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Now Leave Me Alone So That My Anger May Burn Against Your People **32: 7-14**

Now leave Me alone, so that My anger may burn against your people **DIG: Why did YHVH distance Himself from the Hebrews? Was He justified in doing so? On what basis did Moses intercede on behalf of the Israelites? Did the LORD change His mind when He did not bring disaster on His people as He had intended?**

REFLECT: How quickly has failure come on the heels of success in your life? How did you handle it? What did you learn from it? Has it saved you from grief since then? Never waist your sorrows. How have you helped others in the same situation? Is there an area of your life that you are being stiff-necked with God? What needs to change?

The biblical writer takes us back to the top of Mount Sinai and records a conversation between **God** and **Moses**. **ADONAI** who is sovereign, all-seeing and all-knowing, describes to **Moses** what **the Hebrew people** are doing at the foot of **the mountain**.⁶⁶²

God gave the Torah to **Moses** after the revelation concerning the building of **the Tabernacle**. This was the order. In **Chapter 20**, **Moses** was first verbally given the Ten Commandments, and then in **Chapters 21** through **23** **he** was verbally given the Torah. In **Chapter 24** **he** came down from Mount Sinai and wrote the Torah down in the Book of the Covenant. **He** told **the people** what it said and **the people** said that **they** would follow it. Then **Moses** went back up **the mountain** and **God** told **Moses** to build the Tabernacle. Only then was **he** physically given the Ten Commandments. But while **Moses** was on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights, **the people** rebelled and fashioned a golden **calf** to worship.

Then God told **Moses** to **go down to** the base of **the mountain**, because **your people have become corrupt**. The word translated **corrupt** is the Hebrew word *sihet*, which has the idea of *going to ruin*. It is the same word that is used in **Genesis 6:12** to describe the corruption of the world of Noah's day. The rebellion of **the Israelites** was not only a

process of corruption, but also a turning away of clearly revealed truth of the exodus itself.

The anger of **God** is reflected in **His** separating **Himself** from **the Israelites**. All through the exodus experience **God** had referred to **them** as **My people** (3:7, 5:1, 6:7, 7:16, 8:21). In addition, up to this point **ADONAI** had taken credit for bringing **the Hebrews up out of Egypt**, but then speaking to **Moses**, **He** said . . . **whom you brought up out of Egypt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf**. Not only that, **they** gave the idol credit for the exodus. **They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said: These are your gods, O Isra'el, who brought you out of Egypt (32:7-8)**. A holy **God** was distancing **Himself** from **the Hebrews**.

Then **ADONAI** said to **Moses** **His** servant: **I have seen these people, and they are a stiff-necked people**. Their condition was one of rebellion against **God's** leadership. The phrase **stiff-necked people** is a common expression likened to a horse that stiffens his neck when the driver pulls the reign right or left thus refusing to go the way that it should. This expression was frequently used to describe the rebelliousness of **Isra'el** in **her** subsequent history (**Exodus 33:3-5, 34:5; Deuteronomy 9:6, 10:16; Second Chronicles 30:8, 36:13; Psalm 75:5; Jeremiah 17:23 and Acts 7:51**).⁶⁶³

Therefore, **ADONAI** said: **Now leave Me alone so that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them**. **God** was going to populate a new **nation** and start over with **Moses** (32:9-10). In an earlier time **Moses** had **refused to be known as Pharaoh's son**, choosing instead **to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasure of sin for a short time**. He regarded **disgrace for the sake of Christ** as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward (**Hebrews 11:24-26**). So again, he **refused to be made the head of another nation**, choosing instead to be identified with the **stiff-necked people of God**.

But rebellion was followed by intercession. **Moses**, like Abraham before **him** (**Genesis 18:23-33**) and **Amos** after **him** (**Amos 7:2 and 5**), prayed earnestly for **the Israelites** and used the phrase **Your people** as **he** spoke to **God** on **their** behalf.⁶⁶⁴ **Moses** appealed to **ADONAI** with **three reasons** why **His** wrath ought to turn away from **the Hebrews**. He appealed to **the grace of God, the glory of God and the faithfulness of God**. This is one of the greatest prayers in the entire Bible.

First, he appealed to the grace of God. **Moses** sought the favor of **ADONAI** his God. "ADONAI," he said, "why should **Your** anger burn against **Your** people, whom **You** brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand (32:11)? It was grace, pure

and simple, that had been the basis for the deliverance of **the Hebrews** from the bondage of **Egypt**. **They** had done nothing to gain **His** favor. Nor was divine **grace** shown at the expense of justice, because **grace** reigns **through righteousness to bring eternal life (Romans 5:21)**. So it was in **Egypt**. The Passover lambs had been slain and their blood had been applied. It was to this that **Moses** made **his** first appeal. **Isra'el** had sinned and sinned badly, and **Moses** made no effort to deny any of it. Nevertheless, **they** were **God's people** - bought with a price. Unworthy? Yes. Unholy? Yes. But still **His** redeemed.⁶⁶⁵

Secondly, he appealed to the glory of God. Where would the glory of **ADONAI** be in the sight of **the Egyptians** if **He** killed **the children of Isra'el** in the desert of Sinai? If **God** wiped out **the Israelites**, it would vindicate Pharaoh and the gods of **Egypt**. **Why should the Egyptians** say: **It was with evil intent that He brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth?** Would not the enemy rejoice over **their** destruction and thereby over **God Himself?** The thought was more than **Moses** could bear. Therefore, **Moses** pleaded for **God** to **turn from His fierce anger and relent** from bringing **disaster on His people (32:12)**.

Thirdly, he appealed to the faithfulness of God. **Moses** interceded on the basis of the earlier covenant that **ADONAI** had made with **Abraham, Isaac and Isra'el, to whom He** had sworn **by Himself, "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give your descendants all this Land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever" (32:13)**. **God** has **exalted His name and His word above all things (Psalm 138:2)**. If **He** were to destroy **the Hebrews** in the desert, **He** would be viewed as **One** who broke **His** promises.⁶⁶⁶



The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16). **Moses** was such a **man** and **God** **relented**. This seems to contradict other passages of Scripture that say **God** cannot change **His** mind, because **His** plan is absolute. But we must understand the difference between the human viewpoint and **the Divine** viewpoint. From **the Divine**



viewpoint, **God** never intended to wipe out **Isra'el**, because **He** is a covenant keeper, **He** cannot violate **His** promise. From **the Divine** viewpoint there was no change of plan. From the human viewpoint it appeared that **He** had changed **His** mind. But every change in **God's** program, such as one dispensation forbidding to eat pork and another allowing pork to be eaten, is thought out ahead of time. While it appears from our perspective that **God** changed **His** mind about pork, from **the Divine** viewpoint there was no change of plan because it was always part of the plan. The prohibition against pork was never intended to be permanent.

Therefore, **ADONAI did not bring on His people the disaster He had intended (32:14)**. What an encouragement to our faith. If there ever was a time when it seemed impossible that prayer would be heard, this was it! But the faith of **Moses** rose above all the difficulties and grasping the hand of **God**, **his** prayer was granted.⁶⁶⁷