

Moses, A Foreshadow of Christ, Intercedes for Israel

In view of the marvelous presence of the Lord and His wondrous works at Mt. Sinai, Israel made repeated pledges to serve Him. Yet, that would not be sufficient to inspire this generation of Abraham's descendents to trust in the Lord. Their perpetual obstinacy would lead God to declare, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people (Exodus 32:9)!" The Law and the Covenant between God and Israel could not have been more clearly established. Responding to God's promises (Exodus 19:5-6), Israel avowed "all that the Lord has spoken we will do (19:8)." After the Lord presented Himself to Israel in dramatic fashion (19:9-25) and personally proclaimed the Decalogue (20:1-17), Israel recoiled from the presence of the Lord in fear (20:18-19). Speaking now to Israel through Moses, God reinforces the first commandment, "You shall not make anything to be with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves (Ex. 20:22-23)."

In chapters 21-23, God proceeded to relate to Moses in greater detail how His people were to conduct their lives. He provided directions on how to treat servants (Ex. 21:1-11) and how to deal with violent crime (21:12-27). He outlined legal obligations arising from the ownership of livestock (21:28-36), and described rights and obligations inherent in property ownership (22:1-15). God provided guidelines for moral, political, and religious conduct (22:16-31), outlined principles of justice (23:1-9), and established Sabbath laws and feast days (23:10-19). Subsequently, Moses conveyed to Israel all the laws and judgments of the Lord (24:3). Israel, having seen with their own eyes and heard with their own ears, both of God and Moses, replied with one voice, "all the words which the Lord has said we will do (Ex. 24:3)." The Covenant, sealed with sacrifice and sanctified in blood, was complete (24:4-8).

God had revealed Himself to Israel in dramatic fashion. He declared His will to them by the sound of His own voice and through his spokesperson Moses. Israel responded with both fear and trembling, and with promises to keep the laws of God. Israel was primed to become a people worthy of being called "a kingdom of priests" and "a holy nation." As the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they were poised to fulfill their destiny as the children of promise. But, as a sprout that has no root, all their promises and good intentions withered as a vine in a blistering summer sun. When Moses is called up the mountain to receive instructions detailing how God's house on earth, the Tabernacle, and all the elements contained therein shall be constructed, and on how the priests shall be consecrated for service to Him in the Tabernacle, Moses is absent a little short of six weeks (forty days). Apparently this was sufficient time for Israel to lose its collective memory and, consequently, its spiritual fortitude, trust, and loyalty.

When Moses seemed too long in returning, the people clamored to Aaron, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses... we do not know what has become of him (Ex. 32:1)." Aaron acquiesced to their demands and fashioned for them a golden calf. The people then declared, in an act of bewildering faithlessness and stupidity, "This is your

god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt (Ex. 32:4)!" If stupid sounds harsh, it is nevertheless the most generous explanation we can give for their behavior. In view of all they had witnessed with their own eyes and swore to with their own lips, attributing these things to an object fashioned with their own hands cannot be explained in more gracious terms than stupidity. If it was not stupidity, it was deliberate and willful repudiation of the One who had given them freedom, provided for their every need, and, in spite of persistent complaining, held even greater blessings in store for them.

Offending their powerful Lord and Liberator was to, as the expression goes, "bite the hand that fed them," as well as invite wrath of their Provider. There is nothing left for Israel but a "fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which will devour [His] adversaries (Hebrews 10:27)." Except for the intercession of Moses, God would have destroyed these people and raised up a new nation from him (Exodus 32:10). Fortunately for Israel, Moses was present. He was pleasing to God, reminded Him of His promises to Abraham, and argued that to destroy these people would impugn the Lord's image to the Egyptians (Ex. 32:11-13). Amazingly, "the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people (32:14)." Moses, seeking to make atonement for Israel's sins (32:30), pleaded with God that, if He cannot forgive Israel, to blot his own name out of His Book (32:32). Now, the Old Covenant had an intercessor, foreshadowing the One to come for the New Covenant, Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Hebrews 7:25).