

• *Coming and going*

Moses' prayer is one of the great prayers of the Bible. It is broken up into sections. Moses prays^{☞1} and then goes down to the people^{☞2}. A little later Moses says 'I am going up to Yahweh . . .'^{☞3} and he continues his praying^{☞4}. God answers^{☞5}. Later Moses will do some more praying^{☞6}. There is a lot of coming and going between God and the people.

☞1 32:9-14
 ☞2 32:15-30
 ☞3 32:31
 ☞4 32:31-32
 ☞5 32:33
 ☞6 33:12-13, 15-16, 18; 34:9

• *The glory of God is at risk*

Now Moses uses another argument in his praying. **The glory of God is at risk.** Moses says 'Lord, why should the Egyptians say that you only brought them into the wilderness in order to kill them^{☞1} ...?' The Egyptians had seen the mighty hand of God at work. They would not easily forget what had happened in the plagues, and in the death of the firstborn sons throughout the land of Egypt. But if God were to destroy the Israelites now, God's name and character would be slandered.

☞1 32:12

• *The honour of God's name*

Moses is concerned about the honour of God's name. God likes to make himself known. He is not insecure and He can wait for a long time before His reputation is fully made known, but He has plans to declare to the universe what He is like. So God likes it when His people are also concerned that His name should be made known. 'Do everything to the glory of God',^{☞1} said Paul.

☞1 1 Corinthians 10:31

• *An argument that greatly appeals to God Himself*

This is something that can be used in prayer. When we are truly and sincerely able to tell God that we desire the honour of His name in what we are requesting Him to do, it is an argument that greatly appeals to God Himself.

• *The Oath of God*

Then Moses uses perhaps the greatest argument that ever can be used: one based on **the oath of God.** An oath is a promise that has been doubly confirmed, and is therefore no longer an open matter. When God gives a promise, it is generally at first an open matter. 'By faith and patience we inherit the promises.'^{☞1} By unbelief and impatience we lose the promises! But if, in addition to the promise, God takes an oath, then the promise cannot be lost. Or, to put it another way, if God turns the 'open' promise into an oath, then the promise is utterly secure. It will certainly take place.

☞1 Hebrews 6:12

• *An absolutely sure promise*

This too is something that can be used in prayer. Moses says 'Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel to whom you swore – you turned the promise into an oath . . .'^{☞1} God cannot annihilate the people of Israel, says Moses, because an oath has been given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God promised on oath that He would multiply them. God said to Abraham 'By myself I have sworn . . .'^{☞2} Once an oath is given – and God can still give oaths and let us know about them through the Holy Spirit – then His promise is absolutely sure. It is only the circumstances and the details that might be still open. The fulfillment of the promise itself cannot be lost.

☞1 See 32:13

☞2 Genesis 22:16

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So Moses takes this glorious unshakable promise of God, and holds God to His promise. This is what prayer is; it is holding God to His promises. When we find something God has promised it gives us added boldness in prayer. We can say to God, 'Lord, you promised . . .'^{☞1} or 'Lord, you have given this to me on oath. . . You have sworn by your holiness.'^{☞2} God can no more withdraw an oath than He can cease to be holy. He has sworn by His own nature. He has said 'As sure as I am God, I will do this ...'^{☞3} Such a promise cannot be lost.

• *Come boldly*

Moses might seem to be irreverent in praying in this way. Yet God is a Father and is pleased when His people are bold and intimate with Him. True, He is a consuming fire. But He likes us to come boldly, knowing

that the Mighty God, the Consuming Fire, is also our Father.

• *God changes his mind*

Moses gets the answer to his prayer. God ‘changes His mind’, and withdraws His threat to destroy Israel¹. Does God change His mind? It is certainly a way in which the Bible invites us to think about God. Maybe it might be said: did not God know all along what would happen? I suppose He did, but God likes us to think about our relationship with Him in a simple way. We pray; God hears. God threatens; we repent; God withdraws the threat. God promises; we patiently believe the promise; God gives it to us. It is a simple person-to-person way of thinking about God and relating to Him. Whatever might be the deep mysteries in God’s foreknowledge – and there are plenty of them – one thing is sure. When we pray, things happen. God threatened; Moses prayed; God changed His mind! Maybe it is more profound than that, but that will be enough for us. We need not get any more profound than that!

1 32:14

• *Moses’ righteous anger with the people*

Moses stops praying for the moment. He is not finished. He has only got one answer from God and there are other things that he wants to pray about. But there are things to be done. Moses must do other things besides pray. He goes down Mount Sinai¹, carrying the stone tablets on which is written the law (either Exodus 20:2–17 or the whole of Exodus 20:2–17, 23–26; 21:2–23:19). Joshua hears the noise in the camp². Moses already knows what it happening. It is immoral and idolatrous festivity that they can hear³. The first thing Moses must do is get the people to know that they have sinned. He deliberately lets his anger fly, and smashes the stone tablets⁴. He was not losing his temper. We must remember: (i) He had been praying for these people. (ii) He was doing what he did quite deliberately. He was not losing his temper. He had advanced knowledge of what had happened and was not caught by surprise. (iii) He was not getting angry with individuals but with a nation. (iv) His smashing the tablets was to get the people to see how he, their leader felt very deeply about this. It was like tearing one’s clothes. Yet he was angry. It was righteous anger. He makes a liquid of powder from the smashed tablet and water and makes them drink it.⁵ It is a way of showing that breaking the law of God will lead to bitter tasting experiences for them. So he is expressing the seriousness of what they have done.

1 32:15–16

2 32:17

3 32:18

4 32:19

5 32:20

(i) *He had been praying*

(ii) *A deliberate action*

(iii) *Angry with a nation*

(iv) *To show his deep feelings*

• *Prayer and action*

Moses is a man of action as well as a man of prayer. He must persuade people as well as prevail with God. There is nothing timid about him. He is bold and self-assured and confident. He knew in advance what was happening in the camp. This is how to combine prayer and action. We must be men and women of prayer. We also need the guidance of God, such that in each situation we can act confidently and boldly. We learn to combine prayer and action.



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