly wisdom.² Tevunah is a kind of wisdom which underscores one's understanding, cleverness, and/or skill.³ And, da'at speaks of knowledge, as well as discernment.⁴ Since he was put in charge by God of supervising the building of the Mishkan, all three characteristics are more than necessary! However, he did not use these characteristics for personal gain or notoriety. Exodus 31:3 says that he used these characteristics under the control of the Spirit of God.

A word about this phrase, "filled with God's Spirit." We find this expression used elsewhere in Scripture, such as in Ephesians 5:18, which says, "And do not get drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit..." Here Paul helps us know what the phrase means by comparing being filled with the Spirit to being drunk. When a person is drunk, they are not filled all the way to the top like one fills a bottle with a liquid. Rather being drunk is a matter of *control*. A drunk person is simply under the influence or control of the alcohol. The alcohol controls the person's words, thoughts, and actions. In like manner, being filled with God's spirit is not a matter of wanting

1. BDB, 130.

2. HALOT, 314.

3. HALOT, 1680.

4. HALOT, 229.

more and more of the Spirit like we are filling a bottle. Rather, it means to be under the control of God's Spirit.

Apply this definition to Bezalel. Although he was endowed with the necessary qualifications and abilities to do the work God called him to, it was necessary that he operate in those abilities and gifts by being under the control of God's Spirit.

Was Bezalel an elder or sage? No. He was the craftsman whom the Eternal One put in charge of making the things for the Mishkan. He was like any one of us. We are all experts in something. We all have something that we can do unlike any others. The question is do we recognize it and do we operate in it /by being controlled by God's Spirit.

We have one more thing to say about these three characteristics of Bezalel. The first Hebrew letter of each of these words: *ch* (ח), *b* (ב), and *d* (ד), form a well-known Hebrew acronym: "*Chabad* (חבד). This is the popular and more common name for a famous Hasidic group, the Lubavitch Chasidim. Their world center is in Brooklyn, and they send out missionaries everywhere in the world. They attempt to help wayward Jewish people to come back to Judaism. If you are Jewish, they will be very friendly to you, until they find that you are committed to Messiah Yeshua. If you are gentile, they will be politely friendly to you, until they find that you believe in Yeshua and then they mostly treat you like they would any enemy.

B. The Soldier of God

The second amazing individual in this parasha is Joshua. We find him standing alone, away from the camp. When all the sin and degradation were happening around the golden calf in the camp of the Israelites, it was Joshua who reported to Moshe that he "heard the sound of the people in its shouting, the sound of battle is in the camp" (Exodus 32:17–18). This young soldier of God stayed away from all the idolatry and remained loyal to Moshe and the Lord. Such faithfulness has caused the rabbis to speculate that, "he did not leave the foot of Mount Sinai during the entire forty days that Moshe was away."⁵

He was first mentioned in the Torah in Exodus 17 when he was the general of Israel's army as they fought with the Amalakitites. Then, in Exodus 24:13, Joshua is referred to as the one who served Moshe. Moshe's Servant." The word translated "servant" is the verb *sharat* (שרת). This emphasizes the fact that Joshua was also the personal aid or assistant to Moshe,⁶ especially when it came to military matters. Hence it was probably in this capacity that he accompanied Moshe back up the mountain to the Lord (24:13).

The next mention of him is in our parasha, Exodus **32:17**. As a soldier, Joshua interpreted the noise he and Moshe heard when they came down from the mountain as if they were war cries: Exodus **32:17** says, "Now when Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a sound of war in the camp." However, Moshe offered a different explanation when we read in **32:18**, "But he [Moshe] said, "It is not the sound of the cry of victory, nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat; but I hear the sound of singing."

Near the end of the parasha, when Moshe was in the habit of speaking with God face to face in his special tent, it says "Joshua, son of Nun, did not leave the tent" (**33:11**). It seems that all he wanted to do was be with the Eternal One and His servant, Moshe, and to drink in all the goodness that they shared with each other. Is it any wonder that Joshua was the one to fill Moshe's shoes after Moshe died? Indeed, as the general of Israel's armies, Joshua truly was the General of God.

5. ArtScroll Chumash, 498.

6. HALOT, 1662.

C. The Friend of God

The final character we will mention from this parasha is Moshe himself.

Lord, Remember Your Promises!

By far the most outstanding person in the parasha was Moshe. Not enough can be said about him. We first find him on Sinai receiving the Torah in direct conversation with the Holy One. Being in such concentrated fellowship with perfect holiness for forty days, is it any wonder that we see his intense reaction when he sets eyes on the base, idolatrous decadence coming from the camp of the Israelites?

Even before he dealt with their sin, while still on the mountain in safe, sweet fellowship with the God, the Lord put a test before him. God told Moshe about all that the Israelites were doing and offers to destroy all the people and build a great nation out of righteous Moshe. To some, this would sound very tempting, but Moshe was not fooled! We do not find him self-righteously saying, “Yes! Leading these people is too frustrating. They are always going to sin against You and rebel against me, Your choice servant. Go ahead and destroy them.” Instead, the text indicates that Moshe pleaded before the Lord not to destroy them. In **32:11**, when it says that Moshe “pleaded” it is an intensive form of the verb, *chalah* (חלה). Moshe intensely entreated the Lord and pleaded with Him not to destroy Israel.

In his dialogue with the Holy One, Moshe remembered the covenant that God made with his forefathers, the covenant about making a great nation out of the descendants of Jacob. These promises could never be broken. On this basis, then, Moshe resisted the temptation the Lord gave him, the temptation for greatness. He passed God’s test and proved faithful to his Lord.

They Couldn't Be Separated!

All throughout this parasha, Moshe and God are like two intense lovers who could not be separated. It seems as if the Lord could not do enough for Moshe and Moshe could not, in return, get enough of Him. God heeded the intercession of Moshe on behalf of Israel. He gave Moshe the wisdom to take over and lead the young nation through this crisis with the right balance of judgment and leniency. As Moshe saw more of the ways in which the wisdom, grace, and mercy of God dominated His actions towards Israel, all he wanted to do was to get even closer to Him.

Thus, we find in **33:12–17** Moshe asking the Lord for His presence to lead the people more visibly — and God complied. Again, in **33:18**, Moshe, now seemingly ravenous for intimacy with God, requests from the Holy One, “Show me Your glory!” In response, the Lord, desirous to meet all the needs and desires of His loved one, fills even that desire in the most wholehearted way possible without doing damage to the frailty of Moshe's humanity.

So, the Lord told Moshe that He will make “all His goodness pass before you”, except Moshe was not able to see His Face — the most sacred part of God which no mortal can see without dying (**33:18–23**).

Oh! How He Did Shine!

The climax to this whole passage is when Moshe's countenance continued to reflect the glory of God, after receiving a new copy of the Torah (**34:33–35**). We would suggest that it radiated not just because of that one occasion, but that it was a culmination of the deep intimacy and communion Moshe and the Lord shared with each other during this extraordinary time. They say that after a while husbands and wives even start to look like each other! Perhaps that is what is taking place here.

We are sure that Moshe would have wanted the same relationship he had with God to be a reality for all the Israelites, but it was not to be. In fact, they were so afraid that they could not even look upon his shining face. Therefore, he had to wear a veil over it when he spoke with them (**34:35**). Rashi suggests that the fear was because of their sin with the golden calf. Leibowitz adds a deeper dimension

to his idea when she says, “Sin had deprived them of the ability to see the spiritual insight capable of appreciating the most holy and sublime.”⁷

Moshe was able to see. God caused him to see as much of the goodness of the Lord as a person is capable of seeing. Surely Moshe would have understood John perfectly when he wrote concerning the Holy Messiah, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). We think Moshe saw Messiah, even before He came to planet earth. In doing so, Moshe's face reflected His glory showing that he had a profound understanding into the very mind of the Holy One. As the faithful shepherd of his people, we are sure that Moshe prayed that all of them would see the Lord as he knew Him.

II. GOD’S SPECIAL CHARACTER

One of the best-known sections of this parasha is in **34:5–7**. Here is where the Holy One gave Moshe the second copy of the Torah. God carved the first tablets. Now Moshe had to replace them by carving them himself. God told him that by adding, “which you shattered.” “That he added the words, “which you shattered” suggests that God was at least somewhat displeased with Moshe for losing his temper and breaking the first set.”⁸ The next time Moshe loses his temper will result in him being denied entrance to the Land (Numbers 20).

In the process of renewing the tablets, God revealed Himself to Moshe in a most unique way, unparalleled in the rest of Scripture. These verses constitute the Divine answer to Moshe's request to see His glory. When God gave Moshe the new tablets, we read:

And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the Lord. Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in faithfulness and truth; who keeps faithfulness for thousands, who forgives wrongdoing, violation of *His Law*, and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, inflicting the punishment of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations” (NASB).

The rabbis have traditionally labelled this passage “The Thirteen Attributes”. However, if we count all of the revealed characteristics, we can only distinguish twelve of them! The solution to this mathematical mishap is that the rabbis count the repetition of the word Lord (YHVH, יהוה) in verse six as two attributes.⁹ Prager says, “Although Judaism traditionally divides this list into thirteen attributes, there are nine distinct characteristics enumerated here.”¹⁰

We shall survey these attributes. Our approach, however, will be different from that of the sages. The direction of our study is to see what we can learn about the Messiah. In Colossians 2:9 we learn that “In Messiah all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” Among other things, what this verse seems to be saying is that when we talk about God, we are also talking about the Messiah. Therefore, let us look at each word in these Thirteen Attributes and see how it is realized in the life of the Messiah.

Attribute 1: Lord, Lord God (Exodus 34:6)

Exodus 34:6 has two different names for God. The first is a repetition of the tetragrammaton ¹¹ (יהוה, “Lord”). This is considered by the rabbis to be the most sacred name for God. Traditionally in Judaism it was only permitted to pronounce this name on Yom Kippur — and then, only by the High Priest.

7. Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot.*, 634.

8. Denis Prager, *Exodus: God, Slavery, and Freedom (The Rational Bible)*, 465.

9. Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah: Shemot*, 485.

10. Prager, *Exodus*, 466.

11. Sometimes this Hebrew word is called the tetragrammaton. That is because it is comprised of 4 (“tetra”) letters in Hebrew: יהוה-יהוה

Because of this, we really do not know how to properly say the name today, despite what some believers seem to assert, especially on the Internet!

יהוה is usually rendered “Lord” in most English Bibles or sometimes capitalized as LORD. Some try to get more specific and assign such pronunciations as Jehovah or Yahweh, but, in truth, as we have said, we simply do not know the correct way of saying יהוה. We do not know the proper vowels. The meaning and not the pronunciation of this name is most important.

It is interesting to note that the repetition of the word Lord (YHVH, יהוה) constitutes in rabbinical thinking, the first two attributes. We do not see how, however. In addition to what was said above, they assert that the name YHVH teaches God's timelessness, since the name is comprised of the past, present, and future tenses of the Hebrew verb “to be”.

Attribute 2: Love (Exodus 34:6)

Traditional Jewish thinking says that the first use of “Lord,” stresses the fact that, God is merciful before a person sins, even though He knows that the sin will be committed. In addition, God is merciful after the sin has been committed, by allowing the sinner time to repent, and by accepting his repentance, though it may be imperfect. In the second usage (the second attribute), the emphasis is on the fact that, God’s Ineffable Name signifies love. Since God is timeless, His nature does not change, therefore, neither does His love. “His nature is unalterable, both before and after a sin. The only change occurs in the sinner's heart (Maharal).”¹²

We agree, but we wish to take it a step further. It seems that not only is love the main feature of God that is stressed by the tetragrammaton, but a specific *kind* of love is in view — covenant love. The Lord is the One who made the promises to our forefathers and provides the fulfilment of those promises. In other words, יהוה emphasizes the love that God has for those with whom He enters into a personal relationship through a formal legal covenant.

Based on this understanding of “Lord”, we can see in this passage that the Holy One is reaffirming to wayward Israel that despite *their* unfaithfulness, *He* will always be faithful to *them* and will never fail to keep any of the promises He made with them as long as He lives. He provided this assurance just because He is a faithful God and desires to lavish His love upon His people. This was much needed assurance for Israel, especially after the Golden Calf incident.

Messiah's Covenant Love

The Scriptures continually affirm God's eternal love for His people, especially for those with whom He has begun a personal relationship through the Messiah. Elsewhere, the Scriptures speak about God’s love for us in Messiah in three tenses: past, present, and future. In the past, we read that, “In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Yeshua the Messiah...” (Ephesians 1:5). According to this verse, God placed His love upon His own sometime in eternity past. In addition, we see in the present age, that God, in fact, gave absolute proof that He loves us — right here and now. For the Scriptures states, “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Messiah died for us” (Romans 5:8). This speaks about His present love for us. Finally, since we have seen God's covenant love for His own in the past and proven by Messiah’s death in the present, we are also assured of it for eternity future. Thus, we read in Romans 8:38–39, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Yeshua the Messiah, our Lord.”

In every case, these verses speak of a very specific love — the covenant or personal relationship love that is ours through personal trust in the Messiah.

12. Monk, *The Call of the Torah: Shemot*, 485.

Attribute 3: El (Exodus 34:6)

The third attribute in this passage is found in the second name used for God, *El* (אל). This is, perhaps, the most common name for God found throughout the Scriptures. Some say that it is not even a name, but a description of what He is, like a title: He is God! It is often used in its plural form, *Elohim*, or in conjunction with other words such as *El Shaddai* or *El Gibbor*. Interestingly enough, *El* was also the name of the chief Canaanite god, the bull god.

Rabbi Hertz defines the term *El* as used here in the “Thirteen Attributes” to mean, “The all-mighty Lord of the universe, Ruler of nature and mankind.”¹³ The *ArtScroll Machzor*¹⁴ would agree, but adds, [El] connotes God as dominating and all-powerful. Despite this awesome strength, He sits on the throne of mercy, always anxious to show compassion.¹⁵ It is significant that the machzor speaks about God on His throne of mercy. Hebrews 4 also speaks of Messiah on *His* throne of mercy. It describes Him as our great High Priest, through whom we have access to God so that we can “... approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15–16).

Attribute 4: Compassion (Exodus 34:6)

The next attribute is called *rachum* (רחום) or “compassion”. This is a very beautiful word in Hebrew. It is actually related to the Hebrew term for “womb”.¹⁶ “The use of this term suggests God’s feelings toward humanity resemble those of a mother toward the children who come out of her womb.”¹⁷ Thus, in this word we can see God depicted as a mother who tenderly pities her children who she bore from her womb. He shows infinite compassion for our hurts and troubles.

When we look at the life of Messiah we see more than enough examples of God's compassion demonstrated through Him. One of the clearest illustrations of Messiah’s compassion is in Matthew 9:35–38. Here the text says that Yeshua, “Went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues... When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Just as the Holy One was moved with compassion for the wayward children of Israel, so Messiah felt and acted the same way toward the Israel of His day.

Attribute 5: Gracious (Exodus 34:6)

In the Hebrew, there is a connecting vav (ו) between compassionate and the fifth attribute, gracious. This would tell us that these words are related to each other. Because of God's compassion, He treated the children of Israel with grace.

The word rendered “grace”, is the word *chanan* (חנן). According to Munk, “graciousness refers to the offering of mercy freely without the expectation of anything in return, not even the sinner's personal merit.”¹⁸ This is quite a remarkable definition, for it is exactly how the rest of Scriptures, especially the Epistles, uses the word “grace”. Indeed, the Apostolic Scriptures emphasize that the concept of grace carries with it the idea of something that is free, without charge. Merit does not enter into the picture with the word “grace”. It pictures God as compassionate and merciful.

In the Book of Exodus, Israel did not deserve to have God forgive them for the sin of the golden calf, yet He freely did. Likewise, it is the same with all of us. According to Ephesians 1:7, “In Him [Messiah] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished upon us with all wisdom and understanding.” The idea here is that God freely gave His grace to all who are in Messiah.

13. J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 364.

14. A machzor is a Jewish prayer book that is used for the “High Holy Days,” Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.

15. Nosson Scherman. *The Complete ArtScroll Machzor: Yom Kippur*, 109.

16. BDB, 933.

17. Prager, *Exodus*, 468.

18. Monk, *Shemot*, 486.

Moreover, it was not just a small gift, He lavished it upon us. The text states that God gave us His grace, not *out of* His riches, but *in accordance to* the riches of His grace. This concept of the amount of grace which God gave us can be illustrated by thinking of a millionaire who is asked by a beggar for some money. If the millionaire gave the beggar \$100, we could say that he gave him money *out of* his riches. However, if he were to give the beggar \$500,000, then we can say that the millionaire gave *in proportion to, or in accordance with* his riches.

So it is with the Gracious One. He lavished His grace upon us in proportion to His riches. Since His treasures are unlimited, then that is an enormous amount of grace we have at our disposal!

Attribute 6: Slow to Anger (Exodus 34:6)

Instead of saying “slow to anger”, the Hebrew uses an idiom which literally says, “long of nose”, *erekh ap'ayim* (אֵרֶךְ אַפַּיִם). This is an idiom which expresses God's forbearance or patience. Rashi comments on these words by saying, “He extends the time of His forbearance before expressing His anger and does not hurry to exact punishment — perhaps the sinner will repent.”¹⁹

Munk cites a beautiful illustration of this concept from a midrash. The midrash recounts how that when Moshe went to the mountain to receive the Ten Words, he found God writing the words “slow to anger”. Moshe asked whether the statement was meant only for the righteous or if it had application for the wicked as well. Upon hearing the Lord say it was for the wicked as well as the righteous, Moshe exclaimed, “Let the wicked perish!” The Lord then told Moshe that one day he would find this a very useful teaching. As it happened, when Moshe appealed to the Lord's forbearance after Israel sinned over the incidents of the golden calf and the spies, the Holy One responded by reminding him of his previous request. In the end, Moshe learned that God's patience was also for the wicked!²⁰

Do not misunderstand. “God gets angry at people, but it takes a great deal of time to make Him angry) otherwise given the state of human behaviour, He would presumably be in a permanent state of anger.) And because God is slow to anger, people have time to repent before He exacts any harsh punishments.”²¹

Not to Judge, But to Save

If there was ever a flesh and blood demonstration of God's slowness to anger it would be found in the life of Yeshua, the Judge of all mankind. He came to earth directly from the Throne of Heaven. He had to live among sinful people. He tolerated the most extreme kinds of sin, even forgiving them. Moreover, He Himself was victim of the ultimate of injustices from the hands of sinners, being sentenced to the death penalty — although not deserving of it. All the time, He held the power to execute judgment upon his executioners. Yet, His own commentary about His mission states, “I did not come to judge the world, but to save it” (John 12:47).

The judgment would be reserved until Messiah's Second Coming. God would tolerate man's sin until the very last moment. Even just before a person dies, if he truly repents, he will receive as a gift, *chanan* (חַנּוּן) the righteousness of God. In addition, God in Messiah would demonstrate extreme patience with the sin of mankind as a whole.

Thus, the earth continues with the seasons coming and going. Then one day, the Messiah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords will decide to re-enter earth. This time He will not come with forbearance, but instead, “Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of God Almighty” (Revelation 19:15).

19. Rashi, *Exodus, ArtScroll Edition*, 474.

20. Munk, *Shemot.*, 486.

21. Prager, *Exodus*, 466.

Attribute 7: Abundant in Kindness (Exodus 34:6)

The seventh attribute speaks of God's abundant kindness. The Hebrew word translated kindness is *hesed* (חסד). Elsewhere, this word has also been translated “loving kindness” or “mercy”. It is the doctrinal companion to grace *chanan* (חנן).

One person compared the two words in this way: grace is God giving us what we do not deserve; mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve! In other words, we deserved wrath, but God gave us forgiveness. We did not deserve forgiveness, yet God gave it to us as a free gift.

Mercy was certainly what Israel needed at the time. God should have wiped out the nation because of their sin, yet instead of wiping them out, the Lord gave them a second copy of His Torah! Because of this, the children of Israel really understood first-hand that not only did God give them mercy, but He is *abundant* in mercy!

A Covenant Word

This Hebrew word “mercy” has another nuance. *Hesed* is a covenant word. It has to do with displaying proper covenant behaviour. It is “the solidarity which the partners in the covenant owe one another.”²²

It is true that all of God's mercy and grace come from His innermost being to sinners. However, when the word *hesed* is used to describe God's relationship with His people, it is emphasizing more than just God's inner love for us. It is stressing the fact that God grants mercy on the basis of a prior legal agreement that He made with the recipients of His *hesed*.

For Israel, this meant that the basis for God's decision not to wipe them out was because of the fact that He made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Though Israel was obviously unfaithful to Him, God was, nevertheless, under oath to preserve them as a nation, or as a people. This, naturally, speaks of God's loyalty and faithfulness to His promises.

When a person accepts the truth of the Good News of Yeshua the Messiah and places his faith and trust in Him and His atoning work, that person has entered into a covenant with God. It is on the basis of this covenant faithfulness, *hesed*, that the Lord keeps those who have believed in Messiah, despite any sin with which they may have become entangled. It is God who is faithful and merciful because of His promises to us, to forgive and to utterly save for eternity.

Attribute 8: Abundant in Truth (Exodus 34:6)

Once again, the Hebrew letter vav (ו) connects two related words, “mercy” and “truth”. The NIV reads “faithfulness” instead of “truth”. That is a possible rendering. The Hebrew in question is *emet*, אמת. It tells us that not only is God abundant in mercy, but He is equally abundant in truth.

The word *emet* (truth) can have several connotations. It can refer, for example, to the body of doctrine or theological realities which stems from God. However, this does not seem to be the usage here in **34:6**. The thrust of the word in this passage focuses on God's *reliability*. One scholar suggests that when *emet* is used with *hesed* stresses the idea of reliability or trustworthiness. “[Adonai] is the God in whose word and work one can place complete confidence. As the Creator, God keeps 'emet and man can rely on Him forever.”²³

Having established this close connection between the words “truth and mercy”, we can now, perhaps, understand John 1:14 a little clearer — “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of *grace and truth*.” (italics mine) This is speaking of the Messiah. If we understand this verse according to its Torah background, we can see that John intended us to know that, just like His Father, Messiah Yeshua extends abundant mercy and grace to those with whom He has a personal relationship and that He can be relied upon to keep all His promises. Moreover, Yeshua is the same one about whom Exodus 34:6 speaks. He is the personification of grace and truth.

22. Colin Brown, ed, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (“NIDNT”), vol. 2, 594.

23. G. Johannes Botterwek and Helmer Ringgren, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 310–313.

Attribute 9: Preserver of Mercy (Exodus 34:7)

The Thirteen Attributes carry the concept of God's covenant mercy one step further. First, we are told that His covenant love (mercy) exists and it is abundant. Next, we are told that God is also abundant in reliability, giving us further assurance of His covenant faithfulness to us. Now we are told in **34:7** that God is the guardian or *keeper* of mercy. The word translated “guardian” or “keeper” is *notser* (נוצר). It carries the idea of a preserver, a guard, or a watchman.²⁴

Notzer is a fascinating word. Another Hebrew word, spelled the same way, is a word that can be rendered as “branch” or “sprout,” as in Isaiah 11:1. Isaiah 11:1 is speaking about the Messiah. He is a small branch that will sprout from the root of Jesse (the ancestor of King David). Notzer in Isaiah 11:1 is also spelled the same way in Hebrew (notzer, נוצר), the word used here in Exodus 34:7. So, we have two words, spelled alike, yet with different meanings. The use of one of the words reminds us of the of the other word. Messiah is both the branch from the family of Jesse and the One who watches over His people. It is a beautiful wordplay.

It gets even better! With the meaning of “watch over,” notzer, forms the basis for the name “Nazareth.” Nazareth is so named because of its physical location, resting on a ridge overlooking almost the entire Jezreel Valley in Israel. Nazareth, as we know, was the place where Yeshua grew up. Hence, we can see three connected meanings in notzer in Isaiah 11:1. 1 — Messiah is the branch from Jesse, 2) Messiah watches over His people, and 3) Messiah grew up in Nazereth.

Modern Nazareth on top of the Nazareth Ridge, overlooking the Jezreel Valley



Attributes 10, 11, and 12 — The One Who Forgives (Exodus 34:7)

We are combining these next three attributes because, in reality, they are referring to the one attribute of forgiveness.

The text in Exodus 34:7 says that God is the One who forgives. The Hebrew term translated “forgives” is the word *nasa* (נשא). This word can also mean, “carry”, “lift”, or “take away”.²⁵ From this we can suggest that to forgive means to lift sin off of us and take the sin away. It has to do with God bearing our sin as one who takes it off and carries it Himself. The famous Rambam agrees when he says, “To forgive is to declare that HaShem bears our iniquities implies that He can forgo punishment.”²⁶

24. BDB, 665–666.

25. BDB, 669.

26. Munk, *Shemot*, 487.

Exodus 34:7 mentions three different kinds of sin which God forgives. The first word is *avon* (עון) and it refers to iniquity, guilt, or punishment of iniquity.²⁷ The second word is *pesh'a* (פשע). It is a rebellious act.²⁸ The third term is *chatah* (חטאה). Chatah has the idea of error, missing the mark, or inadvertent sin.²⁹ Thus, all possible categories of sin are referred to in this verse. Hence, there is nothing that the Holy One will not forgive. This is an especially powerful truth in light of the context. For, here we see the Lord forgiving even the sin of idolatry.

Only God

When we are told that God forgives these sins, we are speaking of sins that are done specifically against Him. It still remains for people to forgive each other when they offend each other by sin. Ultimately, however, even these sins are, in reality, against God as well.

It goes without saying that only God can forgive or bear our sin. Knowing this adds extra force to what the Messiah said in Matthew 9:6. When a paralytic was brought to Him for healing, Yeshua saw another, deeper, problem. Not only was the man physically unable to move, but he also had a deep spiritual problem — sin. Knowing this, Yeshua decided to make a clear statement about His nature. Yes, He healed the man, but He also forgave the paralytic's sin, saying, “Take courage, my son, your sins are forgiven!” Accordingly, Yeshua wanted this to be a clear pronouncement to all, that He was the Messiah from Heaven, so He said that He did this, “in order for you to know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins” (Matthew 9:1–6). He said nothing else after that to those present. He merely left them to draw their own conclusions, as we will do with you!

Attribute 13 — The God Who Warns (Exodus 34:7)

This final attribute is found in the Hebrew word in Exodus 34:7 translated by the NASB, “unpunished.” The Hebrew word is *nakah*, נקה. This is a verb in the *piel* stem.³⁰ According to HALOT, in this stem, *nakah* would mean “to be unpunished.”³¹ Moreover, according to 34:7, this punishment would affect the descendants of the guilty one for a few generations. All of this needs some clarification.

Unpunished or Cleansed?

First, let us clarify what might be meant by “unpunished.” We know from the rest of the verse that God limited Himself to be bound to His covenant promises and unconditionally grants mercy and grace when His people sin. Why, then, would there be any sign now that in some way He withholds forgiveness, especially “to the third and fourth generation”?

We would like to propose a different understanding. The answer to the problem seems to lie in the word “*nakah*.” Although the lexicons show that in the *piel* stem the words means “to go unpunished,” yet, in our opinion, the context might say otherwise. One of the possible uses of the verb might have to do with being made clean.³² If that is the case, then instead of the verse speaking about *punishing* the next generations for someone’s sin, the verse might be speaking of not cleansing the later generations of the person’s sin.

In other words, we are speaking of the *effects* of sin, not the judgement of it. Someone may be completely forgiven and legally acquitted from a crime, yet still might suffer with some of the *results* of that crime for a long time. For example, if someone commits adultery, upon repentance, there is

27. BDB, 731.

28. Ibid., 833.

29. NIDNT, 594.

30. Hebrew verbs have between five to seven derived conjugations, depending on which grammar book one uses. According to most lexicons, the meaning of the verb might change according to which conjugation it is found. Piel is one of those conjugations.

31. HALOT, 720.

32. Ibid. To be sure, the lexicon does not give this as an option for the *piel* stem. However, remember now that we are speaking of the context in Exodus, as well as a possible option for *nakah* in other verbal stems. we are basing our comments.

abundant forgiveness. Yet, a baby may also be forthcoming! (It is very important to understand that in such cases there is absolutely no guilt that is to be laid upon that baby!)

Thus, there is mercy and forgiveness, but the stain of the sin may linger. According to our proposed understanding of the idea of cleansing, this would mean that sometimes the Lord may have the effects of the person's sin last well into his descendants. A good illustration of this would be the sin of drunkenness. It is well known that an alcoholic may pass his problem of addiction onto his children and grandchildren. Per chance, the alcoholic may become a believer. That means that he is completely forgiven. However, the possibility remains that his sin will have already affected both his children and their children. Nahum Sarna summit up neatly when he comments, "Divine forbearance does not mean that sinners can expect wholly to escape the *consequences* of their misdeeds" (Italics ours).³³

"Third and Fourth Generation"

How long would the effects of one's sin last? To answer this accurately, we need to look at a parallel passage in Exodus 20:5–6 and combine the information of path passages, thereby taking in all of the facts.

At the beginning of Exodus 34:7 we see that the Lord is the One who "keeps lovingkindness for thousands," Both the NET Notes and JPS understand the expression at the beginning of Exodus 34:7 to be "thousands of generations."³⁴ Indeed, God's mercy is endless. The expression is idiomatic and should not be pressed literally. "The duration of two thousand generations is tantamount to an eternity of time."³⁵ In like manner the end of the verse says that the consequences for this sin would extend to the "third and fourth generation." "This is a typical Semitic phrase denoting continuity, not to be understood in an arithmetical sense."³⁶ Note that forgives is endless (thousands of generations) while the consequences are very limited (third or fourth generation).

Further, according to Exodus 20:5–6, the consequences are applied to those who "hate God," who refuse to live their lives in accordance with his will.

As in the ten commandments (20:5-6), this expression shows that the iniquity and its punishment will continue in the family if left unchecked. This does not go on as long as the outcomes for good (thousands versus third or fourth generations), and it is limited to those who hate God.³⁷

Thus, the 13th attribute of God is that He sometimes permits the effects of a person's sin to continue to the next generation. That would depend on the attitude of the subsequent generations. Do they love God? If so, then they can have victory over whatever consequences of their father's sins. If they are not believers, then it will be very difficult to overcome those consequences. Hence, Exodus 34:7 might serve as a warning to keep away from missing the mark otherwise one's descendants might experience the effects of such offenses against the Lord. Dennis Prager writes,

This verse does not mean God punishes children for their parents' sins. The Torah itself commands that "Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children for parents. A person shall be put to death only for his own sins" (Deuteronom7 24:16) ...The intent is to communicate that, though God takes into account the good done by people for a thousand generations, He remembers the bad done by people for only three to four generations. It may simply be a poetic statement of God favouring the good."

We need to finish. The intent of this revelation was to help assure the Israelites that although they sinned greatly, they have a good who forgives anyone who truly wants to be forgiven. That, of course, applies to this very day. It does not matter what pit we have fallen into, what words escaped our mouths, and what deeds our body has done. God is a God who forgives the righteous.

33. Sarna, *JPS: Shemot*, 216.

34. *Ibid*, 216 and *NET Bible Notes* on Exodus 34:7.

35. Munk, *Shemot.*, 487.

36. Cole, *Exodus*, 164.

37. *NET Notes* on Exodus 34:7.