

## Prayer

Dear Jesus, Son of the Father, Saviour of the world  
You are the Source of our greatest joy and happiness  
You are the One who brings hope and meaning to all we do  
You are the Love that brightens our hearts and colours our lives  
You are the most incredible Gift a woman or man could receive  
Dear Jesus, we receive You today with delight and expectation!

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## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: 'New beginnings'

*Ask the Lord to help you be someone who is ready to learn the lessons of the past and move on after things have gone wrong. Pray for the gifts of zeal and godly enthusiasm.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for news editors who decide what we hear about on the news*
  - *Pray for all who live in polluted cities where a short life is expected*
  - *Praise God for His mercy in keeping you safe as you travel*
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## Meditation

Where can the care be found to feed the hungry today?  
Where can the will be found to challenge corruption today?  
Where can the strength be found to act for justice today?  
Where can the heart be found to meet the needs of the poor today?  
Where can the vision be found to safeguard our planet today?  
Where can the intellect be found to defend the truth today?  
Where can the courage be found to confront all evil today?  
Where can the passion be found to fight for what is right today?

Only where people discover that God is good,  
And Christ has won the victory over evil,  
Only where people face the fact of life  
That only He who made the world can save it.

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## Bible Study - Exodus 32:7-14

<sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Moses, 'Go down at once! Because your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have done something corrupt! <sup>8</sup> they have quickly turned aside from what I commanded them; they have cast an image of a calf for themselves; they have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"' <sup>9</sup> The LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and how obstinate they are. <sup>10</sup> Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. Then I will make a great nation out of you.'

<sup>11</sup> But Moses begged the LORD his God by saying, 'O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth"? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, "I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" <sup>14</sup> Then the LORD changed His mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

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## Review

Yesterday, we read about Israel's terrible rebellion against God in making an idol in the form of a calf. This clear breach of the second commandment (20:4f.) was done while the people were awaiting Moses' return from meeting God on Mount Sinai (24:12f., 31:18). Our reading today describes the highly charged discussion between God and Moses about this, and it is an extraordinary passage. First, we read what God said to Moses (32:7-10), and then we read about Moses' prayerful response (32:11-14).

In verse 7, God described the people of Israel to Moses as 'your people' (32:7). It is not that God wished to be rid of His people; they had already separated themselves from God by an unutterable offense. They had made an idol in the form of a calf, perhaps a young bull, to represent God (the bull was a symbol of strength and vitality in Egypt). They had worshipped it (32:5,6) and expressed faith in it, and they had sacrificed to it (32:6) as if it could save them! They had attempted to 'replace' God, so how could God call them His own? How could these people be asked to complete the Tabernacle for God's dwelling place, when they could not sustain their faith more than a few days! There is more than a hint of irony in the comparison between Israel's perception of things, and God's perception. In yesterday's passage we read that Israel's rebellion happened because Moses was 'delayed' on the mountain (32:1); and now, God describes their action as hasty; 'they have quickly turned aside ...' (32:8). Such was the nature of the breakdown!

What God said was dramatic. Was the Lord was testing Moses by what He said, or had He already begun to blot the Israelites out of His mind because of their sin. He summarised what they had done (32:8) and then told Moses to leave Him alone so that He could firstly destroy them ('so that my wrath may burn' – 32:10), and secondly, start a new people of God out of Moses (32:10).

From God's point of view this was reasonable, and He had done this before. When all the world rebelled against God in the days of Noah, God sent a flood to destroy it, and start again from the righteous Noah (Genesis 6-9). However, God made a Covenant with Noah after the Flood, saying that He would never do this again (9:15). This should warn us that what God said in our passage was perhaps more of a test. Is God really in the business of ditching everything and starting again? The clear answer from Scripture is 'No!'

On this basis, Moses acted faithfully as the High Priest of Israel (Aaron had not yet been anointed, see 40:12f.) and interceded on their behalf. Note that he prayed for the people, he did not make an offering or sacrifice for the people, or perform the ritual of atonement (29:33,36, Lev 4:20). Moses spoke up for the people, even though he could not and would not defend them, and he spoke the truth about God and His relationship with Israel. If God were indeed to leave His people to die, then the evidence of His power and authority within the world would be compromised (32:11,12); and what was the point of saving them from Egypt if He abandoned them later because of their sin? Then, by recalling the Covenant (32:13), Moses concluded his prayer; and God listened and 'changed His mind' (32:14).

This is not a story about swaying God's will through prayer, it is a story about how true intercession works. Moses did not plead with God on the basis of the people's need, neither did he seek the forgiveness of their sin. He asked the Lord to complete His will through His Covenant people; something God would surely do. The same is true of our prayers today, for if we seek the Lord's will, then our needs will be met as well! This, of course, is exactly what Jesus meant when He said 'seek first the Kingdom of God ...' (Matt 6:33).

### Going Deeper

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

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## Notes on the text and translation

- V7** *'they have done something corrupt.'* Many Bible versions have *'they have become corrupted'*. However, the form the Hebrew verb here suggests something done rather than a pernicious change of general attitude. They were led astray by their feelings rather than anything else.
- V8** *'from what I commanded them'* The Hebrew reads *'from the way that I commanded them to walk in'*. This is a prosaic way of referring to the Law God gave from Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments and the rules for life (chs. 21-24). There is no easy way of saying the equivalent in English, so because we are speaking about the law, the translation I have given is the simplest that makes sense.

## Going Deeper

The LORD said to Moses, 'Go down at once! Because your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have done something corrupt!

## Application

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### Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss whether you believe that prayers change God's mind about things. What does prayer do?
2. In this story, God appears to relent and forgive without any apparent repentance on the part of people. Does God do this today?
3. How do God's people rebel against Him today, and how can we deal with the sins of the church?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*I am struck by the importance of Moses as an intercessor here, and the way that in his intercession, Moses reflects back to God the Covenant He has already made with His people through Abraham. This suggests that when we pray, we need to reflect not our will but God's. I am sure that Moses was affronted by the actions of Israel just as God was, and he would not wanted to deal with the horrors that awaited him at the foot of the mountain. However, he was willing to intercede and accept what was required of him by God. His is a true model of ministry.*

### Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Think about those things you feel passionately about at church, perhaps the difficult things that happens and what seems to you to be wrong. In the light of Moses' prayer, try to find a way of praying about these things in a spirit of true intercession, reflecting God's will, not your own.*
- *Pray for people who you disagree with at church, and again, try to pray for them bearing in mind Moses' model of intercession.*

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## Final Prayer

Glorious Lord, conquer our fears, have victory over our inhibitions, dispel our doubts and calm our failing nerves. Then, when we have found our peace in You, may we praise You with all our being, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

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