

EXODUS 34:5-9:
A CONUNDRUM FOR
MODERN DAY “MARCIONITES”

A Paper
Presented to the
School of Theology Faculty
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of
the Ph.D. Entrance Requirements

by
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January 27, 2011

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In 2002, Carl Trueman wrote an extremely poignant editorial article for *Themelios*. In this article, he writes that today’s evangelical world is not influenced as much by men of faith and orthodoxy like J. I. Packer, John Stott, or D. A. Carson as it is by the heretic Marcion.¹ Marcion was a 2nd century A.D. figure in the Christian church who was condemned for his mutilation of Scripture, metaphysical dualism, and Gnostic beliefs. Marcion believed that the Old Testament was not to be accepted as Scripture by Christians because it presented a wrathful God who could not have sent Jesus out of love to save a lost world. Because of Marcion’s radical views about the nature of God, he even edited the New Testament Scriptures into a modified form of Luke and only ten of Paul’s letters (lacking the Pastorals).² Trueman’s claim that Marcion could have such pervasive influence upon the modern evangelical church seems shocking, but he provides a few evidences that show such an influence.

To prove his claim, Trueman points to the emphasis in the church that God is “exclusively love,” to the neglect of the church in studying the Old Testament, and to the absence of the Psalms in evangelicals’ corporate worship.³ These prevalent beliefs and

¹Carl Trueman, "The Marcions Have Landed!: A Warning for Evangelicals," *Themelios* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2002): 1-4.

²Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), s.v. "Marcion," by Everett Ferguson.

³Trueman, "The Marcions Have Landed!: A Warning for Evangelicals," 1-4.

practices in many of today's orthodox evangelical churches show that many have become "Modern Marcionites" by inadvertently accepting the subtle lie that God is somehow different in His actions and character in the Old Testament than He is in the New Testament.⁴

Such alarming—but evident—areas of Marcion's influence need to be challenged and corrected to protect the integrity of the church, its doctrine, and its worship. Such will be the task of this paper by highlighting and exegeting an Old Testament text that shows that the God of the Old Testament is not merely just but that He is also gracious, compassionate, and forgiving just as He is in the New Testament. By showing that God has the same character in both Testaments, Marcion's heresy is undermined and the church can begin to recognize both the continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament and the need to study them together as God's complete and inspired revelation to mankind. The text to be examined is Exodus 34:5-9, which strikingly shows God's character (revealed by His own statement!) and proves how wrong these "Modern Marcionites" are in their belief of a fundamental difference in God between the testaments and their resultant jettisoning of the study of the Old Testament.⁵

⁴The fact that such beliefs are common in the evangelical milieu can be illustrated by Baker Publishing Group's use of such beliefs to sell books correcting those beliefs. In Baker's Fall 2010 academic catalog, Paul Copan's book (*Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*) is advertised with a blurb that says, "A leading apologetics scholar provides guidance on navigating Old Testament ethical problems, helping readers reconcile the seemingly disconnected natures of God portrayed in the two testaments." See Baker Publishing Group, "Fall 2010 Academic Catalog," Fall 2010, p. 33.

⁵To call some evangelicals "Modern Marcionites" is not to label them with the term "heretic" or to challenge their salvation. Rather, I am simply pointing out how many in the modern evangelical churches have unwittingly bought into the lie that Marcion propagated in his own time, namely, that there is discontinuity in God's character as revealed in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Often this belief is implicit rather than explicit.

Exodus 34:5-9 displays four major movements as the narrative of God's descending to reveal Himself to Moses unfolds—the appearance of the LORD on the mountain, the proclamation of the LORD to fulfill Moses' request from Exodus 33:18, the response of Moses to the revelation of the character of God, and the request of Moses for God's forgiveness and blessing. These movements will serve as the outline for examining the text and bring forth its truth. The paper will conclude with some of the pitfalls that occur when the influence of Marcion has infected the body of Christ and the clear truths of both the Old Testament and the New Testament are not held together in a consistent and holistic manner.

Context of Exodus 34:5-9

The book of Exodus is a dramatic and powerful depiction of the deliverance of Israel. This book about the “way out” is not merely about the deliverance of God's covenant people from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh but also from the oppressive hand of sin. At the center of the book lies the effector of the salvation of Israel, Yahweh. It is by His might that works according to His gracious and just nature that He brings the Israelites out of their multiple areas of bondage. The key passage that reveals God's character that motivates both His salvation and His judgment is Exodus 34:5-9. This passage is part of a larger block of narrative that spans Exodus 32-34.

Exodus 32 opens with the Israelites realizing that Moses did not seem to be coming back from his excursion up the mountain to speak with God (Ex. 24:15-18). The flow of the narrative seems to indicate that the people did not know how long Moses was to be gone. The information that Moses would spend 40 days and 40 nights upon the mountain in Exodus 24:18 seems to be a narrative detail that is only revealed to the

reader but not revealed beforehand to the people in the situation.⁶ In the midst of this uncertainty, the Israelites approach Aaron, their temporary leader, demanding that he make an idol for them. God knows of this explicit violation of the first and second commandments and tells Moses of the matter while he is on the mountain receiving God's revelation. Moses pleads for the people and then descends the mountain. Upon seeing the sin of the people, Moses becomes angry and shatters the tablets containing the Law of God as a sign of the Israelites violation of the covenant.

All sin has consequences, and the consequences for the Israelites who persisted in their idolatry was death by the sword at the hand of the Levites. Moses and the people are commanded by the LORD to resume the journey to the Promised Land, but Moses seeks a sign from the LORD so that he may know that the LORD is still going with them. Moses requests to see God's glory. God responds by promising to show His goodness to Moses but tells Moses that no one may see his face—His full glory—and live.

This setting is the background against which Exodus 34 begins. Chapter 34 begins with God's command to Moses to cut out two more stone tablets and come up the mountain to meet with Yahweh again in order to renew the covenant that God had established with the people. Moses obeys and proceeds to the place where he is to meet with the LORD. "Then the LORD descended in the cloud" (Exod 34:5).⁷

The Text of Exodus 34:5-9

The text of Exodus 34:5-9 is relatively free from any textual variants. The

⁶Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 661.

⁷Unless otherwise noted, the translations used in the paper are author's.

variants that do appear are only minor and represent no substantial differences in the meaning of the text as it stands in the Masoretic Text (MT). However, for completeness these few variants will be briefly discussed.

Verse six contains one variant where the Septuagint (LXX)⁸ lacks the repetition of the tetragrammaton. Verse nine contains three variants. The first variant is similar to verse six where the LXX lacks the first occurrence of יהוה. The second variant states that κύριος is used to translate יהוה. The third variant is from the Targums and multiple Medieval Hebrew manuscripts and simply has a plural form of יהוה where the MT has a singular.

Even though the LXX tends to provide a much more literal translation of the Pentateuch than other portions of the Hebrew Old Testament, the current general opinion argues that the differences in the LXX reflect a “free rendering” of the original Hebrew text. In addition, the Greek text that lies behind the LXX has been noticeably revised. Recent research also now suggests that since the discovery of the Qumran scrolls the proto-MT text is thought to be as old if not older than the proto-LXX text.⁹ The Targumic

⁸To even say “the Septuagint” is problematic for several reasons. First, the term itself is not consistently used in the relevant literature. Second, there are noticeable differences and corruptions in each of the representative LXX manuscripts so that there is no single LXX text. Third, no general consensus exists on which books should actually be considered as part of the LXX. See Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible*: (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 177-78. However, for the ease of discussion, the term “Septuagint” has been retained, and Melvin Peters’ functional definition can be assumed. He states, “For convenience, it is assumed throughout what follows that a single set of original translations of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek was effected in several stages, and in locations not known for sure; that the earliest parts (most likely the Torah) of the translation took place in the 3rd century B.C.E. (perhaps in Egypt) and the last parts were completed by the first part of the 1st century B.C.E.; that, in the absence of ‘hard copy’ of these translations, we can recover from the extant witnesses, texts sufficiently reliable to be considered equivalent to the originals, if carefully controlled text-critical principles are employed.” See David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (New York; Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “Septuagint,” by Melvin K. H. Peters.

⁹Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism*, 179-181.

reading in verse nine seems to be an explanatory gloss that crept into the text at some point. The “harder” reading of the MT seems to explain the origin of the plural. When these considerations are added to the assessment that these variants represent no major difference in the meaning or form of the text, the resulting conclusion is that the text of Exodus 34:5-9 as represented in the MT should be considered the best reading of the text.

Exegesis of Exodus 34:5-9

The Appearance of the LORD

This section of the passage describes both God’s act of appearing to Moses and his announcement of His appearing before Moses. Here God fulfills Moses’ request to see His glory (Ex. 33:18), though only in a veiled way.

The act of the appearance. While Moses is standing on the mountain with tablets in hand waiting upon God, the LORD does something amazing—He “descends.” The verb used here is a Qal imperfect *waw* consecutive from the root **רָדַד** which means “to come or go down, descend.”¹⁰ The presence of the *waw* consecutive prefixed to the imperfect verb shows that the narrative is indeed continuing.¹¹ Therefore a connecting word like “then” or “so” brings out a more nuanced translation of the Hebrew construction.¹² In fact, **וַיֵּרָד**, **וַיִּתְיַצֵּב**, and **וַיִּקְרָא** are all prefixed with the *waw* consecutive

¹⁰Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon [BDB]* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), s.v. “**רָדַד**.”

¹¹ H. F. W. Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley (London: Oxford University Press, 1910), 326.

¹²See the author’s translation in Appendix 1.

to form what Durham calls a “tightly connected staccato sequence.”¹³ The idea communicated is that the descending of the LORD is made more profound and intense by the two following actions because each successive action highlights the progression and totality of God’s revelatory act to Moses. Such a verbal sequence might be compared to a series of quarter notes that are independently struck but which build upon one another in order to move the tune along as the notes are played.

This descending of the LORD is no ordinary event because it is a physical appearance of God to the senses of man. This display of God’s presence is known as a theophany,¹⁴ a physical manifestation of the presence of God. Moses did not vaguely perceive some supernatural occurrence nor was he merely overwhelmed by a feeling that God was with him. He actually saw with his eyes the glory of God in some real, tangible sense.¹⁵ That the theophany as a real physical manifestation is clearly communicated by the fact that the LORD descended “in the cloud.” The כּ preposition may be classified as “spatial”¹⁶ or “locative”¹⁷ illustrating the location of the glory of the LORD in the theophany. For God to be “in” the cloud is not to say that God’s presence is somehow limited to the cloud. Rather, the cloud is the LORD’s way of mediating His presence in a

¹³John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, vol. 3 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 453.

¹⁴Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 584.

¹⁵Stuart, *Exodus*, 714.

¹⁶Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 196.

¹⁷Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, ed. John C. Beckman, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 97.

particular place and time within history for the benefit of the perception of man.¹⁸ Hence the word עָנָן in this context means “clouds as the domain of the divine activity and existence” and has reference to “both revealing and veiling the presence of God (Yahweh) when he appears.”¹⁹ Therefore, the cloud in which the LORD descends is both a means of revealing his presence to Moses but also a means of concealing God’s full glory without which Moses would surely die (Exod 33:20). This use of the cloud as a means of manifesting His presence is God’s *modus operandi* especially in the book of Exodus (cf. Exod. 13:21-22; 14:19-20, 24; 16:10; 19:9, 16; 24:15-18; 33:9-10; 40:34-38).²⁰

Not only did the LORD descend in the cloud but He also “stood” with Moses. צַב is a verb that only occurs in the Hithpael with the basic meaning “to take one’s stand (firmly).”²¹ In contrast to the above interpretation where the LORD is the subject of this verb, it is grammatically possible for Moses to be the subject so that it is not the LORD standing but only Moses standing on the mountain. This latter interpretation would be in accord with Exodus 33:21 and 34:2.²² However, there is no explicit change of the subject²³ and Moses seems to be the one already standing upon the mountain (Exod.

¹⁸John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 385.

¹⁹Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [HALOT], trans. M. E. J. Richardson, study ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), s.v. “עָנָן.”

²⁰BDB, s.v. “עָנָן.”

²¹HALOT, s.v. “צַב.”

²²Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 215.

²³Cornelius Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, *Chapters 20-40* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 707.

34:2) so that the LORD would come to stand “with him.” The preposition **עִי** (“with”) “expresses the concept of inclusiveness, togetherness, company”²⁴ so that God Himself is standing in very close association with Moses but veiled by the cloud at the spot where he had command Moses to stand (Exod. 33:21).

The announcement of the appearance. Another interpretive challenge arises with the final phrase of verse 5. Is the subject of the Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular verb **קָרָא** Moses or Yahweh? If Moses is the subject, he is calling upon the name of the LORD or praying to Him. If God is the subject, then He is announcing his own presence to Moses so that Moses would expect the upcoming proclamation concerning God Himself and know it be God’s own revelation of His own character.

The meaning of the verb is not particularly helpful in determining the subject since it can mean to “call,” to “proclaim,” or even to “read.”²⁵ However, HALOT seems to make a specific claim as to the LORD being the subject of the verb **קָרָא** by rendering it in this instance as “to proclaim (announce) the name of Yahweh.”²⁶ The attractiveness of Moses being the subject of the verb may be that the LORD is responding to Moses who is crying out to the LORD while on the mountain.²⁷ However, seeing Yahweh as the subject is much more plausible since there is again no explicit change in the subject, since **קָרָא**

²⁴R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* [TWOT] (Chicago: Moody, 1980, s.v. “עִי.”

²⁵BDB, 895.

²⁶HALOT, 2:1131.

²⁷Of the major English translations, only the NASB takes the verse in this way.

would have to have a different meaning in verse 5 than it does in verse 6,²⁸ and since Exodus 33:19 has a very similar construction as the phrase here. In Exodus 33:19, the LORD is the obvious subject who tells Moses that He will proclaim His own name. Either option is viable and Calvin reminds the interpreter "...let us be at liberty, then to take it as applying either to Moses or to God Himself..."²⁹

The idea of names in the Old Testament frequently associated elements of "existence, character, and reputation" with the personal name of an individual.³⁰ This is of great importance for the current context since the name of the LORD is defined by specific attributes, which will be recalled by the very mention of the Name in the future. For this reason, God's people can and should walk in His name (Mic. 4:5) and there is more to taking the name of the LORD in vain than saying the Name in an offhanded way (Exod. 20:7). Certainly, there is connection of the Name here with the revelation of the Name in Exodus 3:13-16, but the emphasis in Exodus 34:5-9 does not lie chiefly on the etymology of the Name. Instead, the emphasis is on the characteristics that define the person that the Name reveals.³¹

By way of review of verse 5, one may note that following the obedience of Moses to cut new tablets and ascend the mountain, God condescends to meet the needs of man by descending from His heavenly abode to make His presence tangibly manifest before Moses. God's descent was to assure Moses as He stood there with him of the

²⁸Houtman, *Exodus*, 707.

²⁹Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, 386.

³⁰TWOT, s.v. "יְהוָה."

³¹Stuart, *Exodus*, 714-715.

LORD's faithful presence with the nation of Israel. This presence is announced with power and the expectation of what is to follow, namely, the very character of the LORD as revealed by His Name.

The Proclamation of the LORD

Upon the heels of the act of God's appearance and the announcement of His appearance comes the substance of His self-disclosure. The presence of the LORD is about to pass by so that Moses may see the glory of God (Exod. 33:18) and the name of the LORD is about to be explained in order that Moses may know Him as He really is (Exod. 33:13).³²

The precursor to the proclamation. The precursor to the proclamation is that God would pass by in front of Moses and begin the proclamation in the fulfillment of His promise in 33:21-23.³³ Presumably, the passing by in the beginning of verse 6 was accompanied by the necessary precautions mentioned in 33:21-23 in order to protect Moses' life from being extinguished.³⁴ Both of the verbs in the first part of 34:6 are Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular thus continuing the narrative sequence and undoubtedly have הַיְהוָה as their subject. עָבַר essentially means to "pass over, by, through" and denotes movement of one object or concept in relation to another.³⁵ The

³²Sarna, *Exodus*, 216.

³³Stuart, *Exodus*, 715.

³⁴Durham, *Exodus*, 453.

³⁵TWOT, s.v. "עָבַר."

preposition phrase *עַל־פְּנֵי* literally means “in front of his face”³⁶ rendering the more natural English phrase “before him.”

It is possible to take the first *הָיָה* following *אֵלֶיךָ* as the grammatical subject of the verb such that the meaning is “The LORD proclaimed ‘the LORD’.”³⁷ Taking this interpretation seems questionable for two reasons. First, the repetition of *הָיָה* as the subject of the verb seems superfluous since the two verbs are intimately connected by the *waw* Consecutive. Second, the Masoretic accentuation clues the reader into how to take the phraseology. The Masoretes have put a conjunctive *Múnāḥ* on the first *הָיָה* and a disjunctive *Zāqēp parvum* on the second *הָיָה* so that the reader would know to put the two words together. Of course, the Masoretic accentuation is neither inspired nor infallible, but it does provide a helpful interpretive guide for how the Hebrew phrase fits together.

The points of the proclamation. Therefore, what comes to the foreground because of this repetition is a clear emphasis placed upon the LORD as the subject of the proclamation. This is the position of Sarna,³⁸ Stuart,³⁹ Enns,⁴⁰ and Calvin.⁴¹ Durham makes an interesting note when he says that this repetition of the name of God is “a deliberate repetition of the confessional use of the tetragrammaton emphasizing the

³⁶HALOT, s.v. “עַל־” and “פְּנֵי.”

³⁷Houtman, *Exodus*, 708.

³⁸Sarna, *Exodus*, 216.

³⁹Stuart, *Exodus*, 715.

⁴⁰Enns, *Exodus*, 584.

⁴¹Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, 386.

reality of Yahweh present in his very being.”⁴² The first point of the proclamation of the LORD is that He is its supreme subject and that what is revealed glorifies and illuminates Him.

Jewish exegetes have traditionally found the Thirteen Attributes of God in verses 6 and 7 of Exodus 34. These attributes play a key role in the liturgical aspects of Jewish worship. They serve not as a way to guarantee forgiveness and mercy from God, but as a means to prompt the Jew to become more like the God that they worship.⁴³ This desire of imitation seems to be the emphasis in Psalm 112 where the righteous man takes on the very characteristics of the LORD whom he fears and worships.⁴⁴

While the first point concerns God Himself as the subject of the proclamation, the second point concerns God’s qualities as the substance of the proclamation. For this reason, Fretheim refers to this section of the passage as a “virtual exegesis of this name.”⁴⁵ This exegesis of the name of Yahweh will bring out points of grace, steadfast love, *and* firm judgment upon the unrepentant person.

The first word encountered after the double occurrence of the Name is another word for “God.” לֵאלֹהִים means “god, but with various subordinate applications to express the idea of might” so that it can also be applied to other entities that display power. These entities can be humans, angels, pagan gods, and even nature, but the chief referent is to

⁴²Durham, *Exodus*, 453.

⁴³Sarna, *Exodus*, 216.

⁴⁴TWOT, s.v. “ לֵאלֹהִים .”

⁴⁵Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation, ed. James Luther Mays (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 301.

the one true God, the God of Israel.⁴⁶ Interestingly, this word rarely occurs in narrative literature unless accompanied by defining words as it is employed in the current passage. The reason for this accompaniment of defining characteristic is due to the word's prevalent usage for denoting deity in Semitic languages. By using "epithets" to define the word in a fuller and more defined sense, the biblical writers were able to make a stark distinction between the true God and all others who would claim deity and to exalt the biblical view of God.⁴⁷ Therefore, the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* remarks that "from the beginning of the use of this term in Scripture, it was intended to distinguish the true El (God) from all false uses of that name found in other Semitic cultures."⁴⁸

An important discovery was made with the appearance of the Ugaritic texts because they show that $\text{לֵא}^{\text{ל}}$ was not merely a generic term for the concept of God. Instead, the word actually carried the idea of a *personal* deity. Therefore, the Old Testament writers' way of speaking of $\text{לֵא}^{\text{ל}}$ as "my rock" (Ps. 42:9), "my savior" (Isa. 12:2), "my fortress" (2 Sam. 22:33), and so on was perfectly legitimate and consistent with the use of the word in the Semitic languages.⁴⁹

$\text{לֵא}^{\text{ל}}$, then, is the personal God of Israel who is fundamentally different from the false gods all around in the ancient Near Eastern culture. In what way is He different? First, God proclaims Himself to be "compassionate." With the exception of Psalm 112:4,

⁴⁶BDB, s.v. " $\text{לֵא}^{\text{ל}}$."

⁴⁷TWOT, s.v. " $\text{לֵא}^{\text{ל}}$."

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

רחום is an adjective that is only used to describe God.⁵⁰ This adjective is related to the verb רחם which communicates the action of a very deep love that is typically directed from someone who is in a superior position towards someone who is in an inferior position.⁵¹ God sees the suffering and plight of man and has a deep desire to alleviate that suffering by meeting man's need. God is able to act compassionately because He is compassionate.⁵² He always acts in accordance with His nature.

Not only is God compassionate; He is also “gracious.” Of the 13 times that רחום occurs, it occurs 11 times with רחום. In addition, God's graciousness is usually coupled with his righteousness and judgment of sin.⁵³ God's being gracious means that He grants to people blessing and favor that they do not deserve.⁵⁴ Therefore, God's compassion—seeing a need and wanting to meet it—is tied to God's graciousness whereby he meets those needs abundantly even though there is no merit in the receiver of the grace.

Yahweh proceeds to declare Himself to be a God who is “long” (אָרְךָ)⁵⁵ of “nose” or “nostril” (אַפִּי).⁵⁶ This is an idiomatic expression to show that God is patient or slow to anger. When someone becomes angry, the nose dilates, becomes red, and

⁵⁰Ibid., s.v. “רחום.”

⁵¹Ibid., s.v. “רחם.”

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., s.v. “רחום.”

⁵⁴Stuart, *Exodus*, 715.

⁵⁵BDB, s.v. “אָרְךָ.”

⁵⁶BDB, s.v. “אַפִּי.”

seems to burn. God has a long nose, which means that it takes a great while for His anger to reach the point of finding expression in action.⁵⁷ Stuart remarks that God’s “patience with people’s less-than-satisfactory behavior and/or failures in any realm, including the moral, is very great.”⁵⁸

A fourth attribute of the LORD is that he is “abundant in lovingkindness.” רַב is a common adjective in biblical Hebrew being used 420 times in contexts that denote a great number of objects or things or entities that are great in capacity, power, or size.⁵⁹ The next term, אֶרֶב, is a highly debated in terms of its meaning. Some like Stuart take the word to mean a covenant love between God and His people Israel.⁶⁰ The only problem is that there are many interactions where the word is used in human-to-human interactions where a covenant is not in view (cf. Ruth 1:8-9; 2:11-12; 3:10; Josh. 2:12; Gen. 19:19; 21:23). Of course, these interactions are not paradigmatic for the interactions between God and man since all of His actions towards Israel would be covenant love due to the nature of His promise to Abraham, but what can be said is that the word itself does not necessarily carry the idea of a covenant. However, the key issue here is whether to see this “covenant love” as a feature of the covenant, or to see the covenant as a tangible expression of the love of God that extends to all mankind? Taking into consideration the use of this passage in other contexts,⁶¹ (especially the context of Jonah 4:2 where God is

⁵⁷TWOT, s.v. “אֶרֶב” and “אֶרֶב.”

⁵⁸Stuart, *Exodus*, 715-716.

⁵⁹TWOT, s.v. “רַב.”

⁶⁰Stuart, *Exodus*, 716.

⁶¹See Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8, 17; 145:8; Jer. 32:18-19; Nah. 1:3. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 302.

compassionate, gracious, and abundant in lovingkindness to *Gentiles*) one would be more inclined to see that certainly **חַסְדֵּךָ** is covenant love. However, it is covenant love by virtue that God has love for all and is willing to bring all into covenant with Him so that the covenant is an expression of that love rather than the love being merely a feature of the covenant.⁶² For this reason, the author has chosen to translate **חַסְדֵּךָ** as “lovingkindness” rather than with some implicit idea of loyalty or faithfulness.

The LORD is not without the attribute of faithfulness though, and God’s love will indeed be in accord with His faithfulness. God is abundant in lovingkindness *and* **אֱמֻנָה**. This word means “firmness, faithfulness, truth”⁶³ and “carries [an] underlying sense of certainty, dependability.”⁶⁴ What God says is true and what God does will always be according to what He has promised.

God’s qualities continue to be revealed by means of two Qal active participles, which have the significance of not merely showing stative qualities but qualities manifested in particular actions.⁶⁵ The first comes from the root **נָצַר** and means to “watch, guard, keep.”⁶⁶ God keeps in store or guards His love from fading “for thousands” (**לְאַלְפִים**)⁶⁷ or an innumerable amount of people and generations.⁶⁸ The next

⁶²TWOT, s.v. “חַסְדֵּךָ.”

⁶³BDB, s.v. “אֱמֻנָה.”

⁶⁴TWOT, s.v. “אֱמֻנָה.”

⁶⁵Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 355-356.

⁶⁶BDB, s.v. “נָצַר.”

⁶⁷BDB, s.v. “אַלְפִים.”

⁶⁸Stuart, *Exodus*, 716.

participle comes from the root נשׂא and means “to lift up,” “to bear, carry, support,” or “to take, take away.”⁶⁹ Hence, it can speak of man taking up sin and the consequences and guilt that accompany it and speak of God’s “taking away, up” of that guilt. Therefore, God is forgiving of iniquity, transgression, and sin.

עוון (“iniquity”) has the idea of “infraction, crooked behavior, perversion.”⁷⁰ עֲשֵׂע (“transgression”) focuses on the idea of a violation of a relationship and its trust or terms.⁷¹ הִטָּעַת (“sin”) is a more general term than the previous two. הִטָּעַת was thought of in terms of a violation or breach in the expected order in all areas of life.⁷² The emphasis with piling up these terms for sin is not as much to bring out the slight variations in meaning but rather to point to the fact that God forgives sins from the least of offenses to the greatest of offenses.⁷³ Thomas Raitt writes of this statement of forgiveness as “the most mature and balanced statement on forgiveness in the Old Testament.”⁷⁴

Yet, lest God’s mercy and forgiveness be used as a license to sin, God makes sure to assert His righteousness and judgment upon those who persist in their sin.⁷⁵ This clause has an interesting construction. There is a Piel infinitive absolute of נקח followed

⁶⁹BDB, s.v. “נשׂא.”

⁷⁰TWOT, s.v. “עוון.”

⁷¹Ibid., s.v. “עֲשֵׂע.”

⁷²Ibid., s.v. “הִטָּעַת.”

⁷³Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, 387. Durham notes “the multiplication of the terms is a deliberate attempt at comprehensive statement.” Durham, *Exodus*, 454.

⁷⁴Thomas M. Raitt, “Why Does God Forgive?,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 13, no. 1 (1991): 47.

⁷⁵Note the presence of the adversative *waw* conjunction.

by the negative adverb לֹא followed by a Piel imperfect of נָקַח . This construction with the same root shows clear emphasis for the certain outcome of the intended action of the verb.⁷⁶ The most basic meaning of the verb is “to be poured out” which shows how it came to be metaphorically associated with the meaning “to be free [or] innocent.”⁷⁷ In the Piel, it has the meaning “to leave unpunished”⁷⁸ rendering the idea that God will certainly not leave the guilty unpunished for their sin. The ones who are in danger of punishment are those who have not been cleared of their sin because they have not come in humble repentance to God for forgiveness.⁷⁹

The result of God’s judgment upon the wicked and unrepentant person is “visiting”⁸⁰ (another Qal active participle) the iniquity of the father on the sons and grandsons (literally “sons and sons of sons”) down to the third and fourth generations. This last phrase of visiting the iniquity on the future generations can be confusing upon a general read, but the idea is not that God will punish the children for the sins of their fathers. Instead, the judgment that God metes out in one generation will certainly be enacted in subsequent generations of people who are likely to follow in the same a pattern of sin as their parents having learned such sinful patterns of life by observation. Therefore, the injunction is that the Israelites were to avoid sin in order to protect the

⁷⁶Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 85. Williams states, “The combination of an infinitive absolute and a finite verb of the same root can indicate emphasis of various types, such as affirming that the action of the verb is very certain to occur.”

⁷⁷TWOT, s.v. “ נָקַח .”

⁷⁸HALOT, s.v. “ נָקַח .”

⁷⁹Sarna, *Exodus*, 216.

⁸⁰BDB, s.v. “ נָקַח .”

future generations from facing the same punishment as they could face since the children will learn how to behave by virtue of the examples that their parents set.⁸¹

The Response of Moses

The immediate and seemingly natural reaction of Moses to this revelation of the nature of God is to bow low in worship. There are at least three aspects of Moses' behavior that are instructive to the follower of God in how one ought to worship his Creator. Moses response includes urgency, humility, and ascription of worth to the object of worship.

The urgency of Moses' response. First, Moses does his actions of worship with great urgency and haste. The verb *מהר* usually occurs in the Piel as it does here to denote something done in a quick manner. Often, the verb is used in such a way to modify other finite verbs so that it has the meaning of “hastily.”⁸² The point is that when someone encounters God and what He is like, the immediate response ought to be done with haste and urgency in order to show the sincerity of his worship and to display his comprehension that he has truly encountered a magnificent and glorious God.

The manner of Moses' response. Second, Moses acts in a way that shows an obvious attitude of humility for he knows that God is certainly greater than he is. So, Moses urgently “bows down to the earth.”⁸³ *קדד* means “to bow, kneel down in

⁸¹Stuart, *Exodus*, 717.

⁸²HALOT, s.v. “*מהר*.”

⁸³Note the directive *ל* ending on *קדד*.

homage”⁸⁴ while אֶרֶץ (‘‘to the earth’’) ⁸⁵ shows the extent of the bowing. Moses completely prostrated himself before the LORD to show his humility in his worship to the LORD.

Finally, Moses ‘‘worshiped’’ (חָוָה) ⁸⁶ by humiliating himself and exalting the LORD. Stuart writes, ‘‘Worship is an act that exalts the one being worshiped but seeks to draw no favorable attention to the worshipper.’’⁸⁷ This then is why Moses bowed down and then worshipped by showing how exalted the Lord truly is.

The Request of Moses

It is only after worshipping that Moses makes his request to God. This pattern is the appropriate order to acknowledge first the place of God so that one might truly make a humble request of God from the proper position of life and heart. From humility and worship, not from presumption, does Moses come to God asking for God’s favor and presence.

The basis of Moses’ request. The basis of Moses’ request is his favor with God resulting from his own obedience to the command of God but resting upon the qualities of God that he has just heard proclaimed by God Himself. Rather than translating the phrase בְּעֵינֵיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ as ‘‘in Your sight, O LORD,’’ it is probably best to see this as an interrupted construct chain to be translated as ‘‘in the LORD’s sight.’’ This

⁸⁴HALOT, s.v. ‘‘קָרַע.’’

⁸⁵Ibid., s.v. ‘‘אֶרֶץ.’’

⁸⁶TWOT, s.v. ‘‘חָוָה.’’

⁸⁷Stuart, *Exodus*, 718.

translation is more in keeping with how Moses has been speaking in the humble and respectful third person rather in the second person.⁸⁸

The content of Moses' request. The content of Moses request centered around two main ideas. First, Moses wanted the LORD to guarantee that He would act graciously and continue on the journey with the people conveying his full presence and blessing upon them. The latter part is the emphasis given by "Your own possession." As the inheritance of God, Israel would receive the Divine favor and blessing that God wanted to bestow upon them. Second, Moses invokes that God practice the attributes that He has just proclaimed of Himself and forgive the people of their sin and iniquity "even though" they were obstinate and stiff-necked.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Having now examined the text and seen the various attributes that God declares of Himself in the Old Testament (even in the so-called "judgmental" Law), one may see that the "Marcionite" charge that God is somehow more loving in the New Testament than in the Old Testament is completely ludicrous. The LORD forgave the Israelites of their sin and renewed His covenant with them (Exod. 34:10) in similar fashion to the way he forgives the sin and renews fellowship with the New Testament believer (1 John 1:5-10). Exodus 34:5-9 actually presents a very balanced view connecting God's grace and compassion with His righteousness and judgment. The one who comes to the LORD in repentance will receive mercy and grace even as Moses'

⁸⁸Francis I. Andersen, "A Short Note on Construct k in Hebrew," *Biblica* 50 (1969): 68-69.

⁸⁹Stuart, *Exodus*, 718-719.

petition illustrates. However, the one who persists in his sin and will not humbly come before God and request forgiveness “will certainly not go unpunished.”

By way of conclusion, three possible issues with the Marcionite idea need to be exposed so that the believer will not hold to some heretical tendency in his theology. First, the extreme of the Maricionite idea is that there is more than one God. This threatens the very idea of monotheism, which is basic to the Christian faith. Another more subtle pitfall is that of implicitly challenging God’s immutability. By saying that God is somehow different in the New Testament than He was in the Old Testament,⁹⁰ one charges God with changing. If God changes then the faith of the believer is in vain and one has no confidence of redemption. Finally the most common pitfall among evangelical Christians is this underlying (and usually not vocalized) idea that since God is more loving in the New Testament one does not really need to study the Old Testament. The disparagement of the studying the Old Testament is a travesty in modern evangelicalism. How might one truly know God if he only studies less than half of what God has revealed to him? For this reason, showing the connection, coherence, and continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament is imperative if the academic world and the church world are to appreciate, study, rightly interpret, and apply the whole Scripture.

Therefore, knowing that God Himself testifies that He is loving and gracious in the Old Testament in a text that is reiterated many other times in the Old Testament

⁹⁰I hesitate to use "is" and "was" in reference to God since He is immutable and timeless. The temporal aspects of past, presence, and future inherent in verbal systems do not apply to God's own experience or character. However, from man's perspective God "was" loving, compassionate, and just in the OT even as he "is now" loving, compassionate, and just in the NT.

writings,⁹¹ one ought to reject the heresy of Marcion and cling to the God of the whole Scripture. One ought to trust that all of God's revelation is equally important for understanding who God is and how one might worship Him, imitate Him, and live according to His will. The call to the churches and to those who would interpret the Scripture is, "Disparage not the Old Testament and the God who is revealed in it! Run to Him and bow low to worship even as Moses did! Plead for forgiveness of sin and trust in the God who is faithful, loving, *and* just in the New as well as the Old!"

⁹¹See footnote 61.

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APPENDIX 1

AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION OF THE PASSAGE

⁵Then the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there. And He proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶Then the LORD passed by before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, the God *who is* compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in lovingkindness and faithfulness; ⁷keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; but certainly not leaving *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons and grandsons to the third and fourth generations. ⁸Then Moses hastily bowed down to the earth and worshipped. ⁹And he said, "If now I have found favor in the Lord's eyes, please let the Lord go in our midst, even though the people are stubborn, and pardon our iniquity and sin, and take us for Your own possession."

APPENDIX 2

EXEGETICAL OUTLINE OF THE PASSAGE

- I. The Appearance of the LORD – Exodus 34:5
 - a. The act of the appearance
 - b. The announcement of the appearance
- II. The Proclamation of the LORD – Exodus 34:6-7
 - a. The precursor of the proclamation
 - b. The points of the proclamation
- III. The Response of Moses – Exodus 34:8
 - a. The urgency of Moses' response
 - b. The manner of Moses' response
- IV. The Request of Moses – Exodus 34:9
 - a. The basis of Moses' request
 - b. The content of Moses' request