DEUTERONOMY

Chapter 9

*Not Because of Israel’s Righteousness*

**Hear, O Israel. You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. 2 The people are strong and tall—Anakites! You know about them and have heard it said: “Who can stand up against the Anakites?” 3 But be assured today that the Lord your God is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire. He will destroy them; he will subdue them before you. And you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly, as the Lord has promised you. 4 After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, “The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.” No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you. 5 It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. 6 Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.**

**9:1–12** The theme of this section of Scripture could be summarized as “By grace you have been saved” (Eph 2:5). (TLSB)

**9:1** *Hear, O Israel.* See note on 4:1. (CSB)

*today*. Previously, the Israelites’ disobedience had delayed their entry into the Promised Land. (TLSB)

*fortified up to heaven*. Hyperbole depicting the strength of the Canaanites. (TLSB)

**9:2** *Anakites.* See note on 1:28. (CSB)

The Israelites felt helpless fighting against the Anakim, but God would fight their battles for them. (TLSB)

**9:3** *devouring fire.* See 4:24; see also note on Ex 24:17. (CSB)

 *he will subdue them before you … you will drive them out.* The Lord not only went ahead of the Israelites, but he also exerted his power alongside them and through them to assure victory. The Lord’s involvement, together with that of the Israelite armies, continues throughout Deuteronomy and the conquest narratives. (CSB)

**9:4** *because of my righteousness.* See note on 7:8. (CSB)

God destroyed the Anakim because they were wicked. The Israelites needed to understand that the land was given to them by God’s grace and not because of any righteousness they possessed. (TLSB)

*wickedness of these nations.* See note on Ge 15:16. (CSB)

**9:6, 13** *stiff-necked.* See 10:16; 31:27; see also note on Ex 32:9. (CSB)

An expression God used some 40 years earlier during the golden calf incident (cf Ex 32:9). (TLSB)

*The Golden Calf*

**7 Remember this and never forget how you provoked the Lord your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the Lord. 8 At Horeb you aroused the Lord’s wrath so that he was angry enough to destroy you. 9 When I went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the Lord had made with you, I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water. 10 The Lord gave me two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God. On them were all the commandments the Lord proclaimed to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day of the assembly. 11 At the end of the forty days and forty nights, the Lord gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant. 12 Then the Lord told me, “Go down from here at once, because your people whom you brought out of Egypt have become corrupt. They have turned away quickly from what I commanded them and have made a cast idol for themselves.” 13 And the Lord said to me, “I have seen this people, and they are a stiff-necked people indeed! 14 Let me alone, so that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven. And I will make you into a nation stronger and more numerous than they.” 15 So I turned and went down from the mountain while it was ablaze with fire. And the two tablets of the covenant were in my hands. 16 When I looked, I saw that you had sinned against the Lord your God; you had made for yourselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. You had turned aside quickly from the way that the Lord had commanded you. 17 So I took the two tablets and threw them out of my hands, breaking them to pieces before your eyes. 18 Then once again I fell prostrate before the Lord for forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water, because of all the sin you had committed, doing what was evil in the Lord’s sight and so provoking him to anger. 19 I feared the anger and wrath of the Lord, for he was angry enough with you to destroy you. But again the Lord listened to me. 20 And the Lord was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time I prayed for Aaron too. 21 Also I took that sinful thing of yours, the calf you had made, and burned it in the fire. Then I crushed it and ground it to powder as fine as dust and threw the dust into a stream that flowed down the mountain. 22 You also made the Lord angry at Taberah, at Massah and at Kibroth Hattaavah. 23 And when the Lord sent you out from Kadesh Barnea, he said, “Go up and take possession of the land I have given you.” But you rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. You did not trust him or obey him. 24 You have been rebellious against the Lord ever since I have known you. 25 I lay prostrate before the Lord those forty days and forty nights because the Lord had said he would destroy you. 26 I prayed to the Lord and said, “O Sovereign Lord, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power and brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 27 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin. 28 Otherwise, the country from which you brought us will say, ‘Because the Lord was not able to take them into the land he had promised them, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the desert.’ 29 But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm.”**

**9:7, 27** *Remember.* See note on 4:10. (CSB)

**9:9** *tablets of stone … of the covenant.* See notes on Ex 20:1; 34:28. (CSB)

The Ten Commandments. (TLSB)

**9:10** *two stone tablets.* See note on Ex 31:18. (CSB)

 *finger of God.* See note on Ex 8:19. (CSB)

**9:11–21** See Ex 31:18–32:20. (CSB)

**9:12** *your people*. God spoke as though Israel belonged to Moses. The sin of the Israelites distanced them from the Lord. (TLSB)

 **9:1–12** God will soon lead the Israelites into Canaan, a land that 40 years earlier they had called unconquerable. But God Himself will lead the charge with “consuming fire” (v 3). Israel’s victory will not be based on their righteousness; neither are the blessing and victory we receive Our salvation came at a terrible price: it cost God the life of His Son, a gift we are to remember in Holy Communion until Christ comes again in His glory (1Co 11:26). • Heavenly Lord, let us never boast of the works of our hands. Everything we have is a precious gift of grace from You, through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

**9:13–21** Moses retells the golden calf incident. The order is not chronological, as detailed in Ex 32, but only gives highlights. (TLSB)

**9:14** God’s anger burned so strongly against the Israelites that He wanted to destroy them for their gross idolatry and raise up another people to take their place. (Consider how God totally destroyed all but eight people during the great flood; cf Gn 6–8.) (TLSB)

**9:15** *burning with fire*. A theophany marked God’s presence on Mount Sinai (Ex 19:16). (TLSB)

**9:17** *broke them before your eyes*. Several Near Eastern treaties contain provisions that if the treaty is broken, the other party may burn or smash the treaty document in a public confirmation that the treaty had been broken. (TLSB)

**9:18** Moses fasted an additional 40 days and 40 nights, confessing the people’s sin of idolatry. God was sustaining his life during the meditation. (TLSB)

**9:19** *But again the Lord listened to me.* Moses’ intercessory prayer on this occasion (vv. 26–29) ranks among the great prayers for Israel’s national survival (see 1Sa 7:5, 8–9; Jer 15:1). (CSB)

Moses offered intercessory prayers on Israel’s behalf. (TLSB)

**9:20** *so angry*. Mel: “Let us [not] imagine that God is made of stone or is a stoic.… God was angry at Aaron and … at that time Aaron was not in a state of grace but was guilty of eternal punishment. We must shrink in horror from the fall of Aaron” (Chem, *LTh* 1:310). (TLSB)

*I prayed for Aaron*. Cyr Jer: “Shall not Jesus, His Only-begotten, prevail with God when He prays for us?… Only, O man, repent also in like manner, and grace is not forbidden you” (*NPNF* 2 7:10). (TLSB)

**9:21** *brook*. Today no brook is found on Mount Sinai. Low-growing bushes at the base of the mountain indicate that moisture is present. (TLSB)

**9:22** *Taberah.* See Nu 11:3 and NIV text note. (CSB)

Where some Israelites complained and God destroyed them by fire. (TLSB)

 *Massah.* See 6:16; 33:8; see also note on Ex 17:7. (CSB)

Where the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord over the lack of water. (TLSB)

 *Kibroth Hattaavah.* See Nu 11:34 and NIV text note. (CSB)

Where some Israelites were struck down by a plague because they grumbled to the Lord for lack of meat. (TLSB)

**9:23** *Kadesh Barnea.* See note on Ge 14:7. (CSB)

**9:25** Time after time, we see Moses falling down to pray that God would forgive His rebellious people. Moses provides a model for intercessory prayer, the ultimate of which is seen in Christ’s High Priestly Prayer (Jn 17). (TLSB)

**9:26** *redeemed through Your greatness*. Moses recognized and acknowledged that the exodus deliverance was by God’s grace (TLSB)

**9:27** *Overlook.* See note on Ac 17:30. (CSB)

*Do not regard*. Hbr wording requests that God not “turn His face toward” the sin Israel has committed. By not noting these sins, God graciously withholds the punishment the people deserve.

 **9:13–29** By retelling the story of the golden calf (Ex 32), Moses teaches a new generation about the consequences of disobeying God’s commands. The entire nation was about to forfeit their status as God’s chosen people. But God mercifully turned away from their sin. Today, God still calls His people to come before Him and seek His forgiveness in order that He might “cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jn 1:9). • Loving Father, each sin we commit brings tears to Your eyes. By our own actions, we separate ourselves from You. Look past our faults to see the gracious intercession of Your Son at Calvary. Amen. (TLSB)