

CHAPTER 9

The design of Moses in this chapter is to convince the people of Israel of their utter unworthiness to receive from God those great favours that were now to be conferred upon them, writing this, as it were, in capital letters at the head of their charter, “Not for your sake, be it known unto you,” ~~33~~ Ezekiel 36:32.

I. He assures them of victory over their enemies (v. 1-3).

II. He cautions them not to attribute their successes to their own merit, but to God's justice, which was engaged against their enemies, and his faithfulness, which was engaged to their fathers (v. 4-6).

III. To make it evident that they had no reason to boast of their own righteousness, he mentions their faults, shows Israel their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins. In general, they had been all along a provoking people (v. 7-24). In particular,

- 1.** In the matter of the golden calf, the story of which he largely relates (v. 8-21).
- 2.** He mentions some other instances of their rebellion (v. 22, 23). And,
- 3.** Returns, at 5:25, to speak of the intercession he had made for them at Horeb, to prevent their being ruined for the golden calf.

~~33~~ DEUTERONOMY 9:1-6

VICTORY PROMISED

The call to attention (v. 1), *Hear, O Israel*, intimates that this was a new discourse, delivered at some distance of time after the former, probably the next sabbath day.

I. Moses represents to the people the formidable strength of the enemies which they were now to encounter, v. 1. The nations they were to dispossess were mightier than themselves, not a rude and undisciplined rout, like the natives of America, that were easily made a prey of. But, should they besiege them, they would find their cities well fortified,

according as the art of fortification then was; should they engage them in the field, they would find the people great and tall, of whom common fame had reported that there was no standing before them, v. 2. This representation is much the same with that which the evil spies had made (~~CHRS~~ Numbers 13:28, 33), but made with a very different intention: that was designed to drive them from God and to discourage their hope in him; this to drive them to God and to engage their hope in him, since no power less than that which is almighty could secure and prosper them.

II. He assures them of victory, by the presence of God with them, notwithstanding the strength of the enemy, v. 3. “Understand therefore what thou must trust to for success, and which way thou must look; it is the Lord thy God that goes before thee, not only as thy captain, or commander-in-chief, to give direction, but as a consuming fire, to do execution among them. Observe, He shall destroy them, and then thou shalt drive them out. Thou canst not drive them out, unless he destroy them and bring them down. But he will not destroy them and bring them down, unless thou set thyself in good earnest to drive them out.” We must do our endeavour in dependence upon God's grace, and we shall have that grace if we do our endeavour.

III. He cautions them not to entertain the least thought of their own righteousness, as if that had procured them this favour at God's hand: “Say not. *For my righteousness* (either with regard to my good character or in recompence for any good service) *the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land* (v. 4); never think it is for thy righteousness or the uprightness of thy heart, that it is in consideration either of thy good conversation or of thy good disposition,” v. 5. And again (v. 6) it is insisted on, because it is hard to bring people from a conceit of their own merit, and yet very necessary that it be done: “*Understand* (know it, and believe it, and consider it) that *the Lord thy God giveth thee not this land for thy righteousness*. Hadst thou been to come to it upon that condition, thou wouldst have been for ever shut out of it, *for thou art a stiff-necked people*.” Note, Our gaining possession of the heavenly Canaan, as it must be attributed to God's power and not to our own might, so it must be ascribed to God's grace and not to our own merit: in Christ we have both righteousness and strength; in him therefore we must glory, and not in ourselves, or any sufficiency of our own.

IV. He intimates to them the true reasons why God would take this good land out of the hands of the Canaanites, and settle it upon Israel, and they are borrowed from his own honour, not from Israel's deserts.

1. He will be honoured in the destruction of idolaters; they are justly looked upon as haters of him, and therefore he will visit their iniquity upon them. It is *for the wickedness of these nations* that God *drives them out*, v. 4, and again, v. 5. All those whom God rejects are rejected for their own wickedness: but none of those whom he accepts are accepted for their own righteousness.

2. He will be honoured in the performance of his promise to those that are in covenant with him: God swore to the patriarchs, who loved him and left all to follow him, that he would give this land to their seed; and therefore he would *keep that promised mercy for thousands of those that loved him and kept his commandments*; he would not suffer his promise to fail. It was for their fathers' sakes that they were beloved, ~~410~~Romans 11:28. Thus boasting is for ever excluded. See ~~410~~Ephesians 1:9, 11.

~~410~~DEUTERONOMY 9:7-29

ISRAEL REMINDED OF THEIR REBELLIONS

That they might have no pretence to think that God brought them to Canaan *for their righteousness*, Moses here shows them what a miracle of mercy it was that they had not long ere this been destroyed in the wilderness: “*Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God* (v. 7); so far from purchasing his favour, thou hast many a time laid thyself open to his displeasure.” Their fathers' provocations are here charged upon them; for, if God had dealt with their fathers according to their deserts, this generation would never have been, much less would they have entered Canaan. We are apt to forget our provocations, especially when the smart of the rod is over, and have need to be often put in mind of them, that we may never entertain any conceit of our own righteousness. Paul argues from the guilt which all mankind is under to prove that we cannot be *justified before God* by our own works, ~~410~~Romans 3:19, 20. If our works condemn us, they will not justify us. Observe,

1. They had been a provoking people ever since they came out of Egypt, v. 7. *Forty years long*, from first to last, were God and Moses grieved with them. It is a very sad character Moses now at parting leaves of them: *You have been rebellious since the day I knew you*, v. 24. No sooner were they formed into a people than there was a faction formed among them, which upon all occasions made head against God and his government. Though the Mosaic history records little more than the occurrences of the first and last year of the forty, yet it seems by this general account that the rest of the years were not much better, but one continued provocation.

2. Even in Horeb they made a calf and worshipped it, v. 8, etc. That was a sin so heinous, and by several aggravations made so exceedingly sinful, that they deserved upon all occasions to be upbraided with it. It was done in the very place where the law was given by which they were expressly forbidden to worship God by images, and while the mountain was yet burning before their eyes, and Moses had gone up to fetch them the law in writing. They *turned aside quickly*, v. 16.

3. God was very angry with them for their sin. Let them not think that God overlooked what they did amiss, and gave them Canaan for what was good among them. No, God had determined to destroy them (v. 8), could easily have done it, and would have been no loser by it; he even desired Moses to let him alone that he might do it, v. 13, 14. By this it appeared how heinous their sin was, for God is never angry with any above what there is cause for, as men often are. Moses himself, though a friend and favourite, trembled at the revelation of God's wrath from heaven against their ungodliness and unrighteousness (v. 19): *I was afraid of the anger of the Lord*, afraid perhaps not for them only, but for himself, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 119:120.

4. They had by their sin broken covenant with God, and forfeited all the privileges of the covenant, which Moses signified to them by *breaking the tables*, v. 17. A bill of divorce was given them, and thenceforward they might justly have been abandoned for ever, so that their mouth was certainly stopped from pleading any righteousness of their own. God had, in effect, disowned them, when he said to Moses (v. 12), "They are thy people, they are none of mine, nor shall they be dealt with as mine."

5. Aaron himself fell under God's displeasure for it, though he was the saint of the Lord, and was only brought by surprise or terror to be confederate with them in the sin: *The Lord was very angry with Aaron*, v. 20. No man's place or character can shelter him from the wrath of God if

he have *fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*. Aaron, that should have made atonement for them if the iniquity could have been purged away by sacrifice and offering, did himself fall under the wrath of God: so little did they consider what they did when they drew him in.

6. It was with great difficulty and very long attendance that Moses himself prevailed to turn away the wrath of God, and prevent their utter ruin. He fasted and prayed full forty days and forty nights before he could obtain their pardon, v. 18. And some think twice forty days (v. 25), because it is said, *as I fell down before*, whereas his errand in the first forty was not of that nature. Others think it was but one forty, though twice mentioned (as also in ~~600~~ Deuteronomy 10:10); but this was enough to make them sensible how great God's displeasure was against them, and what a narrow escape they had for their lives. And in this appears the greatness of God's anger against all mankind that no less a person than his Son, and no less a price than his own blood, would serve to turn it away. Moses here tells them the substance of his intercession for them. He was obliged to own their stubbornness, and their wickedness, and their sin, v. 27. Their character was bad indeed when he that appeared an advocate for them could not give them a good word, and had nothing else to say in their behalf but that God had done great things for them, which really did but aggravate their crime (v. 26), — that they were the posterity of good ancestors (v. 27), which might also have been turned upon him, as making the matter worse and not better, — and that the Egyptians would reproach God, if he should destroy them, as unable to perfect what he had wrought for them (v. 28), a plea which might easily enough have been answered: no matter what the Egyptians say, while the heavens declare God's righteousness; so that the saving of them from ruin at that time was owing purely to the mercy of God, and the importunity of Moses, and not to any merit of theirs, that could be offered so much as in mitigation of their offence.

7. To affect them the more with the destruction they were then at the brink of, he describes very particularly the destruction of the calf they had made, v. 21. He calls it their *sin*: perhaps not only because it had been the matter of their sin, but because the destroying of it was intended for a testimony against their sin, and an indication to them what the sinners themselves did deserve. Those that made it were like unto it, and would have had no wrong done them if they had been thus stamped to dust, and consumed, and scattered, and no remains of them left. It was infinite mercy that

accepted the destruction of the idol instead of the destruction of the idolaters.

8. Even after this fair escape that they had, in many other instances they provoked the Lord again and again. He needed only to name the places, for they carried the memorials either of the sin or of the punishment in their names (v. 22): at *Taberah, burning*, where God set fire to them for their murmuring, — at *Massah, the temptation*, where they challenged almighty power to help them, — and at *Kibroth-hattaavah, the graves of lusts*, where the dainties they coveted were their poison; and, after these, their unbelief and distrust at *Kadesh-barnea*, of which he had already told them (Deuteronomy 1), and which he here mentions again (v. 23), would certainly have completed their ruin if they had been dealt with according to their own merits.

Now let them lay all this together, and it will appear that whatever favour God should hereafter show them, in subduing their enemies and putting them in possession of the land of Canaan, it was not for their righteousness. It is good for us often to remember against ourselves, with sorrow and shame, our former sins, and to review the records conscience keeps of them, that we may see how much we are indebted to free grace, and may humbly own that we never merited at God's hand any thing but wrath and the curse.