

One new thing I learned this week is how Israel's sin, after the worship of the Golden Calf, changes the purpose of the role of the angel among them. Initially, the angel's purpose was to go ahead of the children of Israel as an indicator of God's presence and to conquer their enemies (Sailhamer, 313). Sailhamer, cites Exodus 23:20: "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared" (NIV). Exodus 33:2, NIV, also emphasizes that the angel will proceed the children of Israel and will remove the inhabitants of the land God has promised: the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. The angel is a warrior on behalf of God's people. Yet, Israel's sin shows a shift, where God distinguishes God's self from the angel, saying the angel will go as promised, but God will not go! God said their disobedience may cause Him to destroy them along the way. Some translations use the word stiff-necked to describe Israel's disobedience (KJV, NKJV, ESV, NIV), obstinate (NASB), with both meaning that the people are stubborn and rebellious (NLT). God says: "... you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way" (Ex. 33:3, NIV). Sailhamer believes that this is an indicator of God separating himself from the people and the construction of the Tent of Meeting outside the camp (Sailhamer, 314).

I think the good news, however---which is instructive, is that God is so Holy that God cannot be associated with unholiness. Additionally, the good news is that separation is not abandonment. God still provides the angel!

When we tell one another, "God be with you and also with you," it's an affirmation that God is above and more important than the angel, the dispatcher. The people in the text seem to understand the difference clearly. In verse 33:4, the people begin to mourn at hearing that God would not be going with them and that if God did, it would be to their destruction. "When the

people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments”
(NIV). This gives us an indication of God’s anger but also of God’s mercy. Thanks be to God!