

Moses' Prayers

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Worship

Introduction:

Most Christians today, myself included, struggle with the basic habits of Christianity such as assembling or Bible study. Perhaps some of our greatest struggles are with prayer. In **I Thessalonians 5:17**, Paul said we must pray without ceasing. We look at the prayers in the Bible and see the amazing things God did and wonder how we can have successful prayer lives like that. One such instance revolves around the prayers of Moses in **Exodus 32:11-13, 31-32** and **Numbers 14:13-19**. While these prayers surround two events (the golden calf and the refusal to enter the Promised Land) both involve the same issue. The only thing that stood between Israel and destruction was Moses, who interceded so "the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said he would do to His people" (**Exodus 32:14**). How can we pray like that? The answer is not on God's end of the prayer stick. It is on ours. If we want our prayers to be as successful as Moses', then we must pray as he prayed.

Discussion:

- I. Moses prayed humbly.
 - A. **Numbers 12:3** says Moses was the most humble man on earth. That humility is best seen in these prayers. **Philippians 2:3-4** explains humility means putting aside selfishness and empty conceit and viewing others as more important than self, seeking their interests first.
 - B. Examine Moses' prayers in **Exodus 32:11-13, 31-32** and **Numbers 14:13-19**. None of these prayers furthered Moses' agenda. In fact, they did the exact opposite. God's initial plan was to destroy Israel and make a greater and mightier nation out of Moses (**Exodus 32:10; Numbers 14:12**). What an opportunity for Moses. Yet he did not capitalize on God's anger to further his own place in history. Instead, he used his prayer to further the interests of the Israelites and God. We delve into Moses' humility even more with our next two points.
- II. Moses prayed for others more than himself.
 - A. After Moses dealt with the golden calf, he said, "I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" (**Exodus 32:30**). What is amazing is that Moses did not just pray, "God forgive their sin." He prayed, "But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not please blot me out from Your book which You have written" (**Exodus 32:32**).
 - B. Consider the sheer magnitude of that statement. Moses was saying he would rather be blotted out for Israel's sin, than Israel be blotted out for it. I can hardly fathom that. We often get upset about all the things people get away with through God's forgiveness. Moses was praying that God would let it go and, if necessary let him be the sacrifice to purchase their forgiveness.
 - C. Keep in mind for whom Moses was doing this. This was the people who had made him so angry that he cast down the tablets of the Law God had just given him and broke them in the sight of the people (**Exodus 32:19**). In **Numbers 14:10**, the people had been preparing to stone Moses. Yet he prayed for them. That is humility. When we pray whose agenda most concerns us?
- III. Moses prayed for God's will and glory, not his own.
 - A. **Exodus 32:12** and **Numbers 14:13-16** demonstrate the heart of Moses' humility. More than concern for himself, more than concern for his brethren, Moses' prayer was driven by his concern for God and His glory. What would the pagan nations say if the people of Israel died in a day on their way from Egypt to Canaan? They would not assume the people had angered Jehovah. They would assume Jehovah was unable to do what He promised.
 - B. I find it hard to believe God had not already thought of what these foreign nations would think. I believe the heart of these narratives is not so much about God supposedly changing His mind, but about Moses bending to God's will. Instead of thinking about the glory he could receive as father of the nation, Moses thought about the glory that would be taken from God.
 - C. The problem is we all too often view prayer as the means by which we try to bend God to our will. That is not the function of prayer. Prayer's function is to lead us to bend ourselves to God's will. In reality, the heart of successful prayer is to be found in this one point. There is one way and one way alone to always have all of your prayers granted. Discover God's will and glory and pray for that. God will always grant those requests.

- IV. Moses prayed from a holy life.
- A. Though not explicitly stated, **Exodus 32:32** demonstrates that Moses' prayer stemmed from holy living. Certainly he was not sinless, but he had to have some basis on which to believe his being blotted out of God's book would mean something. Certainly, Aaron could not make a prayer like this; he had been just as involved in the sin as the rest of Israel.
 - B. Of course, Moses could not be the sinless sacrifice that Jesus would become. However, he was a man who had lived in holiness, who had lived according to God's will. Moses was not living however he wanted during the day and then offering a quick goodnight prayer to save his soul if he died in his sleep. Moses lived a life that allowed him to pray.
 - C. I am not suggesting we must be perfect to pray. Certainly, confession will always be a part of our prayers (cf. **I John 1:9; Luke 18:13**). However, we must recognize that if we are harboring sin in our hearts, our prayers do not get past the ceiling (**Isaiah 59:1-14**).
- V. Moses prayed based on God's word.
- A. When Moses prayed in **Exodus 32:13**, he could pray with faith that God would grant his request because he knew the promises God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When Moses quoted these promises, he was not just speaking of these two specific promises; he was referencing all the promises God had made to his forefathers. All those promises, specifically the ones made to the 12 sons of Jacob in **Genesis 49**, could not be fulfilled if God started over with Moses. Moses' prayer was successful because it was based on God's own word.
 - B. Interestingly, in **Number 14:17-18**, Moses based his request on the word of the Lord revealed to him following the Golden Calf incident in **Exodus 34:6-7**. Nevertheless, Moses could pray with faith because it was not just a whimsical request, but a request grounded solidly in God's word.
 - C. When we pray, do we consider God's word? How much more effective our prayers would be if we would actually go to the scriptures first and find the promises of God and pray for those.
- VI. Moses prayed as a priority.
- A. Moses recounted both of these situations in **Deuteronomy 9**. According to **Deuteronomy 9:18, 25**, Moses prayed and neither ate bread nor drank water. These prayers were so important to him that he did not even eat. Since a man cannot survive for 40 days without drinking anything, I believe God must have miraculously sustained Moses. However, the point remains the same. These prayers were so important to Moses that he placed them even above eating.
 - B. Are there any circumstances for us in which prayer is that important? Would we ever forego eating and drinking in order to pray? While fasting is not a requirement for every prayer, the general principle remains the same. For our prayer to be successful, prayer must be a priority.
- VII. Moses prayed persistently.
- A. In **Deuteronomy 9:18, 25**, not only did Moses fast and pray, but he did so for 40 days. I am really amazed at these statements. We would never get that idea from what was revealed in **Exodus 32** or **Numbers 14**. In those verses, Moses simply summarized his 40 day prayer. Think about what that means. For forty days, Moses basically prayed the same thing over and over and over again. I am sure he worded it in different ways. I am sure he took different approaches. I am sure he added argument on top of argument. However, for 40 days he basically said nothing more than "Please forgive these obstinate and stubborn people."
 - B. Again, I ask, is there anything so important to us that we would pray like that? One of the greatest complaints I ever hear about church prayer meetings is how repetitive they are. However, some things are so important they need to be repeated and persisted in prayer. What would have happened if Moses had quit praying on day 39? Who knows, but God did not respond until day 40 in both of these instances. If we want successful prayer lives, we have to learn to be persistent in prayer.

Conclusion:

None of these aspects of prayer are easy. They all take a great deal of work and discipline. However, they do cut to the heart of what is successful praying. When we pray as Moses did, I am convinced we will begin to see the power of God working in our lives and in response to our prayers. But I am also convinced it will only happen when we learn to pray as Moses did.