

## THE MEEKEST MAN

When God began to redeem the world, He made a promise to Abraham. God said to him:

Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 12:1–3)

God called Abraham to leave his father's family, and his father's land, and would give to Abraham a new family, and a new land. Abraham believed God, and did as God asked. So God made good on His promise, and He made the number of Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, great. So great was their number, that, when they dwelt in Egypt, the king of Egypt, for fear of a rebellion, enslaved them. The Israelites cried out because of their misery, and God heard their cries. The Scriptures say, "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them." (Exodus 2:24, 25) God was true to His promise to the patriarchs, and so He would deliver the Israelites from their bondage. God chose Moses to bring them out of bondage in Egypt and to Mount Sinai.

On the way to Mount Sinai, after the Lord had spectacularly delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians, the Israelites complained against Moses because they had no water. When Moses prayed to the Lord, the Lord provided them water. The Lord told them that, if they would obey Him, then He would not plague them as He had the Egyptians. (Exodus 15:22–27) Then the Israelites complained against Moses, and against Aaron, that they had no food. They said that they would rather have died as slaves in Egypt with full bellies than to die of hunger as free men in the desert. So, the Lord provided food for them, quail, as well as bread from heaven. (Exodus 16:1–21) Then the people again complained against Moses because they had no water. They did not trust the Lord, and they believed that He might let them die in the desert. So angry were they with Moses that they were near to stoning him to death. So, God told Moses to strike with his staff a certain rock, and, when Moses struck the rock, water flowed from it and the people satisfied their thirst. (Exodus 17:1–7) In all these incidents, although the people contended with Moses, he never lashed out in anger; he took their complaints to the Lord.

At Mount Sinai, God made a covenant with His people. He said to them:

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. (Exodus 19:4–6)

The people agreed to God's terms, and replied, "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do." (Exodus 19:8) So, God gave the Israelites His law, the Ten Commandments, which includes the commandment not to have any other gods, and the commandment not to worship images of created things. Although the Israelites swore to obey God's commands, they soon broke their vows by making an idol and worshiping it. God was so angry with their treachery that He said He would destroy every Israelite, except for Moses. Moses appealed to God on the ground of His good name: if God destroyed the Israelites, then the Egyptians would scorn Him for delivering the Israelites from bondage in Egypt only to annihilate them in the desert. Moses also appealed to God on the

ground of the promise He had made to the patriarchs: if God destroyed the Israelites, then they would not be a great nation living in a great land. God heard Moses's appeal, and did not destroy the Israelites. Moses was so angry with them for their rebellion that he dashed to pieces the stones on which were written the Ten Commandments, and he had the Levites put to the sword three-thousand idolaters. (Exodus 32)

Then the Lord commanded Moses to lead the people from Mount Sinai to the promised land. The Lord said that, because the Israelites were stiff-necked, He would not go with them, but He would send His angel before them to aid them in conquering the heathen nations in the promised land. (Exodus 33:1–3) Moses was overwhelmed by the responsibility, and he pleaded with the Lord to go with them. Because God favored Moses, He said that he would go with him, but not with the people. Moses told God that, if God did not go with the Israelites, then they were not His peculiar people, then they were not different from any other nation. Moses also asked God to reveal to him his glory, and God, because He favored Moses, gave Moses what he asked for. God passed by Moses and said:

The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6, 7)

Moses again asked the Lord to go with the people. So, the Lord renewed His covenant with the people, and He had Moses cut two new stone tablets on which God wrote the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 34:10–28)

Three days after the Israelites had set out for the promised land, the people complained. Before God made a covenant with the Israelites God did not become angry with them when they complained. Now that they were His covenant people, their complaining made Him very angry, and with fire He destroyed those who complained. Even after this, the people complained again because they had only manna to eat, and no flesh, and God was angry with them for their discontent. Moses, too, was angry; he was so angry that He wished to die. He said to the Lord:

Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness. (Numbers 11:11–15)

Moses was a great man of faith, but he was only human, and peoples' continual complaining was to him a cause of great misery. Moses asked God why, if He favored him, did He afflict him with a people so ungrateful and difficult. Israel were not his people, not like they were God's people. Why did God ask Moses to carry them to the land which God promised to them? Where would he get flesh to feed so many people? He told God that the burden was too great for him to bear alone. If God did favor him, then he would have God take his life rather than ask him to continue bearing the burden. God heard Moses's prayer, and told him to choose seventy good men to share the burden with him. Moreover, God would not only give the people flesh to eat, but He would give it to them every day for one month until it caused them disgust.

It was not only the people that complained about Moses. His brother Aaron, and his sister Miriam, complained about his marrying an Ethiopian woman. They argued that they were prophets as much as Moses, and so should have some say in the match, which they opposed. The Scriptures say that Moses was the meekest man on earth. He was of a mild temper, not easily provoked or irritated; he was patient when wronged. So, he did not repay evil with evil to his siblings; he did not retaliate, but left the matter to the Lord. The Lord took notice of the presumption of Aaron and Miriam. He said to them:

Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? (Numbers 12:6–8)

God made Himself known to His prophets by visions, and by dreams. He revealed things in dark sayings. God's relationship with Moses was different: God spoke to him directly, and plainly, and even saw God's form. Aaron and Miriam were not peers of Moses; Moses was a prophet far greater than any other. It was presumptuous of Aaron and Miriam to speak against Moses. God was so angry with them that He struck Miriam with leprosy, and she had to remain outside the camp for seven days. (Numbers 12:9–15)

Later God commanded Moses to send spies to reconnoiter the land of Canaan. So, Moses sent twelve spies, one from each of the tribes of Israel. When the spies returned, they reported that the land was indeed good, but Caleb alone believed the Lord, and said that Israel were able to conquer it; the other spies said that the Israelites were not strong enough. When the people heard the report of the majority, they rebelled. They cried, and wept, and they complained against Moses and Aaron. They said that it would have been better if they had died in Egypt, and they accused the Lord of bringing them to the land of Canaan to die. They agreed to choose a leader to replace Moses and lead them back to Egypt. (Numbers 14:1–4) Moses and Aaron prayed to God, and Caleb and Joshua tore their clothes as a sign of protest and regret. They all exhorted the people to trust the Lord, and not to rebel against Him, but the people said to stone them to death. Moses interceded and once again reminded God of His reputation among the nations, and of His promise to the patriarchs. He reminded the Lord of His revelation of Himself as “longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.” (Numbers 14:18) He pleaded with God to pardon the people as He had pardoned them so many times before. God said to Moses:

I have pardoned according to thy word: But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it... To morrow turn you, and get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea. (Numbers 14:20–25)

God granted Moses's plea; He forgave the Israelites, and would not destroy them. Yet, God would not allow them to go unpunished. The Lord had been faithful to Israel, and had performed for them many miracles, and

yet the Israelites ten times tested the Lord, and did not obey Him. So, God would not allow them to enter the promised land. Only faithful Caleb and faithful Joshua would He allow to enter. God the faithless Israelites to wander the desert for forty years, and never enter into the promised land. Only their children, along with faithful Caleb and faithful Joshua would enter. The faithless spies God killed with plague.

Some time after, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On, along with two-hundred and fifty leaders in Israel, challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron. They said, “Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?” (Numbers 16:3) The men desired power. They told Moses that they had ruled long enough, and that they should relinquish their power. They argued that God had called Israel a holy nation, and because all the people were holy, anyone might lead them. Next day, Moses had Korah gather the men at the door of the tabernacle. When they were there gathered, Moses told them to separate from Dathan and Abiram, because God would destroy them, and they did as Moses said. Then the ground opened and swallowed up Dathan and Abiram, and all their households, and the two-hundred and fifty, along with Korah, were consumed by fire. Next day, the people complained that Moses had killed some of God's people. So, God brought a plague on them. Nearly fifteen-thousand died, and more would have died, had not Moses interceded.

After some time had passed, the people needed water. Once again they quarreled with Moses and said that they wished they had died with Korah, and the others. Once again they accused Moses of bringing them into the desert to die. Once again, Moses and Aaron interceded. So, God said:

Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. (Numbers 20:8)

God said that Moses and Aaron should gather the people, and, in the sight of the people, speak to a particular rock, and then from the rock would flow water for the people to drink. So, Moses took his staff, and he and Aaron gathered the people, and Moses said to them, “Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?” (Numbers 20:10) Then Moses twice struck the rock, and water flowed from it. The Lord said to Moses and to Aaron, “Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.” (Numbers 20:12) Moses was the meekest man on earth; yet, every man has his limit, and Moses had reached his. So many times, the people had scorned Moses; so many times they had slandered him. Yet, they opposed, not Moses, but God; Moses was but God's representative and mediator. This time, Moses took the people's opposition personally, and he acted not as God's agent, but in his own interest. He lost his temper, and he spoke, not to the rock as God commanded, but to the people. He spoke to them words God did not give them. He did not speak to the rock, as God commanded, but rather struck it, and twice. In the Book of Psalms, it says, “They provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.” (Psalm 106:33) In these ways, Moses did not trust God. He presented to the people, not God, but himself, and so he misrepresented God. He spoke as if he, and not God, was the one to bring water from the rock, and so he would rob God of His glory. Moses called the people rebels, and so they were, but Moses himself rebelled against the Lord, and Aaron was complicit. (Numbers 20:24) So, as with the generation of unfaithful Israelites, Moses and Aaron would not enter into the promised land. Some time later, Aaron died, and he never did see the promised land, just as God had said.

When the generation of unfaithful Israelites finally died out after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the next generation came to the border of the promised land. There he reminded the people of their

history, and he exhorted them to obedience. He told them not to add to the commandments, or to take away from them. He reviewed for them the covenant, and the Ten Commandments. Then he said to them, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5)

When it came time for Moses to die, God allowed Moses to see the promised land, but He did not allow him to enter into it, because Moses had not given God the glory. So, Moses, after seeing the promised land, died, and God Himself buried his body. The Scriptures say:

And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel. (Deuteronomy 34:10–12)

No prophet was so great as Moses was. Yet, before he died, Moses told the people that after him there would come a prophet greater than he, and that they must listen to Him. (Genesis 18:15–19)

That prophet is Jesus of Nazareth. (Acts 3:22, 23; 7:37; Hebrews 3:3, 4) When an expert in the law of God asked Jesus which commandment is the greatest, Jesus answered him:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:37–40)

Every particular commandment of God is rooted in love of God, and love of man who is created in the image of God. Jesus did many great works, but His greatest work was His perfect, unfailing love of God and man. It was because of this perfect love and obedience that God said of Him, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” (Matthew 17:5) It was because of His perfect love and obedience that God said to Him, “Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.” (Matthew 22:44)

Let us be instructed by the bad example of ancient Israel. Let us greatly esteem Moses, and learn from his good example. Let us put our faith in Jesus Christ, and follow His perfect example.

Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.