

The Temptation of Moses Exodus 32:1-14

“Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them
And I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.” v.10

God’s people belong only to God. God will not let them go.

1. Moses is presented with the temptation to imagine that he and he alone is the servant of God.
 - a. God calls the Israelites “your people, whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt.” V.7b He seems to give credit for the Exodus deliverance to Moses, but Moses remembers the work of God and knows it is not his own work. Four hundred years later, Elijah thought. “I alone am left, and they are seeking my life...” (1 Kings 19:10b,14b) but God told him there were 7,000 still faithful.
 - b. God once before did destroy corrupt human communities, in the flood, and rebuild from one obedient man, Noah. The rainbow was God’s sign of His promise (Gen 9:14,15) that God would never again destroy all humanity with a flood. (2 Peter 3: 6,7 helpfully notes that the earth is now reserved for judgment by fire.) A precedent does not validate every road forward. Only God freely chooses the path.
 - c. Moses continues to believe the promise God made to him at the burning bush. “”...I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land.” Ex 3:8a. This is the work of a servant of God.

2. The People of God are presented with the temptation to find a different leader when they don’t understand God’s working. However, God’s claim on them does not change.
 - a. God seems to delay. Jesus stays two more days before going to where Lazarus is dying. (Jn 11:5) God knew what was going on at the foot of Sinai although Moses did not, but detained Moses.
 - b. There is hiddenness in the work of God. It is very clear, and yet, it seems unclear to the people living in the moment. The people wanted to move forward with setting up a new community of Israelites.
 - c. By changing leaders, they thought they could change the terms of their covenant with God, find something more convenient, play off brotherly rivalry of Aaron with better educated brother, Moses, or control the story.
 - d. God’s claims on His people are exclusive. “I am a jealous God.”
Family, Clan, Labor Union, all are second. Ex 32:26 “Who is on the Lord’s side?”

3. Neither leaders nor people can find a better deal elsewhere.