

• *Moses comes back to prayer – an act of great unselfishness*

Intercession is one of the most unselfish things we can ever do. Almost everything we do could be spoiled by self-centredness, but the secret intercessor is doing something very generous and considerate. He or she is taking the needs of others upon himself or herself, as though it were his or her own problem. Moses was living a busy life. There were other things that had to be done. But Moses comes back to prayer.

1. Prayer may be progressive

• *His prayer gets greater in stages*

1. **Prayer may be progressive.** Moses' prayer gets greater in stages. He comes back to God to ask for more than he asked before. He first had asked that the people would not be exterminated^{□1}. God answered him. Then Moses asks for more. He wants God not only to withhold extermination but actually to totally forgive them, and to pick up with his people Israel once again.

□1 32:12

2. Prayer requires honesty

• *He is explicit and definite about the people's sin*

2. **Prayer requires honesty.** We notice Moses' great frankness, both with the people 'You have committed a great sin'^{□1} and with God 'What a great sin these people have committed'^{□2}. There is no pretence of evasiveness. He is explicit about what they have done 'They have made ... gods of gold'^{□3} If we are to recover after we have sinned, we must be explicit and definite in admitting what we have done.

□1 32:30

□2 32:31a

□3 32:31b

3. Prayer requires sacrifice

• *He is willing to be 'blotted out' from God's book of those who were alive*

3. **Prayer requires sacrifice.** Moses is committed to a constant life of intercession. It is as if he is the sinner. He asks God for forgiveness for the people^{□1}. He identifies with them. He wants no future separate from them. He is willing to be 'blotted out' from God's list. What is this being 'blotted out'? God has a list of His people. They are people He intends to bless. 'Blotted out' means that God will withdraw His intention to use the person. Sometimes it might refer to premature death. In the Mosaic law, great sin was punished by execution. The person was 'blotted out of the book of those who were alive'^{□2}.

□1 32:32

□2 see Psalm 69:28

• *Moses - a forerunner of Jesus*

Moses sees that atonement is needed, for sin is to be forgiven. So he offers himself as the atonement. He is like Jesus in being willing to be punished for the sins of the people. God forgives on the basis of atonement. He has issued His word that sin must be punished. So sin must be punished in one way or another. Sin can be forgiven if the punishment is transferred. Jesus was offering Himself on the cross as a substitute for sinners. He was saying 'Father, punish me instead of them. Forgive them! Punish me!' So Moses was being a forerunner of Jesus when he offered himself for the sins of the people.

4. Prayer may be redirected by God

• *An exploratory prayer – partly declined*

4. **Prayer may be redirected by God.** God may partly decline what we ask but redirect it to do something else. Moses' prayer was partly declined. God reserved the right to punish sin. 'Yahweh replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book"^{□1}. Moses' prayer was exploratory. He was finding out what was possible. We may be led to pray 'exploratory prayers' sometimes. Moses was exploring to see what was possible. But there was no way he could be a sin offering for the people. Only Jesus can atone for the sins of others.

□1 32:33

• *Heard in other ways*

But in other ways Moses' prayer was heard. The punishment is reduced. No longer does God talk about extermination, and abandonment. The people will still move towards Canaan. God says:

• *Reduced punishment – a plague but not extermination*

• *The promise of God's presence is withdrawn*

• *Further intercession – Moses wants even more for his people*

5. Prayer must be intertwined with action

• *Moses brings the people into deeper repentance*

• *The people see the seriousness of what God is saying*

• *Repentance expressed for the first time*

• *There is hope of restoration if the people will repent*

'Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you¹. And now they will face only a plague, not extermination. God says, 'However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin². And Yahweh struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made³. There is something that shows how God feels about sin.

God resumes many of His plans for the people. They may travel towards Canaan¹. But they have lost something. God says, 'But I will not go with you... ' ². The promise of God's presence is withdrawn. Presumably this refers to what was planned in connection with the tabernacle. No longer does God plan to dwell within the midst of His people.

All of this leads to further intercession. God requires to be sought further before He will make any further steps in coming close to His people. They have lost something. Moses must intercede even more. First God had promised not to exterminate them. Then God had been willing to forgive them. But Moses wants even more. He cannot be happy with the thought of God not being with His people.

5. Prayer must be intertwined with action. Before he prays yet more, Moses brings the people into deeper repentance¹. He tells them of what God had said. They are still under God's displeasure. Although God has forgiven them, they are still being disciplined and chastened by Him. There has been no expression of repentance from them. God has withdrawn His promise to accompany them with the pillar of fire. No longer will He reside with them in the tabernacle.

But for the first time the people express regret over what they have done. Spiritual renewal begins with facing the decline that has taken place within us. It involves seeing that we shall lose something of the presence of God if we displease Him. The people see the seriousness of what God is saying and they are at last repentant. They put off their ornaments. There can be no rejoicing until God agrees to go with them. The ornaments are the very kind of thing that were used in making the golden calf¹.

The people cannot bear the thought of God not being with them as He had been before. They are now expressing deep regret at having brought upon themselves the loss of God's blessing. There is hope of restoration if the people will repent. Perhaps God is only withholding His presence because they are withholding their repentance.

1 32:34a

2 32:34b

3 32:35

1 33:1-3a
2 33:3b

1 33:4-6

1 32:2



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