

# Exodus 33:7-11

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-33/exodus-337-11/>

*The LORD had just announced that He would no longer reside in the midst of His people. Instead, He met Moses in a tent that was outside the camp. When the LORD met Moses, a pillar of cloud would appear at the tent. When the people saw the pillar of cloud descend upon the tent, they worshipped the LORD by standing in reverence. Moses would enter the tent to fellowship with the LORD like a friend. When he returned to the camp, his assistant Joshua would remain at the tent.*

Apparently as a symbol of the separation between the holy LORD and His obstinate people, *Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp.* This *tent* was pitched a good distance from the camp, meaning that this tent was separated from the people by a sizable distance, but it was close enough for the people to see both it and a *pillar of cloud* that would descend upon the *tent*.

Moses called it the *tent of meeting*. This was not the same *tent of meeting* described in chapters 25 – 31. That tent (the Tabernacle) will not be constructed until chapters 35 – 40. Also, there is no mention of the tabernacle furniture (such as the ark), and it was placed a good distance outside the camp, whereas the tabernacle was erected in the midst of the camp ([Numbers 3;23;29;35;38](#)). This *tent of meeting* apparently was a temporary structure where Moses would meet with the LORD, and *the LORD would speak with Moses*.

If an Israelite *sought the Lord*, he or she would go out to the *tent of meeting which was outside the camp*. This means that the people still had access to the LORD, but He was not in their *midst*, likely as a remembrance of them breaking the covenant and coming under judgement for their violation. They had to go a distance *outside* their *camp* to seek *the Lord*.

Verses 8 – 10 describe what happened during this time. First, *whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent*. Moses would walk to the *tent* when he needed to be in the LORD's presence. In response, the people, now separated from the LORD's immediate presence, could only watch Moses walk to the tent and enter it. They likely did this in

reverence, having gained fear of the LORD's judgment pursuant to the covenant.

Also, *whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent* (v. 9). This *pillar* was a visible indicator of the presence of the LORD. It was a familiar sight to the people. It had protected the Israelites at the crossing of the Red Sea ([Exodus 14:19, 24](#)), and it led them through the wilderness ([Exodus 13:21](#); [Numbers 14:14](#)), and now through the *pillar the Lord would speak with Moses*.

The people reacted appropriately to the appearance of the *pillar*, because *when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent* (v. 10). The phrase *worship* here likely refers to the fact that *each* Israelite stood *at the entrance of his tent* to pay due respect that God was speaking with their leader. *Worship* is any act of obedience or recognition of the reality of who God is ([Matthew 9:18](#); [14:33](#); [15:25](#); [Mark 5:6](#)).

When the LORD came to speak to Moses, the people rightly responded in *worship*. But they could *worship* Him at a distance, at the entrance of their own tent, not the entrance of the tent of meeting where the LORD's presence rested.

In contrast to the separation of the people from the LORD, verse 11 speaks of the close relationship that Moses had with Him. The verse says that *the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend*. This does not mean that Moses saw the face of God. That was not allowed (see v. 20). The phrase *face to face* is a figure of speech that conveys friendship and open communication ([Numbers 12:8](#); [Deuteronomy 34:10](#)).

The section ends with a note about Joshua. It would happen that *When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent*. Joshua had been Moses' assistant for some time now ([Exodus 17:9ff](#); [24:13](#)). *Joshua* remained at *the tent of meeting* even when Moses departed. *Joshua* also faithfully remained halfway up Mount Horeb for the forty days Moses received the Law and the instructions for constructing the tabernacle ([Exodus 24:13](#); [32:15-17](#)). Joshua will eventually take the baton from Moses to lead Israel into the land.

This passage illustrates the contrast between Moses' closeness with the LORD and the people's broken fellowship. Moses experienced fellowship and harmony with the LORD on the basis of his faithful obedience, while the

Israelites were made distant from God because of their obstinance. Their sin had strained their intimacy with the LORD. He was still present with them, though now at a distance. This is likely a picture of how known and unconfessed sin affects a New Testament believer. Jesus explained to His disciples why He made the primary point of His model prayer “And forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors” ([Matthew 6:12](#)). Immediately after the prayer’s “Amen” Jesus said:

“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”  
([Matthew 6:14-15](#))

As with Israel, failing to forgive others creates a distance in fellowship between the bitter person and God. By praying “forgive us...as we have forgiven” we are asking God to treat us the way we treat others. When we refuse to forgive, we push people out of our “camp.” Our obstinance to not forgive pushes God away as well. He is still with us, but there is a lack of closeness.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>7</sup> Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. <sup>8</sup> And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. <sup>9</sup> Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the Lord would speak with Moses. <sup>10</sup> When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. <sup>11</sup> Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.**