

Deuteronomy 9:25-29

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As Moses resumed the story of the molten calf, he reminded the Israelites of his intercessory prayer on their behalf so that the LORD might not destroy them and start over with Moses. They narrowly averted destruction, an important lesson about the consequences for disobedience.

Having briefly introduced other sinful incidents to demonstrate Israel's history of continuous rebellion, Moses returned to the story of the molten calf and reminded the people of the intercession he made on their behalf. Moses *fell down before the LORD the forty days and nights*. Moses did this *because the LORD had said He would destroy all the people other than Moses*. The lessons are clear. Disobedience has terrible consequences. Sometimes God has overlooked the disobedience for a season. But it always comes home to roost. In this case, the disobedience with the *molten calf* almost cost them all their lives. If not for Moses' mediation, God would have destroyed them all and started over with Moses.

As leader and covenant mediator, Moses chose to pray and fast on behalf of the Israelites to ask God to have mercy on them. He prayed *for forty days and nights*. Just as the Israelites sinned against the LORD during the time of Moses' original forty days of fasting on Mount Sinai, so now Moses prayed again on behalf of the people for the same amount of days in order to reverse the sinful consequences of their actions.

In his prayer, Moses asked God to reverse His judgment on Israel and to replace it by grace and mercy in order to allow Israel to possess the Promised Land. That intercessory prayer was based upon three rationales. The first relates to the Suzerain's redemption of His vassals (Israel) from slavery in Egypt. Moses prayed *O Lord God, do not destroy Your people, even Your inheritance, whom You have redeemed through Your greatness, whom You have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand*.

Moses reminded God that the Israelites are His *people, even His inheritance*. The Israelites were God's chosen covenant people "among all the peoples" of the earth ([Exodus 19:5](#)). They were God's *inheritance*. As a people who belong to the LORD, the Israelites would be precious to Him and He would care for them. Although the Suzerain (Ruler) God is sovereign over all the

earth, His ownership of Israel would be special as a result of the relationship they would have with Him ([Exodus 19:4-6](#)). It was because of that covenant relationship that the Suzerain God *redeemed* His people from slavery in *Egypt with a mighty hand*.

The verb translated here as *redeemed* (Padah, in Hebrew) often stresses the idea that a ransom price was to be paid to free a slave, that is, to confer upon him/her the legal rights and privileges of freedom. However it can also be translated as “rescued” as in [1 Sam 14:45](#). That seems to fit better here, because God brought the people out of *Egypt* through His *greatness* and with *a mighty hand*. The LORD rescued Israel with His great power. Moses reminded God that He had demonstrated His *greatness* when He rescued Egypt. If He now destroys Israel, His *greatness* will be diminished in the eyes of the Egyptians.

The second rationale for God to forgive His people was His covenant oath which He swore to the patriarchs. Moses asked God to remember His *servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*; and *not look at the stubbornness of this people or at their wickedness or their sin*. God made lasting promises to Abraham because of his loyal service rendered but also in anticipation of ongoing obedience ([Genesis 12, 15, Acts 7](#)). Although Abraham was still childless at that time, the LORD promised to make of him a great nation. God reassured Abraham with these terms, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them... So shall your descendants be” ([Genesis 15:5](#)).

To accomplish His purpose, God brought Israel out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, as promised to the patriarchs ([Genesis 15](#)). He led them through the great and terrible wilderness to ultimately lead them to the Promised Land ([Deuteronomy 8:15](#)). In [Deuteronomy 9](#), Moses asked God to *remember* His covenant relationship with His *servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, in order to have mercy on the stubborn Israelites (see [Exodus 32:12-13](#)). It is by forgiving Israel and by allowing them to occupy the land of Canaan that God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be fulfilled. As God had pointed out to Moses, God could still fulfill His *oath* through Moses.

The third rationale for God to forgive the Israelites concerns God’s own reputation. God had shown His *greatness* by rescuing Israel out of Egypt. Now Moses argued that if the people die, the Egyptians will conclude that *the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which He had promised them*. This would overturn the demonstration of God’s *greatness*. Further, even though God could fulfill His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

through Moses, the Egyptians would conclude that God *hated them*, that *He brought them out to slay them in the wilderness*. Therefore, Moses argued that it would not fulfill God's purposes to *slay them in the wilderness*.

In the original account recorded in [Exodus 32](#), Moses made it clear that the land from which the LORD brought His people is Egypt. Moses said, "Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil *intent* He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'?" ([Exodus 32:12](#)). Thus, according to Moses, the Egyptians would misunderstand God's actions. They would think that God is not powerful enough to take His people to the Promised Land. They would also think that God hated His own treasured possession (Israel) so He *brought them out to slay them in the wilderness*. Because such a misjudgment and misunderstanding could hurt the LORD's reputation and character, Moses entreated the LORD to ask for His divine grace and mercy in sparing the people.

Contrary to what the Egyptians might think and say, the LORD is all-powerful, and Israel is His special people. Moses made that sharp contrast when he included in his petition for mercy a reminder to God that the Israelites *are Your people, even Your inheritance, whom You have brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm*. The Israelites were God's chosen covenant people "among all the peoples" of the earth ([Exodus 19:5](#)). They were God's *inheritance*. So, for God to destroy His own people would be misunderstood by onlookers. The entire idea to make Israel a priestly nation that provided an example for other nations to follow would be put in jeopardy.

Amazingly, God listened to Moses' prayer. The text says "The LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people" ([Exodus 32:14](#)). Moses makes it clear to the listeners that they barely escaped. Moses had intervened for them. God had listened to Moses. So now the people should listen to Moses, and do all he commands them this day. The LORD forgave the people, and allowed them to live. But He still disciplined them. According to [Exodus 32:35](#) He "smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made." They suffered an illness as punishment for their idolatry, but they were spared from total destruction.

Biblical Text:

²⁵ "So I fell down before the Lord the forty days and nights, which I did because the Lord had said He would destroy you. ²⁶ I prayed to the Lord and said, 'O Lord God, do not destroy Your people, even Your

inheritance, whom You have redeemed through Your greatness, whom You have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²⁷ Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not look at the stubbornness of this people or at their wickedness or their sin. ²⁸ Otherwise the land from which You brought us may say, “Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land which He had promised them and because He hated them He has brought them out to slay them in the wilderness.” ²⁹ Yet they are Your people, even Your inheritance, whom You have brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm.’