

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION TO DEUTERONOMY 9

In this chapter the Israelites are assured of the ejection of the Canaanites, though so great and mighty, to make room for them, (^(~~CR01~~)Deuteronomy 9:1-3), and they are cautioned not to attribute this to their own righteousness, but to the wickedness of the nations which deserved to be so treated, and to the faithfulness of God in performing his promise made to their fathers, (^(~~CR04~~)Deuteronomy 9:4-6), and that it might appear that it could not be owing to their righteousness, it is affirmed and proved that they had been a rebellious and provoking people from their coming out of Egypt to that time, as was evident from their idolatry at Horeb; a particular account of which is given, and of the displeasure of the Lord at it, (^(~~CR07~~)Deuteronomy 9:7-21), and of their murmurings, with which they provoked the Lord at other places, (^(~~CR22~~)Deuteronomy 9:22-24), and the chapter is closed with an account of the prayer of Moses for them at Horeb, to avert the wrath of God from them for their making and worshipping the golden calf, (^(~~CR25~~)Deuteronomy 9:25-29).

Ver. 1. *Hear, O Israel*, etc.] A pause being made after the delivery of the preceding discourse; or perhaps what follows might be delivered at another time, at some little distance; and which being of moment and importance to the glory of God, and that Israel might have a true notion of their duty, they are called upon to listen with attention to what was now about to be said:

thou art to pass over Jordan this day; not precisely that very day, but in a short time after this; for it was on the first day of the eleventh month that Moses began the repetition of the laws he was now going on with, (^(~~CR03~~)Deuteronomy 1:3), and it was not until the tenth day of the first month of the next year that the people passed over Jordan, (^(~~CR09~~)Joshua 4:19) which was about two months after this:

to go in and possess nations greater and mightier than thyself; the seven nations named (^(~~CR06~~)Deuteronomy 7:1) where the same characters are given of them:

cities great and fenced up to heaven; as they were said to be by the spies, (^{<R028>}Deuteronomy 1:28), and were no doubt both large and strongly fortified, and not to be easily taken by the Israelites, had not the Lord been with them, (^{<R003>}Deuteronomy 9:3).

Ver. 2. *A people great and tall*, etc.] Of a large bulky size, and of an high stature, so that the spies seemed to be as grasshoppers to them, (^{<0433>}Numbers 13:33),

the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest; by report, having had an account of them by the spies, who described them as very large bodied men, and of a gigantic stature, the descendants of one Anak, a giant; and so the Targum of Jonathan,

“a people strong and high like the giants;”

from these Bene Anak, children of Anak, or Phene Anak, as the words might be pronounced, the initial letter of the first word being of the same sound, Bochart ^{f96} thinks the country had its name of Phoenicia:

and of whom thou hast heard say, who can stand before the children, of Anak? or the children of the giants, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan; which they had heard either from the spies who had suggested the same, (^{<0433>}Numbers 13:31) or as a common proverb in the mouths of most people in those days.

Ver. 3. *Understand therefore this day*, etc.] Or be it known to you for your encouragement, and believe it:

that the Lord thy God [is] he which goeth over before thee as a consuming fire: did not only go before them over the river Jordan, in a pillar of cloud and fire, to guide and direct them, and was a wall of fire around them to protect and defend them, but as a consuming fire, before which there is no standing, to destroy their enemies; (see ^{<R024>}Deuteronomy 4:24 ^{<S023>}Hebrews 12:29),

he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face; be they as great and as mighty, as large and as tall as they may, they will not be able to stand before the Lord, but will soon be made low, and be easily brought down to the earth by him, and to utter destruction; which would be done in a public and visible manner, so as that the hand of the Lord would be seen in it by the Israelites:

so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the Lord hath said unto thee; that is, the far greater part of them, and so many as to make room for the Israelites, and which was quickly done. The Jews commonly say ¹⁹⁷, that they were seven years in subduing the land; otherwise they were not to be driven out and destroyed at once, but by little and little: (see ^{<R172>}Deuteronomy 7:22).

Ver. 4. *Speak not thou in thine heart*, etc.] Never once think within thyself, or give way to such a vain imagination, and please thyself with it:

after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee; to make way for the Israelites, and put them into the possession of their land; which is to be ascribed not to them, but to the Lord:

saying, for my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land; such a thought as this was not to be secretly cherished in their hearts, and much less expressed with their lips; nothing being more foreign from truth than this, and yet a notion they were prone to entertain. They were always a people, more or less, from first to last, tainted with a conceit of their own righteousness, and goodness, which they laboured to establish, and were ready to attribute all the good things to it they enjoyed, and nothing is more natural to men, than to fancy they shall be brought to the heavenly Canaan by and for their own righteousness; which is contrary to the perfections of God, his purity, holiness, and justice, which can never admit of an imperfect righteousness in the room of a perfect one; to justify anyone thereby, is contrary to the Gospel scheme of salvation; which is not by works of righteousness men have done, but by the grace and mercy of God through Christ; it would make useless, null, and void, the righteousness of Christ, which only can justify men in the sight of God, give a title to heaven and happiness, and an abundant entrance into it; and would occasion boasting, not only in the present state, but even in heaven itself; whereas the scheme of salvation is so framed and fixed, that there may be no room for boasting, here or hereafter, (see ^{<R172>}Romans 3:27,28 ^{<H118>}Ephesians 2:8,9 ^{<R172>}Titus 3:5,7),

but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee; namely, their idolatry, incest, and other notorious crimes; (see ^{<R172>}Leviticus 18:3-28), which sufficiently justifies God in all his dealings with these nations.

Ver. 5. *Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart,* etc.] Neither for their external righteousness before men, or their outward conformity to the law, nor for the inward sincerity of their hearts, and their upright intentions in doing good, in which they were defective:

dost thou go to possess their land; this is repeated, and enlarged on, and explained, that this notion might be entirely removed from them, and not entertained by them; similar to which is that of men, who fancy that their sincere obedience, though imperfect, will be accepted of God instead of a perfect one, on account of which they shall be justified and saved; but by the deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified in the sight of God, nor by any works of righteousness done by the best of men, and in the best manner they are capable of, will any be saved;

but for the wickedness of those nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee; which is repeated, that it might be taken notice of as the true reason of the Lord's dealing with them in such severity; and which because it would be now doing, when the Israelites passed over Jordan, and went in to possess the land, it is expressed in the present tense, "doth drive", the work being not yet finished; sin was the cause of their ejection out of their land, and another thing was the reason of the Israelites possessing it, and not their righteousness next expressed:

and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; it was to fulfil his covenant, and make good his word of promise to their fathers, and not on account of any righteousness of theirs; and the salvation of the Lord's people in a spiritual sense, and their enjoyment of the heavenly Canaan, are owing to the gracious purposes and promises of God, and to his covenant engagements, as well as to the undertakings, obedience, and righteousness of his Son, and not to any righteousness of theirs.

Ver. 6. *Understand therefore that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness,* etc.] This is again repeated to impress it upon their minds, that it was not for any goodness of theirs, but as a gift of divine goodness to them, that they were put into the possession of the good land, which greatly exceeded any merits of theirs, and was entirely owing to the kindness of God to them, and not to any righteousness of theirs; and this he frequently inculcates, that they might have a thorough understanding of it. And so the doctrines of justification by the righteousness of Christ, and not man's, and of salvation by the grace

of God, and not the works of men, are points of knowledge and understanding; and to lead men into an acquaintance with them is the general design of the Gospel; and he cannot be reckoned an understanding man, but ignorant of God and his righteousness, of the law and the spirituality of it, of Christ and the way of salvation by him, of the Spirit and of spiritual things, of the Gospel and its doctrines, nor can he be wise unto salvation, who expects to get to heaven by his own works of righteousness; and it might be added, that he is ignorant of himself, of his state and condition, of his sinfulness and vileness, and of the nature of his best works; as the Israelites in a good measure seemed to be, whose conviction is laboured in the following part of this chapter:

for thou art a stiffnecked people; refractory and unruly, like an heifer unaccustomed to the yoke, that draws back from it, and wriggles its neck out of it; so untoward and perverse were this people, and disobedient to the commands of God; wherefore there was no show of reason that they were put into the possession of Canaan for their righteousness; and to make it appear that they were such a people as here described, several instances are given.

Ver. 7. *Remember, and forget not how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness*, etc.] Aben Ezra remarks that this was after they journeyed from Horeb; but before they came thither, even as soon as, they were in the wilderness, they provoked the Lord, as by their murmuring for water at Marah, when they had been but three days in the wilderness; and for bread in the wilderness of Sin, and for water again at Rephidim; all which were before they came to Horeb or Sinai, and which agrees with what follows:

from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; though they had such a series of mercies, yet their life was a continued course of rebellion against the Lord: which is a sad character of them indeed, and given by one that thoroughly knew them, was an eyewitness of facts, and had a hearty respect for them too, and cannot be thought to exaggerate things; so that they were far from being righteous persons in themselves, nor was there any reason to conclude it was for their righteousness the land of Canaan was given them.

Ver. 8. *Also in Horeb ye provoked the Lord to wrath*, etc.] The word “also” shows that they had provoked him before, but this instance is given

as a very notorious one; here they made the golden calf and worshipped it, while Moses was on the mount with God, receiving instructions from him for their good. Near to this place a rock had been smitten for them, from whence flowed water for the refreshment of them and their cattle; here the Lord appeared in the glory of his majesty to them, and from hence, for it is the same mount with Sinai, the law was given to them in such an awful and terrible manner; and yet none of these things were sufficient to restrain them from provoking the Lord to wrath by their sins:

so that the Lord was angry with you, to have destroyed you; so very angry with them, and so justly, that he proposed to Moses to destroy them, and make of him a great nation in their stead, (⁽¹²²⁰⁾Exodus 32:10).

Ver. 9. *When I was gone up into the mount to receive the tables of stone*, etc.] The tables of the law, the same law which forbid idolatry, and which they had lately heard from the mouth of God himself: even

the tables of the covenant which the Lord made with you; which they had agreed unto, and solemnly promised they would observe and do, (⁽¹²⁴⁷⁾Exodus 24:7),

then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights; and this long stay was one reason of their falling into idolatry, not knowing what was become of him, (⁽¹²⁴⁸⁾Exodus 24:18 32:1).

I neither did eat bread nor drink water; all those forty days and nights, (⁽¹²⁴⁸⁾Exodus 34:28).

Ver. 10. *And the Lord delivered unto me two tables of stone, written with the finger of God*, etc.] The letters were of his devising and forming, the writing was his, the engraving them on the stones was his own doing; and which was done to show its original, to stamp a divine authority on it, and to denote its duration; (see ⁽¹³¹⁸⁾Exodus 31:18 32:16)

and on them was written according to all the words which the Lord spake with you in the mount; the ten commands, exactly in the same order, and in the same words, without any variation, as they were delivered to them with an articulate voice in their hearing; but now were written in this manner, that they might be read by them, and remain with them, (see ⁽¹³⁴⁸⁾Exodus 34:28)

out the midst of the fire; in which the Lord was, and whence he spake:

in the day of the assembly; when all the people of Israel were gathered together at the foot of the mount; (see ^{<1917>}Exodus 19:17 ^{<1940>}Deuteronomy 4:10-12).

Ver. 11. *And it came to pass at the end of forty days and forty nights*, etc.] The time of Moses's stay in the mount, when it was just up, and not before: that

the Lord gave me the two tables of stone, [even] the tables of the covenant, as in (^{<1940>}Deuteronomy 9:9). Aben Ezra observes, that this shows that the day the tables were given to Moses the calf was made.

Ver. 12. *And the Lord said unto me*, etc.] The omniscient God, who knew what was doing in the camp of Israel, though Moses did not, of which he informs him:

arise, get thee down quickly from hence; from the mount where he was; and the word "arise" does not suppose him to be sitting or lying along, neither of which postures would have been suitable, considering in whose presence he was; but is only expressive of urgency and haste of his departure; it is not used in (^{<1917>}Exodus 32:7)

for thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt, have corrupted themselves; their way, as the Targum of Jonathan; that is, by idolatry, than which nothing is more corrupting and defiling; the Lord calls them not his people, but the people of Moses, being highly displeased with them; and ascribes their coming out of Egypt to Moses the instrument, and not to himself, as if he repented of bringing them from thence:

they are quickly turned aside out of the way which I commanded them: it being but about six weeks ago, that the command forbidding idolatry, the sin they had fallen into, had been given them:

and they have made them a molten image; the image of a calf made of melted gold.

Ver. 13. *Furthermore the Lord spake unto me, saying*, etc.] After he had given him the two tables, and before his departure from the mount:

I have seen this people; took notice of them, their ways, and their works:

and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people; unwilling to submit to, and bear the yoke of my commandments; (see ^{<1917>}Exodus 32:9).

Ver. 14. *Let me alone, that I may destroy them*, etc.] Do not say one word to me on their behalf, or entreat me to spare them, and not destroy them:

and blot out their name from under heaven; that no such nation may be heard of, or known by the name of Israel:

and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they; of his family, whereby the Lord's promise to Abraham would not have been made void, but equally firm and sure, since this mightier and greater nation would have been of his seed; (see Gill on "⁽¹²²⁰⁾Exodus 32:10").

Ver. 15. *So I turned and came down from the mount*, etc.] As the Lord commanded:

and the mount burned with fire; as it had for six weeks past, ever since the Lord's descent upon it; and so it continued, for the words may be rendered, "and the mount was burning"^{f98}; and yet this did not deter the Israelites from idolatry:

and the two tables of the covenant were in my two hands: one table in one hand, and the other in the other hand.

Ver. 16. *And I looked*, etc.] When he was come down from the mount, and was nigh the camp:

and, behold, ye had sinned against the Lord your God; that plainly appeared by what they had done, and at which he was amazed; and therefore a behold is prefixed to it, it being such a gross sin, having so much impiety and ingratitude, and stupidity in it:

and made you a molten calf; that he saw with his eyes, and them dancing about it; (see ⁽¹²²⁰⁾Exodus 32:19)

ye had turned aside quickly out of the way which the Lord had commanded you; (see ⁽¹²²⁰⁾Deuteronomy 9:7).

Ver. 17. *And I took the two tables, and cast them out of my two hands*, etc.] In wrath and indignation at the sin they were guilty of:

and brake them before your eyes; as an emblem of their breach of them by transgressing them.

Ver. 18. *And I fell down before the Lord*, etc.] In prayer for Israel who had sinned; but this he did not immediately after he had broken the tables,

but when he had first ground the calf to powder, strewed it on the water, and made the children of Israel drink it; and when he had chided Aaron, and ordered the sons of Levi to slay every man his brother:

as at the first forty days and forty nights; which is to be connected, I think, not with what goes before; for we read not that he fell down before the Lord, at the first time he was with him so long in the mount; but with what follows: “I did neither eat bread nor drink water”; as he neither ate nor drank the first forty days, so neither did he these second forty; (see ⁽¹⁸⁰⁾Deuteronomy 9:9)

because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger; for they were guilty of more sins than one; besides idolatry, they were guilty of unbelief, ingratitude, etc. which were notorious and flagrant, were done openly and publicly, in sight of his glory and majesty on the mount; all which must be very provoking to him, and on account of these Moses prayed and fasted.

Ver. 19. *For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure wherewith the Lord was wrath against you*, etc.] Which was exceeding vehement, as appeared by his words to Moses, forbidding to intercede for them, that he might consume them, and make of him a greater nation; wherefore he dreaded the issue of it, lest it should be

to destroy you; that that should be his full resolution and determination; however, he made use of means, and betook himself to fasting and prayer; so heartily affected was he to this people when his temptations lay another way:

but the Lord hearkened unto me at that time also; as he had at other times, when this people had sinned, and he entreated for them; in which he was a type of Christ, the Mediator and Advocate, whom the Father always hears.

Ver. 20. *And the Lord was very angry with Aaron, to have destroyed him*, etc.] For complying with the request of the people in making a calf for them, and for that miserable shift he made to excuse himself; which so provoked the Lord, that he threatened to destroy him, and he was in danger of being cut off, had it not been for the intercession of Moses:

and I prayed for Aaron also the same time: who either was included in the general prayer for the people, (⁽¹⁸¹⁾Exodus 32:31) or a particular prayer was made for him, though not recorded, and which also succeeded.

Ver. 21. *And I took your sin, the calf which ye had made*, etc.] Which was the object of their sin, which lay in making and worshipping it; (see ^{<2310>}Isaiah 31:7)

and burnt it with fire, and stamped it; with his feet after it was burnt, to bring it into small pieces:

and ground it very small; or, as the Targum of Jonathan,

“ground it in a mortar well;”

the burnt and broken pieces:

even until it was as small as dust; being ground to powder, as in (^{<0320>}Exodus 32:20)

and I cast the dust thereof into the brook that descended out of the mount; and made the children of Israel to drink of it, as in the previously mentioned place; (see Gill on “^{<0320>}Exodus 32:2”); all this was done before the prayer for Aaron and the people.

Ver. 22. *And at Taberah, and at Massah, and at Kibrothhattaavah, ye provoked the Lord to wrath.*] These places are not mentioned in the strict order in which the provocations were made at them; for they provoked the Lord at Massah by murmuring for water, before they provoked him at Taberah, by complaining as it should seem of their journeying; for Massah was before they came to Sinai, and Taberah after they departed from thence; though some, as Aben Ezra observes, say that Taberah is Massah; but it could not be the Massah in Rephidim, for that was on one side of Mount Sinai, and Taberah on another; though different places might be so called from their tempting the Lord at them; rather Taberah and Kibrothhattaavah seem to be the same; where the people died with the flesh in their mouths they lusted after, and were buried; since no mention is made of their removal at that time from the one place to the other, nor of Taberah in the account of their journeys, only Kibrothhattaavah; (see ^{<0170>}Exodus 17:7 ^{<0410>}Numbers 11:8,34).

Ver. 23. *Likewise when the Lord sent you from Kadeshbarnea*, etc.] From whence the spies were sent to search the land, though previous to it they had the following order to go up and possess it; (see ^{<0308>}Numbers 32:8 ^{<0519>}Deuteronomy 1:19-21)

saying, go up and possess the land which I have given you; this they were bid to do, before they desired the spies might be sent to search it first; and after they had returned and made their report, they were encouraged to go up and take possession of it:

then ye rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God; refusing to go up into it: and ye believed him not; that he would cast out and destroy the inhabitants of it, and put them into the possession of it; which they distrusted by reason of the gigantic stature of some that dwelt in it, and their fortified cities:

nor hearkened to his voice; whether commanding or encouraging.

Ver. 24. *You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you.*] Either from the time he first had and took knowledge of them and visited them, before his departure from Egypt to the land of Midian; ((see ^{<4021>}Exodus 2:11-14) compared with (^{<4025>}Acts 7:25)); or from the time that he was sent to them to deliver them out of Egypt; (see ^{<4050>}Exodus 5:20,21) and especially from the time he brought them into the wilderness.

Ver. 25. *Thus I fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights, as I fell down at the first*, etc.] Which Jarchi says are the selfsame said above, (^{<4098>}Deuteronomy 9:18), but doubled or repeated, because of the order of his prayer. The words “at the first” are not in the text; and, as before observed, we do not read that Moses fell down at the first forty days he was in the mount, unless it can be thought he did, (^{<4021>}Exodus 32:11), wherefore this falling down seems to be as he fell down at the second forty days; and so this was a third forty days, according to the Jewish writers, and of which opinion were Dr. Lightfoot and others; (see Gill on ^{<4048>}Exodus 34:28”),

because the Lord had said he would destroy you; threatened them with destruction, and seemed as if it was his intention to destroy them; nay, even after Moses’s first prayer, though he bid him go and lead the people on, yet he declared that he would visit their sin upon them, (^{<4024>}Exodus 32:34).

Ver. 26. *And I prayed therefore unto the Lord*, etc.] What follows is a different prayer from that in (^{<4023>}Exodus 32:31,32) and agrees better with that in (^{<4091>}Deuteronomy 9:11,10,13), delivered before he came down from the mount, yet could not be the same, because delivered at another forty days and nights:

and said, O Lord God, destroy not thy people, and thine inheritance: because they were his inheritance, a people whom he had chosen for his peculiar treasure; this is the first argument used, another follows:

which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness; redeemed out of the house of bondage, the land of Egypt, by his great power, as next explained:

which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand: inflicting plagues on the Egyptians, particularly destroying their firstborn, which made them the Israelites urge to depart.

Ver. 27. *Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,* etc.] The covenant he had made with them, the promises he had made to them of the multiplication of their seed, and of giving the land of Canaan to them; which is a third argument used with the Lord not to destroy them:

look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin; nor to the natural temper and disposition of the people, which was to be stubborn, obstinate, stiffnecked, and self-willed; nor to their wickedness, which appears in various instances; nor to that particular sin of idolatry they had now been guilty, of; tacitly owning that if God looked to these things, there was sufficient reason to destroy them.

Ver. 28. *Lest the land whence thou broughtest us out say,* etc.] The land of Egypt, the inhabitants of it;

because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them; the land of Canaan, the inhabitants of it being so mighty, and their cities so strongly fortified. Here Moses expresses his concern for the glory of God, and the honour of his perfections, and makes that a fourth argument why he should not destroy them:

and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them in the wilderness; out of Egypt, a plentiful country, into a wilderness where nothing was to be had; but his choice of them for his inheritance, his redemption of them out of bondage and misery, the care he took of them, and the provision he had made for them in the wilderness, clearly showed that they were not the objects of his hatred, but of his love.

Ver. 29. *Yet they are thy people,* etc.] Though they had sinned against him:

and thine inheritance; which he would not forsake and cast off; at least Moses hoped on this account he would not, and makes use thereof as an

argument with him why he should not, and which he repeats, adding in effect what he had said before:

which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power and stretched out arm; even out of the land of Egypt; the doing of which was plainly the effect of his almighty power, and an evidence of it, considering the weakness of Israel and the strength of Egypt, and the manner in which the Lord brought about this surprising event.