

# Exodus 32:30-35

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*Moses offered to God to die or bear the consequences for the people. The LORD rejected his offer and declared that those who committed this terrible sin would suffer consequences. He also commanded Moses to lead the people according to the LORD's instruction and revealed that His "angel," rather than He Himself, would lead them.*

After dealing with Aaron and the people involved in the golden calf idolatry, *the next day Moses said to the people, "You yourselves have committed a great sin."* Literally, the Hebrew reads, "You [plural] have sinned a great sin." The *you* is emphatic, showing Moses' intense anger at the Israelites, as well as reinforcing the fact that they and they alone made the choice to disobey. They were responsible for the consequences of their actions. The word for *sin* (Heb. "khatah") means "to miss the mark." The people, who were called to be a kingdom of priests to the LORD ([Exodus 19:6](#)) had missed the target of walking consistently with the commitment they had made, to obey their covenant with the LORD ([Exodus 24:3](#)).

Then Moses told them that he was *going up to the Lord*, meaning entering into the LORD's presence, so that *perhaps I can make atonement for your sin*. The word *perhaps* expresses the hope on Moses' part that he, as mediator between the LORD and the people, could provide an *atonement* (lit., a "covering" for sin). This raises the question as to why Moses thought this necessary, since he had already convinced the LORD to relent from destroying them. Perhaps it is because while the LORD agreed to relent from this plan to destroy them, now Moses sought complete *atonement* for the sin. God had not promised to relent of other consequences for their disobedience.

Now Moses had firsthand experience of the extreme, grievous nature of Israel's disobedience. Here Moses seeks complete remission. God had agreed to not destroy Israel, but perhaps Moses thought God might not allow them to enter the land, or might invoke other forms of punishment for their disobedience.

Moses then *returned to the LORD*, and presumably ascends the mountain again in order to make his appeal to God. First, he acknowledged the sin of the people by saying *this people has committed a great sin, and they have*

*made a god of gold for themselves.* Moses begins with specific honesty and confession. Unlike Aaron, Moses is frank and honest. Which of course is an act of worship, for it acknowledges the reality that God is God and already knows what is true.

Then Moses makes his request to the LORD. Moses intercedes on behalf of the people and asked *if You will, forgive their sin.* Moses fully recognizes that God is under no obligation to do so. He just asks God to please forgive the people, even though their sin was grievous.

Moses is seeking forgiveness either directly or at his expense. If the LORD was not willing to simply forgive, Moses makes this request: *please blot me out from Your book which You have written.* Here, Moses was asking for the LORD to put the responsibility on him. In this manner, Moses offers himself as a sacrifice on behalf of the people. The Apostle Paul said something similar in [Romans 9:3-4](#).

This raises a couple of questions: What is Moses referring to when he mentions *Your book which you have written*? What does it mean for God to *blot Moses out* of this *book*?

The Book of Life is referred to in the Old and New Testaments ([Psalm 69:28](#); [Philippians 4:3](#); [Revelation 13:8](#); [17:8](#); [20:12](#); [20:15](#); [21:27](#)). But there are also apparently a number of other books that record the deeds of humans, as Revelation says:

“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”

([Revelation 20:12](#))

In this [Revelation 20:12](#) passage, it seems clear there is a Book of Life as well as other books which have recorded all deeds of all people. It is not clear which book Moses has in mind when he says “*Your book which you have written.*”

Moses could be referring to a book that logs who is living and who is dead. He could be offering his physical life to atone for the sins of the people. This would be consistent with the message of the Passover, where a lamb was slain to substitute for the sins of the people. And it is consistent with the

Passover as a foreshadowing of Jesus dying as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world.

But Moses could also be offering to assign to him the blame for the people's sin by blotting out any reward he might be due because of his faithfulness in serving God. This could be supported by another verse from Revelation:

"He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"  
([Revelation 3:5-6](#)).

This passage is written to believers, as indicated by the overall context of Revelation, which is addressed to Jesus' bond-servants ([Revelation 1:1](#)). The phrase "he who overcomes" is speaking of faithful believers who overcome the temptations of the world. This is shown clearly by [Revelation 3:21](#), where Jesus says He Himself was an overcomer, and exhorts His bond-servants to also overcome:

"He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Therefore, when [Revelation 3:5-6](#) says that one of the rewards for being an overcomer (like Jesus) is to not have your name erased "from the book of life," the indication is that the "book of life" likely includes deeds of faithfulness that God will reward. But these deeds can be erased due to later unfaithfulness. Moses could have this principle in mind, and be asking God to erase his rewards as payment for the sins of the people.

The LORD chooses the first option, to forgive, because He is a gracious God. The LORD makes clear that Moses, or any other man, is not a sufficient ransom for others ([Psalms 49:7f](#)). He also makes clear that He will reward each person for their own deeds, and is not open to substituting the deeds of one person for the deeds of another. Each person will stand before God based on either what Jesus has done (in the case of being justified in the sight of God, [John 3:14-16](#)) or based on their own deeds, (in the case of being rewarded for deeds done while living on earth, [2 Corinthians 5:10](#)).

*The Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.* This could refer to the covenant requirement (which the people

agreed to in [Exodus 24:3](#)) that those who participated in idolatry should die (which was inferred in [Exodus 20:20](#), but is later stated directly). It could refer to the general principle that sin leads to death ([Deuteronomy 30:11-20](#); [Romans 6:23](#)). It could additionally refer to the principle that each person will be responsible for their own choices ([Ezekiel 18](#)). It does not refer to God forsaking Israel, since God made promises to Abraham, and the gifts, or grants, of God are irrevocable ([Romans 11:29](#)).

The LORD included in His response a command. The LORD told him to *go now, lead the people where I told you*. Judgment against the idolaters would be executed, but God made it clear that He would preserve many and lead them to the land of Canaan ([Exodus 6:4](#)).

But the LORD would lead them in a new way. Now God said, *My angel shall go before you*. The *angel* would now lead the people. Even though the LORD (through His *angel*) would take them to the Promised Land, the LORD would bring punishment upon Israel for their disobedience. God does not specify when this will occur. He just adds *nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin*. This judgment was upon the people who worshipped the golden calf, and it was eventually expanded to the entire first generation that left Egypt when they rebelled in [Numbers 14:27–35](#). This first generation will ultimately not be allowed to enter the land, because of their disobedience.

Verse 35 is a summary statement of the LORD's actions in light of the golden calf. True to His word, *the Lord smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made*.

We do not have specific information about this smiting. It might be referenced in [1 Corinthians 10:8](#), which discusses the golden calf episode, then adds: "Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day." However, many believe this passage is referring to the episode recorded in [Numbers 25:9](#).

Moses was Israel's intercessor under the covenant made at Sinai. Under the New Covenant in the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the mediator for New Testament believers ([1 Timothy 2:5](#); [Heb. 8:6](#), [9:15](#), [12:24](#)) as well as our intercessor ([Heb. 7:25](#)). Those who have believed in Him for everlasting life have received forgiveness on account of His righteousness and His ministry on our behalf. The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sent as our Helper, also intercedes for believers in prayer ([Romans 8:26-27](#)).

**Biblical Text:**

<sup>30</sup> On the next day Moses said to the people, “You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” <sup>31</sup> Then Moses returned to the Lord, and said, “Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. <sup>32</sup> But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” <sup>33</sup> The Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. <sup>34</sup> But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.” <sup>35</sup> Then the Lord smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made.