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MOSES AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

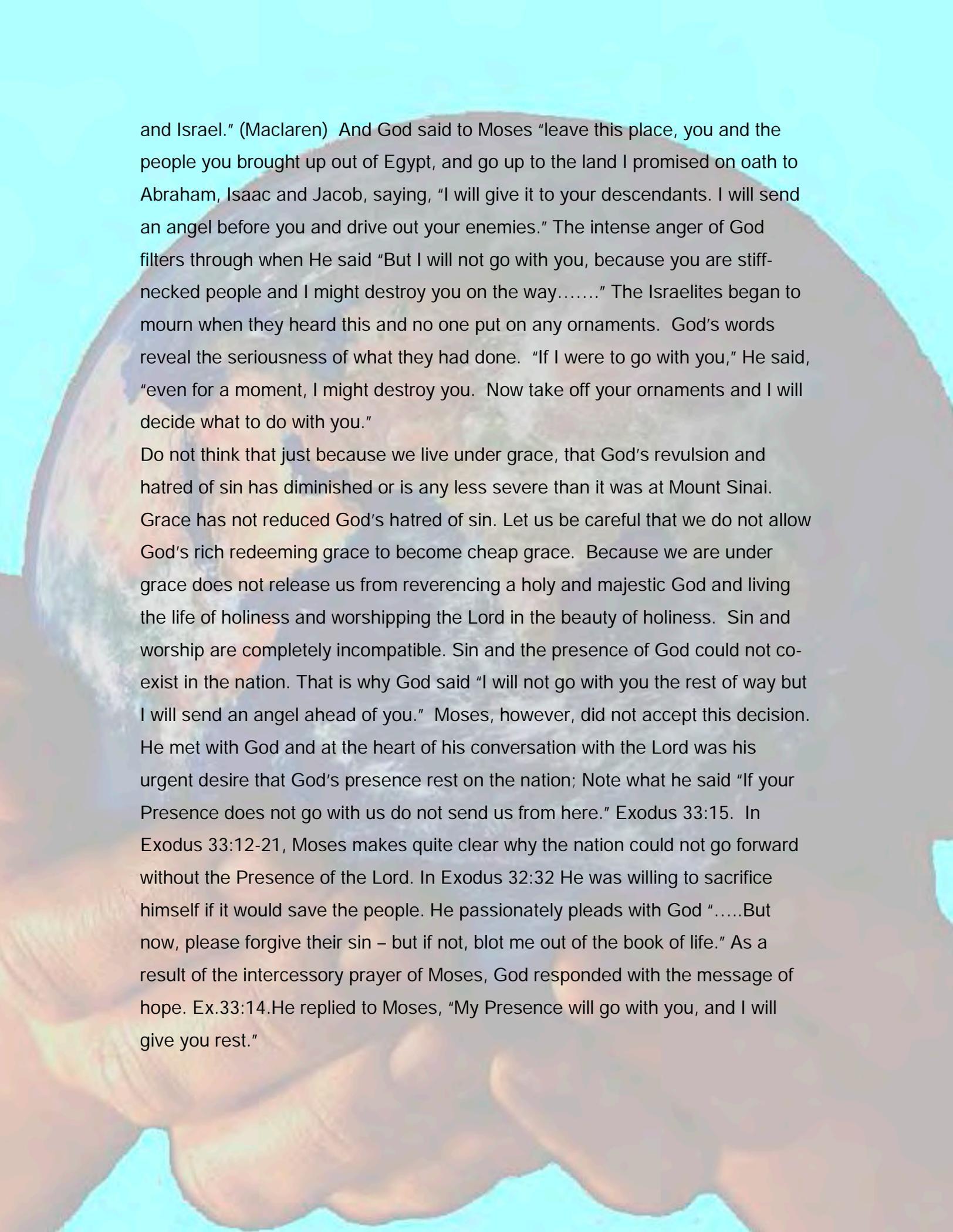
A MESSAGE FOR THE NEW YEAR.

Scripture Reading – Exodus 32: 11- 33. Ex .33:12-23.

Introduction

Moses had returned to Mount Sinai the place he had met God in a burning bush. It was at the burning bush he had received the Divine commission to be God's instrument to bring freedom to the Israelites. He had led the Israelites out Egypt to this point in their journey to the Land of promise. It had been three months since the people had received their freedom. God had commanded Moses to bring them to this holy place. He had been summoned by God to meet Him on top of the mountain. The Word says that God gave Moses "two tablets which were inscribed on both sides, front and the back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. Exodus 32:15-16. But Moses lingered long on the mountain and after forty days and nights, the Israelites gave up on him and they turned away from God, and built a golden calf which they worshipped and the scriptures describes the worship scene. Moses coming down the mountain saw the people running wild. What we can glean from the murk of this mess is that the nature of the God we serve will determine the

nature of the worship we give him. If you compare the kind of worship that God laid down for His people with that of the idolatrous nations you will discover a marked difference between them. The golden calf allowed the people to run wild in its presence. It placed no restrictions on them. The worship in which they indulged was not only about the calf. It was about the worshippers giving vent to their base desires. It is must be realized that worship is not primarily about us; it is about the God we serve. The distinctive feature of the living God is that He is holy and all worship is to be compatible with who He is. It might be noted that idols allow their worshippers to run wild. Idols have no life. They are dead. It is the idol worshipper who determines the nature of their worship. Their perception of their God allows them to do this. The idol worshipper goes where their emotions and desires take him. Hence it is self-centered. Authentic Christian worship however, involves a relationship with God. This being so it is vital that we grasp who God is and get a glimpse of His holiness. This is the indispensable vision we should have of Him. Who He is, must be the guide, level or standard in our worship of Him. This is where we should start in Christian worship. Worship is not about us feeling good or stirring our emotions or about pleasing others; a spirit which I fear has invaded much of the modern church. Recently a lady whom I know was asked what she thought about the church service she attended. She replied "I didn't know that I was going to a rock concert." Christian worship is not entertainment. It is focusing on God. It is about God and giving Him the worship He deserves. True worship happens when we uplift Him and glorify His Holy Name. It is ascribing to Him the glory and honor he deserves. His holiness is to determine the way we are to worship Him; something which has largely been forgotten. Moses was angered by what He saw at the foot of the mountain. The people of God were running wild, an activity which was not acceptable to a Holy God. The anger of Moses burned with a white hot intensity and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them in pieces at the foot of the mountain. God's response to their rebellion was a burning anger which placed the nation and its future in grave danger. "The calf worship broke the bond between God



and Israel." (Maclaren) And God said to Moses "leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, "I will give it to your descendants. I will send an angel before you and drive out your enemies." The intense anger of God filters through when He said "But I will not go with you, because you are stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way....." The Israelites began to mourn when they heard this and no one put on any ornaments. God's words reveal the seriousness of what they had done. "If I were to go with you," He said, "even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you."

Do not think that just because we live under grace, that God's revulsion and hatred of sin has diminished or is any less severe than it was at Mount Sinai. Grace has not reduced God's hatred of sin. Let us be careful that we do not allow God's rich redeeming grace to become cheap grace. Because we are under grace does not release us from reverencing a holy and majestic God and living the life of holiness and worshipping the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Sin and worship are completely incompatible. Sin and the presence of God could not co-exist in the nation. That is why God said "I will not go with you the rest of way but I will send an angel ahead of you." Moses, however, did not accept this decision. He met with God and at the heart of his conversation with the Lord was his urgent desire that God's presence rest on the nation; Note what he said "If your Presence does not go with us do not send us from here." Exodus 33:15. In Exodus 33:12-21, Moses makes quite clear why the nation could not go forward without the Presence of the Lord. In Exodus 32:32 He was willing to sacrifice himself if it would save the people. He passionately pleads with God "....But now, please forgive their sin – but if not, blot me out of the book of life." As a result of the intercessory prayer of Moses, God responded with the message of hope. Ex.33:14.He replied to Moses, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Now in verses 12-21, Moses makes clear the importance of God's presence in the nation. If you study the conversation Moses had with God, you will discover a number of vital truths. Moses wanted the question of God's presence be settled before the nation would move forward.

This New Year in our journey with God, I strongly believe that we should ensure that God is central in our lives. We need to recognize the indispensability and priority of His Spirit in our relationship with Him. Without this commitment we will fail as Christians to live the life God has designed for us, and to fulfill His purposes. Now if you study the conversation Moses had with God you will discover what truths are vital on this journey. First Moses needed to know that God's presence would accompany him and the nation. His prayer was answered. Note will you

1. THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S PRESENCE IS PROMISED. Exodus 33:1-4, 12-15. The Lord said "My Presence will go with you....." This is the certain promise of God to His servant. The assurance of God's presence in the nation was what Moses wanted above all things. This was the focus of His prayer. In response to the intensity of the prayer of Moses there comes from God,

a. The Promise of the Divine Presence to the Nation. Exodus 33:14. God said "My Presence will go with you." One has pointed out that Moses at that moment was a disappointed man. The bottom had fallen out of his life. The Israelites had forsaken the Lord. They had betrayed him. They had proved faithless and given themselves over to idolatry. It is true that they had set out with high hopes but they had fallen and committed a great sin. And it was to this man, and at this time, that the comforting word was given to him. "My presence will go with you." Ex. 33:14. This promise, says Baxter, was given to a discouraged man. Moses had left his home and put his life on the line for these people. He had begun a great work for God, but at this moment it seemed to be falling to pieces. Not only had the people failed, they had proved to be utterly undependable and perverted, and because of their sin three thousand souls had fallen by the swords of their own people. Furthermore, the Tabernacle had been removed and God Himself

had indicated that He would withdraw from the nation. It was true that God had said that angel would lead the nation. Moses was not satisfied. Note the significant words he spoke to God, "If **YOUR** presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and from all other people on the face of the earth?" Ex. 33:15 -16. Moses came to be a disappointed and discouraged man, but the Divine promise both comforted, strengthened and encouraged him. Furthermore notice another important truth here is the desire for

b. The Priority of God's Presence in the Nation. Exodus 33:14-15. If your presence does not go with us, do not send us from here." Moses was not satisfied with the promise of angel in their midst. Moses had established his priority for his leadership. The presence of God resting in and on the nation's life was indispensable to him. Haddon Robinson points out that one old recipe for rabbit started out with this injunction: First catch the rabbit." says Robinson: "the writer knew how to put first things first. The security and achievement of God's purposes rested on the priority given to the presence of God in the nation. First bring God back into the life of the nation. This is a principle that has not changed." That is what we do when we establish priorities – we put things that should be in first place in the proper order." Rabbit recipe is useless unless you have the rabbit. The rabbit is the priority. Catch the rabbit and the recipe will follow. Moses recognized this important principle. Moses was concerned about the place God would be a priority in the nation. The priority with Moses was that the presence of God resting upon the nation be sovereign in the nation. Everything revolved around His pre-eminence in the life of the people. This issue had to be settled before any action or any movement forward be taken. Moses refused to move until the issue of the priority of God was established. The anger of God with His people had led Him to say "leave this place, you and your people you brought up out of Egypt and go up to the land I promised. But I will send an angel before you, but I will not go with you because you are a stiff-necked

people." See Ex. 33; 1- 3. Moses did not accept this proposition from God. God's initial promise that He would send an angel in His place did not satisfy Moses. An angel was not his priority, and as powerful as angel might have been it was a poor substitute for the presence of God. Moses wanted God's presence to go with them. He refused to move forward move with out the God who had he met in the burning bush. Moses wanted this issue settled before he took another step toward Canaan. He knew that the future was not secure without the Presence of God with them? When Rev. Henry F. Lyte found that his tuberculosis was terminal and there was no hope of recovery, he went into his study, and looked death straight in the face, and sat down to write brave and beautiful words. "I fear no foe with thee at hand to bless. Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness. Where is death's sting? Where grave thy victory. I triumph still, if thou abide with me." The Presence of God was a priority in Henry Lyte's life. In the moment of crises there was no fear and he could write victorious words. If God is with us we may triumph still and we will triumph for God has said 'My Presence will go with you, I will give you rest.'" God's word and God's Presence are always certain and when Moses got this response from God, he was completely satisfied. God had responded according to the intercessory prayer of Moses. Now Moses could face the future having received the assurance of the Divine promise. "My Presence will go with you." Ex 33:14. Why was Moses so insistent on that God be a priority? It was because he realized,

2. THE NECESSITY OF GOD'S PRESENCE. Exodus 32; 11, 33:1-4, 11-15.

"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Why was the Presence of God so necessary to Moses and the people of God? There are three fundamental reasons for the necessity of the Presence of God. First because Moses,

a. Looked back and remembered. He remembered God in action on behalf of His people. Exodus 32:11. He looked back and remembered the mighty deeds of God on behalf of the people. Moses said to God **"why should your anger burn**

against your people, who you brought out of Egypt with great power and mighty Hand? Notice that Moses refers to God's "great power and Mighty Hand." Moses is reciting the history of the mighty deeds of God in their deliverance from Egypt. Moses would remember that God had promised that He would free the Israelites from Egypt because He was the great I AM, the **one who makes things happen**. And up to this point God had been true to His promise for He had made the impossible happen. Moses had seen God in action in the liberation of His people. He had seen the devastating plagues He had poured out on Egypt. He had been part of the great miracle at the Red Sea where He had made a way through those foreboding waters. It was a moment when the Israelites were trapped. One has written that "they came to a "cul-de sac of impossibility and the Lord had led them there. And the cul-de-sac of impossibility was handled by the Lord of the impossible. And the story tells us what God can do with the impossible if He is trusted." At Sinai Moses remembered the powerful deeds of the God of the burning bush. In the mind of Moses this made the Presence of God indispensable to the life of Israel.

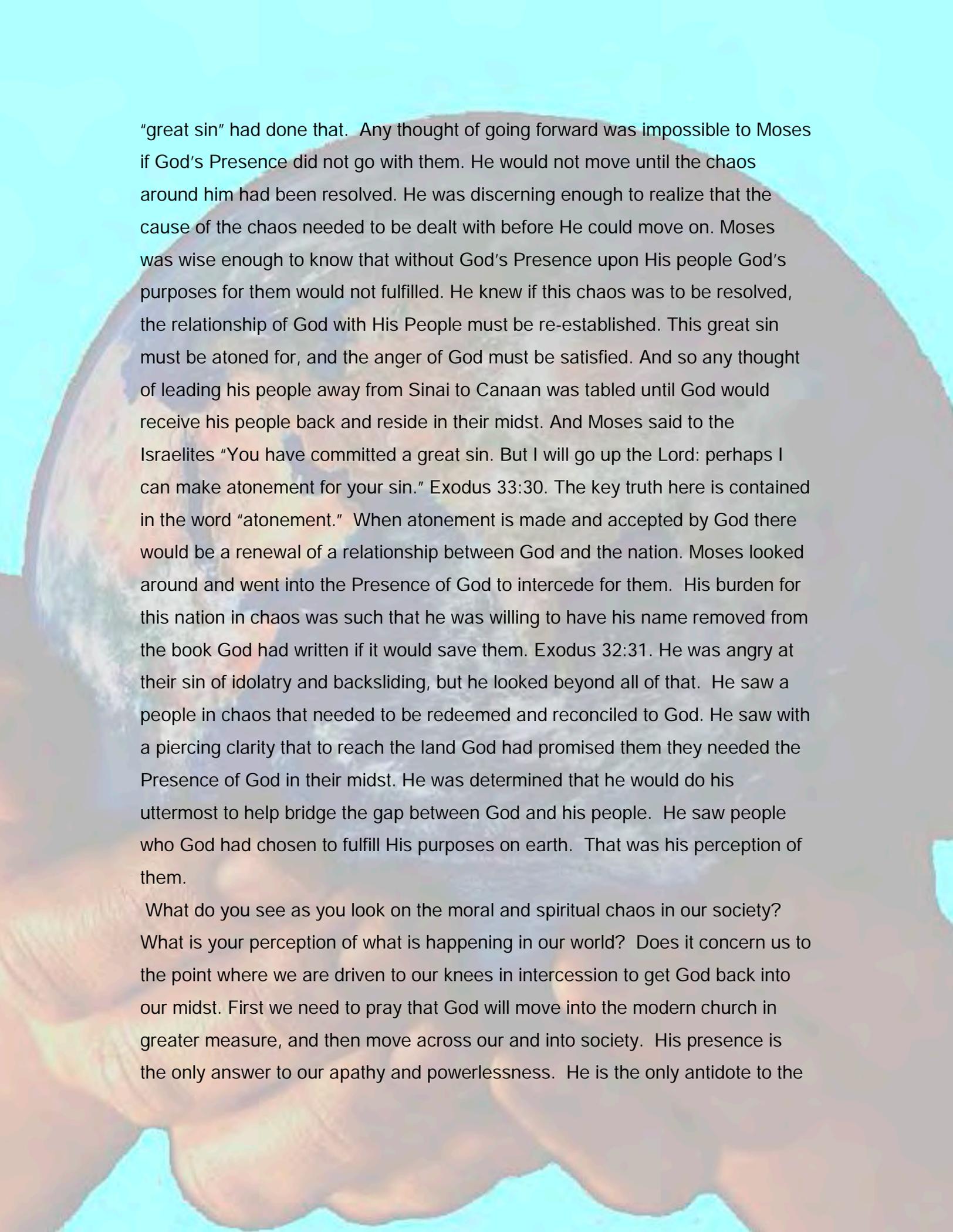
I am firmly convinced that this truth should be paramount in the life of the church and our personal lives. The presence of God should be more than a theory it should be a life-style. But another reason for the indispensability of God's Presence is because Moses,

b. Looked around and responded. Ex. 32:19- 20. He responded in two ways.

First he recoiled at the great sin they had committed against God and His purposes for them.

Second he went up the mountain to intercede for them. Exodus 32: 19-20, 31.

The nation was in chaos. They were running wild. They had no anchor. The foundations had crumbled. As far as these people were concerned their future was in jeopardy without the presence of God. The purposes of God were brought standstill. Without the glory of God's presence on the people they were lost. There was no hope that they would be part of the fulfilling of God's saving purposes. The bond between God and these people had been broken. Their



"great sin" had done that. Any thought of going forward was impossible to Moses if God's Presence did not go with them. He would not move until the chaos around him had been resolved. He was discerning enough to realize that the cause of the chaos needed to be dealt with before He could move on. Moses was wise enough to know that without God's Presence upon His people God's purposes for them would not be fulfilled. He knew if this chaos was to be resolved, the relationship of God with His People must be re-established. This great sin must be atoned for, and the anger of God must be satisfied. And so any thought of leading his people away from Sinai to Canaan was tabled until God would receive his people back and reside in their midst. And Moses said to the Israelites "You have committed a great sin. But I will go up the Lord: perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." Exodus 33:30. The key truth here is contained in the word "atonement." When atonement is made and accepted by God there would be a renewal of a relationship between God and the nation. Moses looked around and went into the Presence of God to intercede for them. His burden for this nation in chaos was such that he was willing to have his name removed from the book God had written if it would save them. Exodus 32:31. He was angry at their sin of idolatry and backsliding, but he looked beyond all of that. He saw a people in chaos that needed to be redeemed and reconciled to God. He saw with a piercing clarity that to reach the land God had promised them they needed the Presence of God in their midst. He was determined that he would do his uttermost to help bridge the gap between God and his people. He saw people who God had chosen to fulfill His purposes on earth. That was his perception of them.

What do you see as you look on the moral and spiritual chaos in our society? What is your perception of what is happening in our world? Does it concern us to the point where we are driven to our knees in intercession to get God back into our midst. First we need to pray that God will move into the modern church in greater measure, and then move across our and into society. His presence is the only answer to our apathy and powerlessness. He is the only antidote to the

continuing tidal wave of evil in our world. Moses looked around he recoiled at the chaotic evil about him. But what He saw compelled him to go into the presence of God to intercede on behalf of the people he had led. As children of God what vision of the world do you have? Do you see a world in sinful chaos? Do you see the desperate need of men and women going to a lost and dark eternity? Is that the perception you have because the vision you have should compel you to get involved in making a difference in the life of our society for Christ. Our vision should determine what action we take. James Stewart observes that there are different ways of looking at the great cities of the world. The young person sees it as the gateway to adventure, wealth and an active social life. They perceive that there would be freedom and romance with no restrictions. The city then becomes magnet to the young. The business man sees the city as a place of profit. Another man may see it as the city as prison for around him are the formidable buildings the noisy streets and he feels stifled and suffocated. A Politian may see the city as an opportunity to get votes and climb to power. A poet may go poetical over it. He sees the city as a fascinating silhouette against the sky. Like Wordsworth who stands in the dawn on Westminster bridge in London and writes: "Earth has not anything to show more fair: Dull would he be of soul who could pass by a sight so touching in its majesty." Wordsworth grew poetical over it. When Jesus saw the city He wept over it O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! How often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks but you would not. The young man. The business man. The restless city dweller. The ambitious Politian, the poet and the compassionate Jesus each have their reactions to the city according to their perception of it. Have we ever stood where Jesus stood on Olivet? Have we seen the lost crowded ways of men and women? Have we seen the city as Jesus saw it and wept? Or even as Moses saw the people of Israel. It was his vision of those people that drove him to his knees to pray for their salvation. Each of these men responded according to the perception they had of those about them. Moses looked around and went to his knees on behalf of them. Jesus looked at the dying lost world and went to the

Cross for them. Intercessory prayer was the magnificent response of Moses to his people.

God's Presence was necessary because Moses,

c. Looked forward and reflected. He reflected on what would happen if the nation moved forward without the Presence of God. Ex 33:16.

First he looked forward to having

i. The Presence of God with them. This would indicate that God was pleased them. Exodus 33:16. It was indisputable evidence of the favor of God upon them. The words of Moses are important at this point. "How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us?" God said to Moses My Presence will go with you..." Literally this means "My Face shall go with you..." In some mysterious way there was to a face to face communion with God. This speaks of an intimacy of the relationship of Moses with God. It also speaks of

ii. The Favor of Divine Approval. It would indicate the gracious favor of God towards him. In Numbers 6:22-26 disapproval is often indicating the turning away of the face. (Baxter). When God says "My Face shall go with you it is the assurance of His approval." The Lord said to Moses 'Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His Face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.'" So when God says "My Presence will go with you." Literally He is saying "My Face shall go with you." This is what Moses wanted to hear. He yearned for the favor of God on him and his leadership. In this critical moment nothing else mattered to Moses. Once he had God's approval and presence he would move on. Then Moses looked forward to maintaining the,

iii. The Distinctiveness of God's people. Exodus 33:16. Moses asks "What else will distinguish me and your people from all other people on the face of the earth." The difference between God's people and the world is the presence of God resting upon them. It is not denominational labels, great sanctuaries

overflowing prosperity or large numbers. It is the presence of God resting, energizing and anointing His people. It is the presence of God empowering His children to live holy lives in an unholy world. Jesus exhorted his followers to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Light is distinct from darkness. We are to be different to the world about us as lights in the darkness. The striking feature that distinguishes the church from the world is the presence of God among us. The nations wilted and feared the Israelites when God was upon them. They were different because the difference lay in the abiding presence of the Lord. Moses recognized the necessity of the abiding presence of God on His people. Moses knew that the Presence of God was synonymous with,

3. THE AUTHORITY OF GOD ON HIS PEOPLE. Exodus 33:12-23.

God said to Moses "My Presence will go with you..." The pronoun, "MY" is significant. This presence is a Divine presence. This makes this nation distinctive and their relationship to God unique. The foundation of the nation's life would be the Presence of God. All through Exodus 33 God is referred to as "THE LORD" And in verses 7 to 22 it is written this way at least nine times. This not by done accident, for accentuates and is highlighting the Sovereignty of God. It is as though God is saying to His people, "the fact that you created a golden calf as a Sovereign Lord and which you worshipped, makes no difference to the truth that ultimately and finally I am the Sovereign Lord and always will be." There are no powers in heaven and earth that can change that truth. Briefly there are two truths that touch the authority of God in the nation. The first is,

a. The Leadership of God. Exodus 33:15. "My Presence will go with you." This is God's to the plea of Moses and Moses declared "if your presence does not go with us, do not send us up there. Exodus 33:15. Here is the recognition by Moses of his complete dependence on the Leadership God. He did want to move to the land of God's promise without God's guidance. The Presence of God was seen in the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. This fact insured that Moses and the nation would guided to the completion of God's purposes for the

His people. If they followed the pillar of cloud and fire, it was guaranteed that they would reach their destination in the will of God. One of the privileges of knowing the presence of God in our lives is that He will guide us. There was a young man working in Johannesburg South Africa who was preparing to cross the seas to England to begin his preparation for the ministry. He was earnestly seeking God's guidance for the future. During his devotions one day a verse of scripture seemed to leap out at him. His life lay before him and he wanted and needed guidance on his journey and the Lord gave him one verse in Psalm 32:8. "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." This was a telling moment in his life. This promise burned in his soul. That moment was a very sacred and holy moment for him. It is one of the high points in his walk with God; this promise has proved to be true. This young man, who is not so young anymore, is writing this sermon. I can testify that when I look back and see where I have served Him in so many different capacities, there is clear indication of the footsteps of God on my journey with me. His presence guarantees His leadership if we obey Him. In that leadership there is the assurance of protection on the journey. While God was sovereign in the nation they were secure. His abiding presence insured that. The Hymn writer expressed it well,

**The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
He will not, He will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
He'll never, no never forsake. This sovereignty also touches,**

b. Fellowship with God. Exodus 33:18-23. Moses said "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so that I may know you and continue to find favor with you." Exodus 33:13. The key words here are "that I may know you." This was the desire and longing of the heart of Moses. And then he makes an incredible request. "Show me your glory." God says to Moses "I will cause my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my Name." Lloyd Ogilvie tells us that the

Hebrew word for Glory is "kabod." When it describes a person it meant his wealth, worth, stature, standing and power. What did Moses want when he asked to see God's Glory? Did he want to see God's presence in physical manifestation? What Moses wanted was to experience who God is. In a way, he was saying, "Lord I want to know You better and love You for who you are." He wanted a heart to heart intimacy. Lord God not only wants to know us, He also wants us to know, love, worship and adore Him as our God." He wants to enter into a close relationship with us. There are those who have pointed out that Moses said to God "show me your glory and God's response to Moses was in four ways. God said,

i. "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you." Exodus 33:19. His goodness refers to His whole character and nature. Ogilvie maintained that "Goodness is the unchangeable, reliable, dependable nature of God, the same yesterday, to day and forever. He can be counted on to be what he says He is. What is more, this is what Moses needed to hear as he looked into the future unknown and uncertain. His character is revealed in His power to create and recreate. He is the final and ultimate power of the universe." Then God said

ii. "I will proclaim my Name." God's Name includes His nature, character, and person. In this context His Name includes

iii. His graciousness or His grace. Ex. 33:19 He will proclaim His grace. One has said "His grace is the unlimited, unchanging love of God. It is not dependent on our performance or instigated by our inadequacy. We do not deserve it and cannot earn it. God loves us because His Love." The Lord went to say,

iv. "I will have compassion upon whom I will have compassion." Ex. 33:19.

Compassion literally means "womb" "bowels." This refers to deep seated feelings. We would use the word heart. The love of God comes from the depths of His heart. It is an expression of His glory. But you will also read that God said to Moses "you cannot see my face, for no man may see and live. The security and assurance Moses needed lay in the words of God who said to him "MY presence will go with you. And I will give you rest."

Conclusion

When King David committed adultery and murder his soul, was in anguish before God. In true repentance he cried out to God for forgiveness and cleansing. There is part of his prayer that is very striking in Psalm 50:11 "Do not cast me away from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." Here is a man who suddenly felt that the foundations of life had crumbled under him. You can almost hear him say take anything else from me, but do not the one thing which gives life meaning, fulfillment and security. We understand the words of James Stewart who observed that the professional pianist would say "do not take my hands from me" or the writer who cried out "do not take my eyes from me." - Or the artist who pleaded "do not take my gift from me." Life for them depended on these things. Life would be crippled with out them. David had the same intense feeling about God. "Do not "take your Holy Spirit from me." This is the essence of what Moses said to God. Is that your desire? Let us determine that as we move out into the New Year we ensure that God's presence go with us. Our world is full of darkness and uncertainty. The attack against Christians is intensifying. The only certain security is that we possess is the presence of an omnipotent God in our lives. Let us not move forward into the future without the unshakable assurance of His abiding presence on our journey. We wish you a blessed and prosperous New Year.