



BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

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MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH

Scripture Reading – Exodus 3: 1-14, 19:3. 32:15-35, 33:1-6, 14, 24:2, 12.

Introduction

In this message we fix our attention on Moses the servant of God. A number of passages have been selected which give insight into Moses the servant of God. They touch his character - commitment and passionate concern for God's will and God's people. About three years ago we discovered Moses in the wilderness and outlined some discoveries he made in the desert. Those discoveries were unexpected and surprising. The question arose as to whether it was possible to discover God in a desert? Moses did in a unique way; God met him in the burning bush. It seems incredible that God would take time to go into the wilderness to meet with an obscure lonely shepherd. There is nothing of too much interest in the desert place. We would say that Pharaoh's court among royalty would seem to be a more appropriate place to for God to meet with Moses. Moses however, was in the desert, and God came down to meet him there. He revealed Himself in a burning bush. It burned brightly and was consumed yet not consumed. It was a common desert bush, but was aglow with

the presence of God. Fire in the Book of God is a symbol of His presence, and so that common bush burned with a holy Divine fire. Moses was both intrigued and attracted by that bush and turned out of his way to investigate. As he drew near to the bush, a voice came out of it – “Moses! Moses! Don’t come any closer; take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” In those moments a common bush became the temple of the living God. The common ground surrounding it became holy ground when God was there. **Could it be** that God was saying to Moses, “you see Moses when I fill a common bush which attracts nobody and blends in with the arid background of the wilderness and seems to have no use in the desert, (when I fill it) it is transformed into a blazing bush, with an inextinguishable blaze. Amazingly it was a bush which while it burned does not burn up. The flames do not consume it. God says to Moses this is so because it contains my presence. **Could it be** that He was saying to Moses you are like that bush? You are common and weak and ineffective, but if my presence fills your life something extraordinary will take place, and you can become a burning and shining light. **Could it also be** that God wanted Moses to know that He could fill an ordinary common and insignificant individual to reveal His presence, display His glory and exercise His power and accomplish His purposes? **COULD THIS BE?** At the very least these are thoughts upon which to seriously reflect. All of the aforementioned thoughts touch on possibilities which are intrinsic in the questions asked. What can be stated with unquestionable certainty is that God had chosen a weak human instrument to lead his chosen people out of the bondage of Egypt to the land of promise - Canaan. While Moses was weak He would empower him and through him He would deliver the Israelites. He was to be God’s instrument of redemption for the Children of Israel. God gave Moses the pledge that His presence would go with Him. The fulfilment of God’s purposes would be achieved but by the activity of Divine power not the strength of Moses. Nevertheless this moment in the desert was a holy moment of destiny, not only for Moses personally, but also for the children of God and ultimately all of mankind. What took place in that hour

would ultimately touch the whole world and was the beginning of the road that would eventually lead to a Cross and the salvation of the world. Moses would never be the same again. It might be said that Moses a common bush would become ablaze with the glory of God's presence. God commissioned Moses to be His man to lead the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan and empowered him in this great task.

Now It is clear that Moses did not want to go for he came up with all kinds of excuses. Eventually he relented and committed himself to fulfill God's purposes for him and his people. He picked up his rod and marched down the halls of Pharaoh's court with the demand of God burning in his heart and flaming on his lips "Let my people go!" This was no hesitant nervous tentative request; it was an audacious and even dangerous challenge, but it was a demand with all of the authority of God behind it. Pharaoh however, was not receptive to the demands of God, and God had to send plague after plague on Egypt before he eventually relented and let God's people go. And so Moses at the head of his people led them out of Egypt through the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea and brought them to Mount Sinai. God kept his promise that He would be with them. The scriptures tells us that God went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way, and by night a pillar of fire to give them light so they could travel by day or by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. Exodus 13:21-22. And in the third month after the Israelites had left Egypt – on the very day they came to the Desert of Sinai." Exodus 19:1. They camped in the desert in front of the mountain. It was the same place where God met Moses in a burning bush. He brought God's people to this place. One has written that it is here that God's promise to Moses in Exodus 3:12 is fulfilled: God said "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you; when you have brought the people out Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." The journey of Moses had come full circle. He met God on Mount Horeb in chapter 3, and now has returned to Him with the recently redeemed Israelites. They were a liberated people now. Moses

was God's answer to the plight of a people in bondage. He was God's instrument of liberation. This obscure shepherd in a dry barren place became God's mighty instrument in the redemption of His people. In that encounter God had revealed to Moses a common bush in the desert as it were, that he could become a burning bush ablaze with His glory. Moses was but a common bush that became a burning bush filled with the wisdom, power, presence and glory of God. He had his excuses; he listed his inadequacies; he recited his weaknesses to God. God was not impressed by it all. For God said to him "I AM THAT I AM. WHICH MEANS I AM THE CREATOR OF ALL, WHO CAUSED ALL THINGS TO COME TO BE, WILL MAKE THINGS HAPPEN." Moses your weaknesses are no problem for me. The secret of accomplishment and success was not dependent on strengths of Moses or lack of them but on the power of God. God was not influenced or discouraged by the weakness of Moses; He would make him what He wanted him to be. He is the "I AM the one who will cause things to happen." What does this say to us? Since He can cause things to happen, there is not one of us who God cannot use as His instrument. God is not deterred by our failings and deficiencies. When in complete obedience and in a full surrender we place our lives totally in His Hands, our disabilities become His opportunities and our weaknesses become the means of exercising His power in our lives. Why then was Moses such an effective instrument in God's hands? We find the answer to this question if we step back for a moment and take a look at him in God's book. He was an effective instrument because he enjoyed

1. A COMMUNION WITH A HOLY GOD THAT WAS CONSTANT. These scriptures give insight into the intimate relationship Moses had with God. "Moses went up to God." (see also Exodus 3:1-14.) Exodus 19:3, and in Exodus 24:2 "Moses alone is to approach the Lord." In Exodus 31 Moses was a long time coming down from the mountain for he had been in communion with God. And there is an extremely telling verse in Exodus 33:11. "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks with his friend." No wonder he was the friend of God. Moses had a special relationship with the God he met in the

wilderness. Throughout his life there was a holy intimacy between God and Moses. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Moses “endured because he saw him who is invisible.” Hebrews 11:27. For Moses to undertake the task that God had given Him, he had to keep in contact with the one who made things happen. It was this relationship that sustained and empowered him to be the strong leader and legislator he was. It seemed that Moses had come to the realization that the success and achievement of his mission was dependent on this relationship. In other words without God he could accomplish nothing but with God all things were possible. There were three elements which were vital to this intimacy with God. They are intertwined and identified with his relationship with God. The truth is that he could not have this close communion without them. They were the blood stream of his fellowship with a holy God. To study the life of Moses you will discover

a. His Reliance on the Promises of God. Exodus 3:11-12. Moses had a basic trust in God. He revealed his trust the declared word of God. At the burning bush Moses had said, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt. And God said I will be with you and in Exodus 3:17 Moses was to repeat what God had said, “.....I have promised to bring you out of your misery in Egypt into the land flowing with milk and honey.” He believed that promise. He rested on it. And you remember how after they had been delivered from Egypt they were confronted by the challenge of crossing the Red Sea. They were trapped. Pharaoh and his army were pursuing them. The Red Sea was in front of them. Moses said to the people do not be afraid, “stand firm and you will see the deliverance that the Lord will bring today.” Exodus 14:13 You know the story how God paved a way through those waters. They were saved. God promised to bring deliverance to the Children of Israel. And Moses trusted God’s word of promise. This relationship Moses had with God was founded on his complete reliance on the word of God. It was also nurtured by,

b. His Compliance with the Purposes of God. Exodus 3:8. God’s visit to Moses in the wilderness was not a social call. He had placed before Moses what His

plans were. God had heard the cries of His oppressed people in slavery, and it was His purpose to take them out of the pain of their bondage and to snap the chains of their slavery. God needed an instrument to do that. He chose Moses. He said to Moses "I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey." Exodus 3:8. In this concise way God sums up what His broad purposes were. They first,

a. To rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians; from the oppression of their slave drivers. Secondly,

b. To bring them into a good and spacious land, flowing with milk and honey."

Note the contrast between Egypt and Canaan. Egypt – chains, slavery, deprivation, pain and poverty. Canaan - the land of freedom, a good land, a spacious land, with the abundance of milk and honey. He is taking them from one land to another; the land of misery and bondage up to another land; the land of plenty and liberty. Moses once declared that that the **"Lord had brought us out in order to bring us in."** Brought up out of Egypt to inherit Canaan. This sums up the purposes of God in this moment for the people of God. God chose Moses to accomplish this purpose. Moses – Inadequate! Yes – With disabilities certainly – Reluctant - there was that too – fearful – most certainly. But Moses made a decision to fit into the purposes of God. He identified himself with the will of God. He complied with the will of God. He maintained his relationship with God because he kept step with the purposes of God. But also relationship was constant because of his,

c. Dependence on the Power of God. Exodus 3:14. 14:14. While God was looking for a man to lead His people out of bondage, Moses needed the power of God to accomplish the task he been given to do. The big question for Moses was how the people were going to be freed. Moses knew the military might of the great Pharaoh. He also knew Pharaoh's dependence on the Hebrew slaves for continued expansion of the power of Egypt. "The most impossible thing Moses could imagine was that he could ever get the people out of Egypt." (Ogilvie) That

was certain impossibility. There would have to harness a power greater than Egypt to do that. A lonely desert shepherd could never do it. And Moses could never do it and he was aware of it. "Who am I he said that should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt." Exodus 3:11. But as one has written so well an "authentic encounter with God always involves us in the answer. **What we want God to do for us, he wants to do through us.**"(P.61. Ogilvie). **God always has to take control of a surrendered life in order to use** it. As we have already said the God revealed Himself as the God "who will make all things happen." He is the all-powerful, all knowing, all loving God. It is He who will make all things happen -even the impossible. Moses met the "Lord of the Impossible," so said Ogilvie. That is why Moses was able to say at the Red Sea in Exodus 14:14. The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still." Moses was dependant on the power of God that is why intimate communion with him was so crucial to Moses. Moses was an effective instrument of God because he courageously stood resolutely in a

2. A CONFRONTATION WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD THAT WAS CRITICAL. Exodus 32:1-35.

Moses had been called up the mountain by God. It was in this meeting with God he would receive the law. It was a crucial hour in the history of the nation of Israel. Moses went up the mountain to meet with God and the word tells us in Exodus 32:1. He was a long time coming down from the mountain. The nation had waited for forty days and had become impatient. When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron, "come and let us make Gods who go before us, as far as this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt we don't know what happened to him. Exodus 32:1. And Aaron took the gold jewelry from the people and made a golden calf out of it and worshipped it. When Moses returned from his meeting with God and saw the golden calf; the dancing, the orgy and the immoral behavior anger burned in his heart and he threw the tablets containing then law breaking them in pieces at the foot of the mountain. And in Ex 32:20 – 21 it says

that, "he took the calf they had made and burned in it the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it. He said to Aaron what did these people do to you, that you led them into such a great sin? The anger of Moses was white hot. He had put his life on the line to bring them out of oppressive slavery into freedom and now they had failed him. They had betrayed him. There are a multitude of truths in this story, but we do not have time to deal with them but let me touch on two obvious things. We have seen what the reaction of Moses was but more importantly let us see what,

a. The Reaction of God was. Exodus 32:9-10. Moses had just come from the presence of a God into the presence of wicked idolaters. Moses was in close communion with a Holy God who had given him two tablets of the testimony or the law. The tablets of stone were inscribed by the finger of God. Exodus 31:18. These tablets contained laws for the moral, spiritual, religious and social life of the nation. Coming down from the mountain Moses saw the chaos in front of him. It angered him but more importantly God was angry with his people. His words burn with anger "for I have seen these people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them." Exodus 32:9-10. These words give us insight to what God thinks about idolatry. Moses sums up what the seriousness of their idolatry meant. He calls it sin. At least three times in chapter 32 Moses calls their action such **"a great sin" Ex:32:30.** This no small deviation to God. It was not just a mistake. It was not just a stumble in the dark. Sin never is. Moses called it what it was, "a great sin." God never trifles with sin. It is always a serious matter with God. And God was angry with the nation. The anger of God is a terrible and awesome thing. The Bible says it is a "terrible thing to fall into the hands of an angry God." Much of the contemporary pulpit hesitates to discuss this, but the intensity of God's anger is an indication of his passionate hatred and incontrovertible aversion to sin. God is great in His Sovereignty and glorious in His majestic holiness and He cannot and will not tolerate sin. His whole being revolts against it. Today we try to make sin more tasteful and acceptable in our society. We don't want to offend anybody. I

wonder if we are concerned and as careful about not offending God? Sin bothers God; it offends Him. We categorize sin when we talk about big sins and little sins. With God there are no categories of sin. John Wesley said "Remember there can be no little sin, till we find a little God." Kenneth Barnet wrote that "The question is not how looks sin looks to us, or to worldly people, or to liberal theologians and I might add to seeker sensitive proponents. The question is how does sin look to God." This maybe not be a popular proclamation, **but popularity is not the goal of the gospel; proclamation of the truth is.** Popularity will not prepare us to meet a Holy God and we will meet Him one day, but obedience to the truth will ready us to meet Him. God hates sin that is why He sent His one and only Son to die on Calvary's cross. It is in the power of the shed blood of Jesus that we are cleansed from all unrighteousness. That momentous day at Sinai the anger of God was his reaction against sin. But there is another thing of which we should take note and that is,

b. The Result of that Sin. Exodus 32: 5,8,25. Deuteronomy 9:25-29. Sin inevitably has consequences. They are destructive, damning and degrading consequences. Very briefly there are three consequences of the sin of the Israelites. Sin resulted in

i. Detachment from the Living God. Exodus 32:7-8. God said to Moses "Your people have become corrupt. They have been quick **to turn away** from what I have commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. Sin separates man from God. Notice that God does not say to Moses my people have become corrupt. **He says your people.** They had become detached from God. Furthermore God said "they have been quick to turn away..." The heart of their sin was,

ii. Devotion for another god. Exodus 32: 8. God emphasized this truth in verse 8. "They have made themselves an idol in the shape of calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, "These are your gods O Israel, who brought you out of Egypt." Exodus 32:7-8. Their devotion to their new god led them to attribute to the calf what the Living God had done for them, in other

words they gave the golden calf credit for their redemption from Egypt. Their devotion to the golden calf was such that they gave Divine power and authority to human creation. This was the consequence of this devotion to another god. The final consequence was that they were depraved,

iii. Depraved in the Sight of God. Exodus 32:25. Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control. There was moral

anarchy. Why? It was because the golden god placed no demands or restrictions upon them. It allowed their lusts to rule their actions and chaos ensued. There were no absolute values with this god. Everything was relative. So if it felt good they did it, and they did it in front of their new god. It didn't seem to disturb him. But standing in the shadows was the God whom they had forgotten. His holiness no longer stood as a deterrent to their wickedness. They forgot that He is holy and to be his people they could not run wild because they must conform to the demands of His holiness as contained in the law. While they were giving vent to their lusts, the scripture tells they became a laughing stock to their enemies. Exodus 32:25. This brought disgrace and shame upon the name of God and their witness among the nations would be destroyed. This was the essence of depravity. The condition of these Israelites resulted in a critical confrontation of Moses with them. The scripture tells us that his anger burned, and it was so intense that he threw the tablets engraved by the hand of God out of his hands. This anger was his initial reaction to the moral and spiritual chaos he saw, but as we watch him, we are impacted by the greatness of this man. The rage of Moses evolved into a heartfelt compassion. There was in the heart of Moses,

3. A COMPASSION FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD THAT WAS COMPELLING.

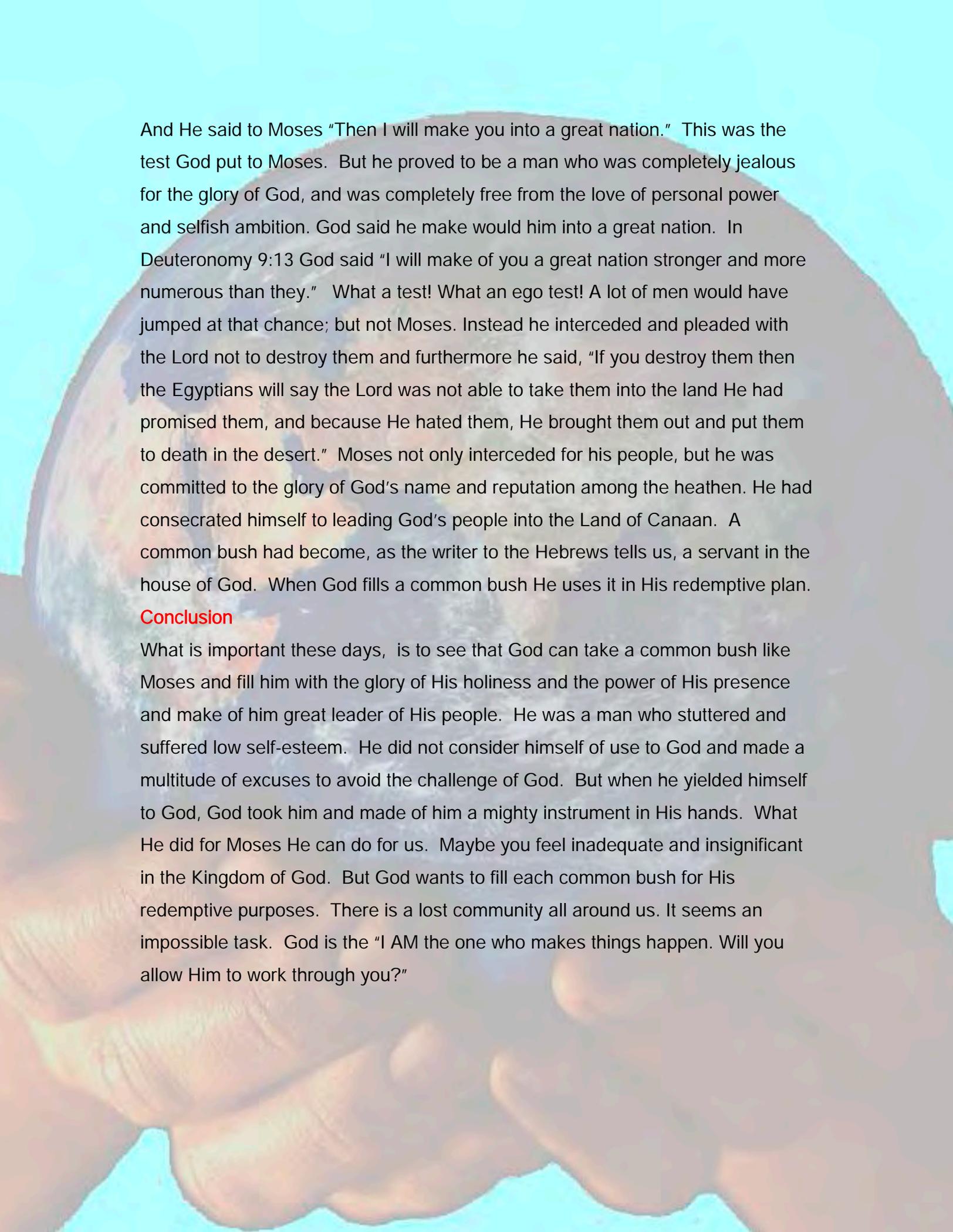
Exodus 32:30-32. It was this compassion that was the constraining force in the salvation of the nation. In Moses was a spirit of profound distinction. It is true that at first a passionate anger possessed him. His people had failed him. They were a disappointment to him. He felt betrayed. If anyone had a reason to wash his hands off these people Moses did. If anyone had a reason to relinquish his

leadership responsibilities, to back out and return to the peaceful life of tending his father-in-laws sheep, Moses did. But Moses instead said to the nation "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." So Moses went back to the Lord and, "Oh what a great sin these people have committed! They made themselves gods of gold. But now please forgive their sin- but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." In these incredible words we get a glimpse of the heart of Moses. His heart is filled with,

a. A Concern for the People. Ex 32:30-32. "I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." There was an intangible force which held Moses to his task. There was a deep seated love for God's people. While his anger at them burned with intensity it gave way to this love. It did not ignore the seriousness of their sin. It fully recognized the gravity of it for he had described it as a great sin. Love always recognizes the gravity of sin. A great sin indicates a serious problem. And love seeks to find a way out of its dilemma. Love will not excuse or defend it, but it will persistently and urgently try to do something about it. Love did not press the crippled nation into the dirt it sought to lift it out of the dirt. The words of Moses pulsate with compassion. "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." This compassion gives birth to,

b. His Intercession for the People. Exodus 32:30-32. In verses 30 to 32 Moses pled with Lord to forgive His people. And he was willing to sacrifice to have his name blotted out of the book if it would save the nation. Moses later relaying this incident at Mount Sinai in Deuteronomy 9:18. said "I fell prostrate before the Lord for forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water because of all the sin you had committed. And the Lord listened to me." This compelling love interceded for a people who had failed him and it saved the nation. Compassion and intercession go together. Another feature of spirit,

c. Consecration to leading the people. Exodus 32:9. In Exodus 32:9 God says that because His people "were a stiff necked people, He would destroy them.



And He said to Moses "Then I will make you into a great nation." This was the test God put to Moses. But he proved to be a man who was completely jealous for the glory of God, and was completely free from the love of personal power and selfish ambition. God said he make would him into a great nation. In Deuteronomy 9:13 God said "I will make of you a great nation stronger and more numerous than they." What a test! What an ego test! A lot of men would have jumped at that chance; but not Moses. Instead he interceded and pleaded with the Lord not to destroy them and furthermore he said, "If you destroy them then the Egyptians will say the Lord was not able to take them into the land He had promised them, and because He hated them, He brought them out and put them to death in the desert." Moses not only interceded for his people, but he was committed to the glory of God's name and reputation among the heathen. He had consecrated himself to leading God's people into the Land of Canaan. A common bush had become, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us, a servant in the house of God. When God fills a common bush He uses it in His redemptive plan.

Conclusion

What is important these days, is to see that God can take a common bush like Moses and fill him with the glory of His holiness and the power of His presence and make of him great leader of His people. He was a man who stuttered and suffered low self-esteem. He did not consider himself of use to God and made a multitude of excuses to avoid the challenge of God. But when he yielded himself to God, God took him and made of him a mighty instrument in His hands. What He did for Moses He can do for us. Maybe you feel inadequate and insignificant in the Kingdom of God. But God wants to fill each common bush for His redemptive purposes. There is a lost community all around us. It seems an impossible task. God is the "I AM the one who makes things happen. Will you allow Him to work through you?"