

## **EXODUS 32:11-14 CAN GOD CHANGE HIS MIND?**

As we go through the book of Exodus, we learn more about the character of God. In fact, anytime you read and study any place in the Bible, you should see the nature of God. As we left off in our last study in verse 10 of chapter 32, we saw the nature of God as His anger was displayed. His wrath was ready to destroy the nation of Israel. Where we are at today, Moses will exercise his role as a mediator. We will see him becoming more compassionate. Another theme, besides the mediator and compassion theme, is the ground of security is outside of us, God's grace. Of course, the first theme was the sin that Israel committed which reminded us of the fall. When we see these themes come together it is etched in our minds how dependent we are on God and His providing of everything. We need His compassion, mercy, grace, and His mediator. We are sinners and are in need of someone outside ourselves to redeem us from our fallen state.

In this section we see today, we find quite a perplexing problem. God has said He would consume His people for their idolatry. Then, Moses intercedes for the Israelites and pleads that God would relent from destroying them. God then answers Moses and says He would relent and turn from His wrath. This verse 14 is bothersome. Can it really mean that God can change His mind?

### **1. THE MEDIATION OF MOSES 32:11-13**

The people in their sin had forgotten about Moses and it is ironic for he is the one they need the most. All this time, they were oblivious of their mediator. They didn't have any idea of the work that Moses was doing. How this should remind us of the time we were without Christ and were enemies of God and all that time the Mediator was doing His work for us. The Israelites had not been loyal to God as they broke His commands and made an idol. They wanted the presence of God, now, but refused to wait on His time. This made God very angry. This brings us to where we are at in this text as Moses pleads to God for the people for the sake of His name. He pleads for them as they reject him and their God. This is highly ironic as they are involved in a feast of idolatry as Moses is bringing down God's Word to them. The mediator pleads God's mercy as they are rejecting God. Redemption has everything to do with the mediator's interaction with the heavenly Father on the basis of His perfect righteousness on the behalf of His people. This is quite remarkable what Moses did. We get a great picture of what a mediator is through what Moses did.

God had already told Moses to leave Him alone by not interceding.

#### **A. THE APPEAL TO GOD'S SOVEREIGN CHOICE**

The word is pleaded or entreated. This word is always used for a plea for mercy from God. Moses was very bold with his plea His approach to God was boldly coming before the throne.

Moses asks, "Why are you going to destroy Israel?" These are the

people You brought out and saved. God chose His people. He redeemed them. Moses' first argument is God's election. You chose them, Lord, they did not choose You. This was Your plan. Why would You want to destroy them now since You made a choice for them to be Yours?

Deut 7:6

God, why are you going to destroy your people You delivered? Moses appeals with this argument using God's sovereign choice. This is a very good argument He started with.

#### **B. THE APPEAL TO GOD'S GLORY AND NAME**

Exodus 9:16

The whole reason God is doing what He is doing is to make His name famous. He would destroy that if He harmed His people and Egypt would then say that God didn't keep His promise. They will reproach You Lord and bring dishonor to Your name.

The Egyptians will say; their god saved them, then killed them.

Moses is arguing that God has passion for His glory. He didn't want God to defame His name.

#### **C. THE APPEAL TO CHANGE HIS MIND**

You have every right to condemn them, Lord. Don't do it. Turn from Your anger and change Your mind.

Wrath burning hot means to be set on taking the action of judgment.

Moses knows God has every right to bring judgment and they deserve God's wrath as He wants to do it. But Moses wants God to not do what God has said He would do.

#### **D. THE APPEAL FOR GOD TO REMEMBER THE PROMISE**

Remember it again, Lord for you have promised.

Exodus 2:28-God heard their cries and remembered His promise he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

He's pleading the promise. Remember Abraham, the servant that You swore to by Yourself. Moses was pleading the covenant.

God had said in verse 7 that they were now Moses' people. Moses turns it back on God and says they are Your people.

### **2. HIGHLIGHTS OF MOSES' PRAYER**

#### **A. GOD'S NATURE**

This whole petition depends on God being reliable. This prayer appeals to the consistency of God's nature. God has already stated His will for these people.

#### **B. THE ROLE OF THE MEDIATOR**

God had groomed Moses to be the mediator of compassion. This is not surprising God that Moses is asking these petitions. Moses is not talking God into being merciful. God is merciful. Moses learned his mercy from God. Moses is a provision from God for the people.

#### **C. HOPE IS GROUNDED IN GOD IN EVERYTHING**

God's election, covenant, promises, actions, grace, mercy

None of those grounds are found in Israel or based on their goodness, or faithfulness, or worthiness. Our hope is not based on anything in us. Our hope is theocentric. Our hope is outside of us. That is what

Moses' prayer is about. He is not saying Lord, You are being a little too hard on Israel. They are really good people. He is not saying that. He is saying, You chose them, and You need to do this for Your name and glory. Remember Your promise. It has nothing to do with their goodness, but has everything to do with who God is. It is based on God's character and promise. Mercy is the ground of salvation.

### **3. GOD CHANGED HIS MIND ? 32:14**

Moses interceded. We can say thank God for Moses as he interceded for the people. We know by our own experience that is what happened to us. We have to have compassion for them in this story for we had to have a compassionate Mediator.

So...Moses interceded and the Lord changed His mind. What do we make of this though? God changed His mind because Moses pleaded. Does my prayer mean something?

#### **A. NOT THE ONLY PLACE MENTIONED**

The Lord would have destroyed had it not been for Moses. Moses had to stand in the gap. The Lord's wrath would have been displayed. Psalm 106:23,45, This is not the only place we see God changing His mind.

Ex 33:1-3,16-17, In verse 17 God says He will do something other than what He first said. God responds to us as we appeal to Him. God wants people to know His character. He is not only Judge but also Savior. He is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, loving and merciful. God is full of grace and mercy even when people are rebellious. We are to appeal to God to change His mind for the glory of His grace.

Genesis 6:5, 18;26-32 God involves Himself in human affairs. He responds to us and engages with us. He wants us to pray and petition Him. Pray hard for that hard hearted soul who is lost. Pray that our Church would reach it's full potential in reaching the lost.

1 Chron 21:15, 1 Sam 15:11, 2 Sam 24:16, Jonah 3:10  
Jere 26:13

#### **B. DOESN'T THE BIBLE SAY HE CANT CHANGE ?**

Isn't God immutable? Nothing happens that God has not planned.

1 Sam 15:29, Numbers 23:19, Ps 33:11, 102:25-27

Isa 46:9-10, Heb 13:8

#### **C. PROBLEMATIC OR CONTRADICTORY ?**

The Bible never contradicts itself. The Bible says God doesn't change in His person. What He has secretly decided, will happen. No one can thwart His plan. God is perfect. He can't change. If He were to change and it got better, then He wasn't perfect. Perfect can't get better.

Is there a contradiction? A contradiction asserts something, then asserts something different, the opposite. The stick is straight and the stick is not straight. If you are using identical terms, this is a contradiction. The Bible is the very Word of God and there are no errors. God can't be saying two different things.

This topic can be problematic but it is not contradictory. We have the

problem, for we have finite minds. God's Word is not the problem. We cannot be comfortable with contradictions. But the Lord changes His mind and He cannot change His mind.

Two things to keep in mind of

1. The Lord genuinely responds to His creatures. He relents.
2. The Lord's secret decrees never alter.

These are twin truths.

In the mystery of God, God Himself is unchangeable, but He responds to human beings and sometimes alters the course. This is a mystery, and not a contradiction. Both statements are true. Look at 1 Sam 15:11, then verse 29. Try to explain that.

Charles Hodge "God is immutable but nevertheless He is not a stagnant ocean but ever living, ever thinking, ever active, ever suiting His actions for His creatures and He is suiting His actions to the accomplishing of His infinitely wise design. Whether we can harmonize these facts or not is of minor importance. We are constantly being called upon to believe things that are without being told how they are and how they can be." The Trinity is an example of this.

God is compassionate, loving, merciful, and yet He is also just. He will not undermine His justice, but He will give His mercy to some.

Another way to look at it is commented on by Ligon Duncan. "The gracious God of Israel has withheld a deserved destruction in response to the prayers of the mediator. God's plan hasn't changed. The previously announced course of action is not going to be put in effect." It wasn't that Moses had such good arguments that God had to give up and give in. God is making a point as human emotions such as this one, changing His mind, makes this dramatic. This human pattern of behavior grabs a hold of you.

#### D. THE COMFORT OF IT ALL

Rom 8:28 He ordains everything to happen and He never does anything to harm us.

The suffering and death of Christ was orchestrated by God.

#### E. PRAYER MATTERS

His secret plans never alter and yet He takes action when we call. Prayer really works. We have confidence in Him. He responds to us.

#### F. PRINCIPLE

Ligon Duncan--His point then, is not that we can somehow change the secret will and plan of God, but that He is consistent in the way that He deals with us. Why then would God say, "Let me alone that I may destroy them" unless He was just about to do it. Because it was vital for them to know their need of a mediator. You remember that the people of God decided that they didn't need Moses. Anybody here think that anybody in Israel thought that they didn't need Moses when this was all over? Anybody here? There's no way you get through this incident and don't realize that you need a mediator. God gives you a mediator, you jolly well need that mediator.

Secondly, it was vital for God to do this so that His people would realize that His threatened destruction was precisely what they deserved. You know, if this event had not happened it would have been very easy for Israel to come through the Exodus experience

and begin to think, “You know, we’re pretty good. No wonder God chose us.” But my friends, after this there could be no delusion on the part of anyone that the reason that they were still with God was because they were pretty good.

Thirdly, this event was vital in order for the people of God to understand why God did not bring the threatened destruction. And they learned that on the basis of Moses’ intercession. Moses said nothing about them, but everything about God, everything about His grace, everything about His covenant. Nobody could have come out from that and said, “Well you know, the reason that God spared us is because we were sort of faithful; we were pretty good; we were going to church; we were trying hard.” Fill in the blank. Nothing about you; all about God, all about the mediator, all about the covenant, all about mercy.

God does not change but He is constant as the northern star in punishing unbelief and idolatry and forgiving the repentant and keeping His covenant even when we fail.

Whenever God promises something and His people are presumptuous, He will judge. Whenever people sin and God threatens, and then people repent, He will receive them. His secret plans are never altered, and yet He takes actions when we call.