

- *Prevailing on the people*

### Moses – the man of action

- *A symbolic way of showing the shattered relationship between God and Israel*

### Moses confronts Aaron

- *Aaron had been following the people not leading them*

- *Aaron had been given to Moses for his stubbornness in refusing God's call*

- *A leader has to keep a balance*

- *Idolaters executed*

- *The people's sin needs atonement covering - Moses goes back to God*

### Moses – the man of prayer

Moses is a great man of prayer; and he is a great man of action. He has prevailed upon God to change His mind about destroying the people. Now he must prevail upon the people to change their mind about disregarding God.

**Moses continues to show himself to be a man of action.** He gets them to see and feel his own anger concerning what they have done. He smashes the tablets of the law<sup>□1</sup>. He takes the golden calf, which probably had a wooden frame and a golden covering. He burns the wood and grinds the gold into powder and then demands that the people of Israel drink it<sup>□2</sup>! It is a symbolic way of showing the shattered relationship between God and Israel. Their having to drink the loathsome powder is a sign of the bitter consequences that follow when God is disobeyed in this way. Sin had shattered the covenant between God and Israel almost before it had begun. Their departing from the living God would turn out to be a bitter experience for them.

Next **Moses confronts Aaron**, who was meant to be Moses' assistant in the leadership of Israel. What sort of leadership was this? Moses sees exactly what has happened. The people put pressure on Aaron, and Moses knows that Aaron is a sufficiently weak character to allow this to happen. But did he need to fix a festival for the worship of the idol<sup>□1</sup>? Aaron blames the people<sup>□2</sup>, although he had been quite willing to do their will<sup>□3</sup>. Aaron had in fact not been a 'leader' at all; he had been following the people not leading them. He had not been acting on what he knew was right. He was not leading the people into ways of righteousness. He surely knew that such idolatry was sinful, but he was weak and submitted to the pressure of the people. 'Out came this calf!' he said<sup>□4</sup> as if he had nothing to do with it, and was totally uninvolved!

It helps us understand how God's giving Aaron as Moses' colleague back in Exodus 4:14–17, was an act of God's anger. At that time Moses lost part of his call, which was given instead to Aaron. However this was God's responding to Moses in anger for his stubbornness in refusing God's call. Aaron was never much of a blessing to Moses!

A leader has to keep a balance. On the one hand he must keep the people well informed and must not tyrannize over them. On the other hand a leader leads the people; it is not the other way around.

Moses sees the people running wild<sup>□1</sup>. Aaron had encouraged them. It would delight Israel's enemies. Moses calls out for those who are willing to stand for the pure worship of Yahweh, to join him. His own tribe, the tribe of Levi are ready to assist him<sup>□2</sup>. They are commissioned to execute large numbers of the idolaters<sup>□3</sup>. Three thousand are put to death<sup>□4</sup>.

Next Moses tells the people of the greatness of their sin; they need some kind of 'atonement-covering' for their sin<sup>□1</sup>. Moses returns to Yahweh. We notice that this time he goes without any special invitation. He does not need it. He knows he must go back to God; the only hope for his people is in God's mercy.

**Moses continues to show himself to be a man of prayer.** Moses again takes up the task of interceding for the people. He goes back to God<sup>□1</sup>. He confesses their sin<sup>□2</sup>, admitting precisely what they have

□1 32:19

□2 32:20

□1 32:21

□2 32:22–23

□3 see 32:5

□4 32:24

□1 32:25

□2 32:26

□3 32:27–28

□4 32:29

□1 32:30

□1 32:31

□2 32:31

• He confesses their sin

done. He cannot 'repent' for them. Someone who hasn't sinned in a particular way cannot precisely repent for those who have. But Moses cares for them, and spends time in prayer for them. Yet his concern does not lead to any kind of camouflage of their sin. He admits what they have done. It is a model of how we pray for our country.

• He asks for their forgiveness

He asks for their **forgiveness**. He has already won their partial forgiveness. They have not been destroyed. The disaster God threatened has not come upon them<sup>□1</sup>. But Moses wants more. He wants the relationship to be totally healed.

• Moses is ready to lose his life if only God will bless the people – the complete opposite of Aaron

'But now,' says Moses, 'please forgive their sin. Otherwise please wipe out my name from the book that you have written'. What a contrast there is between Aaron and Moses. Aaron calls the people 'evil'<sup>□1</sup>, which indeed is true, but there was no desire in his heart to defend them, only to defend himself. Moses defends the people before God's hot anger, but Aaron makes no attempt to defend them before Moses' anger. Aaron does not restrain the people; Moses restrains the people and hopes to restrain God as well! Aaron is only concerned to defend himself; Moses is ready to lose his life if only God will bless the people.

**Moses is like Jesus**

Moses is just like Jesus! Jesus knows how prone we are to evil, but He is still wishing to defend us and rescue us. Jesus is always alive in the presence of God, defending us from the hot anger of God against sin (although it is God's will Jesus should be there!). Jesus was ready to lose His life in order to provide a way of salvation for us.

• Atonement-covering for sin

Moses wanted to be an 'atonement-covering' for the sins of the people. The Hebrew word here<sup>□1</sup> has already been used six times in Exodus 29:36, 37; 30:10, 10, 15, 16. It can be translated 'make an atonement' or 'cover sin by paying a price for it'. It is the word also used in Genesis 32:30, when Jacob had offended Esau and was fearful of Esau's anger. He sent presents to him and said to himself 'I will turn away his anger – Hebrew *kipper* – with the gift'<sup>□2</sup>.

• Moses willingness to sacrifice his own life

Moses is offering himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Paul would say something similar, years later<sup>□1</sup> Romans 9:3. Moses is willing to lose his life and be taken out of the list of those who are alive as God's people. The 'book that you have written' is a phrase which pictures God as having a list of the citizens of Israel. There would be citizenship-lists in the cities of the ancient world. Moses is willing to lose his life, and cease to live in this world as one of the people of Israel – if only God will forgive the people. Like Jesus, Moses said to God 'Don't punish' them; punish me instead!' This is what Jesus was saying to the Father when He died for the sins of the world. On the cross Jesus was in effect saying 'Don't punish them; punish me instead!' This is what intercession means. It is a willingness to carry before God the burdens of others.

□1 see 32:14

□1 32:22

□1 *kipper*, Exodus 32:30

□2 Genesis 32:20

□1 Romans 9:3



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