

Prayer, as intercession, is to plead with God on behalf of others. When Israel sinned against God by turning to an idol, Moses interceded. His example reveals what genuine intercession with God is like. Two cycles of intercession occur, first after God tells Moses of Israel's corruption and second after Moses himself encounters their sin.

I. First Cycle (32:7–14): real intercession is grounded in a divine perspective.

A. God's proclamation revealing His perspective toward sin (7–10)

1. Sin corrupts and deserves punishment. Therefore, when we interceded because there has been sin, don't contradict God, let sin be named as sin.
2. God is merciful and invites intercession. What appears to be a command to leave God's presence, implied to Moses an invitation to intercede. Destruction was not yet fixed; only Moses stood in the way; God's offer to Moses wasn't consistent with His previous promises.

B. Moses' intercession reveals a complete God-centeredness (11–14).

1. Moses pleads on the basis of God's redemption of Israel (11). It was God who had brought up Israel out of Egypt. His redemptive work is the basis of His covenant with them (Exodus 20:2). They are His people.
2. Moses pleads on the basis of God's reputation (12a). God would get a bad name in Egypt, if He destroyed the people. God's honor is important to Moses as it should be to us when we intercede for others.
3. Moses pleads on the basis of God's mercy (12b). Without excusing the people or diminishing the correctness of punishing them, Moses relies upon God's mercy by asking Him to relent. Mercy is a basic character quality of God (Exodus 34:6–7a) which we should acknowledge when we pray.
4. Moses pleads on the basis of God's covenant (13). Though God could have made Moses into a great nation, it was not consistent with the implications to Jacob that God's covenant would be fulfilled through his sons. Intercede on the basis of God's promises.

God then "relents." God changes His actions in order to remain unchangeable in His character. To be consistent with His character of being just and merciful, He responds to changed situations. He did not destroy Nineveh, when they repented. He did not destroy Israel, when Moses interceded.

When you intercede with God for others, come to Him with His perspective. Your intercession must touch both the person in need and God. Come humbly to God and exalt Him.

II. Second Cycle (32:15–35): real intercession comes from the heart of the intercessor.

A. Moses encounters personally Israel's sin and offers intercession (15–30).

1. Moses responded with anger, breaking the tablets and destroying the golden calf (19–20). Moses broke the tablets symbolizing the broken covenant. He destroyed the idol, showing how vile and senseless was their sin. He made them drink the water with the residue probably confronting them symbolically with their guilt. The depth of their sin moved Moses to anger and action.
2. Moses confronted Aaron (21–24). He did not excuse even his older brother and fellow leader but placed greater responsibility on him.
3. Moses responded with immediate action according to the command of the LORD (25–29). The pagan partying had to stop and the Levites joined him with a result that 3,000 were killed.

B. Moses intercedes again despite the gravity of their sin and reveals his character as an intercessor (30–35).

1. Moses' character is revealed when he again pleads for Israel (33). The greatness of their sin disturbed him greatly but moved him that much more to intercede.
2. Moses offers his life for theirs. This is the most probable explanation of verse 32, since it fits with the idea of making atonement (v 30) for their sin. The book, like a king's register of those in his kingdom, was probably a figure of God's register of the living, either eternally, physically on earth, or in His earthly kingdom.
3. Moses is allowed to intercede, but not to atone. God alone deals with each sinner as He will. But Moses was affirmed as Israel's leader and thus approved by God for his intercession.

Moses' intercession came from the heart and proved itself to be genuine intercession.

God promised to raise up a prophet like Moses from among the people (Deuteronomy 18:15). That promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. (Acts 3:22). Moses foreshadowed Jesus, who is the perfect intercessor (cf. Hebrews 7:25). Jesus intercedes as the God-man who lived on earth as a man, but who perfectly represents God as well. This is an encouragement for every believer.

But it is also an example, as we are called to follow Christ and imitate Him (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:6). Intercede for others. Pray from the heart for them. Pray on the basis of God's character and promises. It is not a waste of time or simply an exercise for our own benefit. Genuine intercession moves a just and merciful God to act, even when the reason seems to be a mystery us.