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A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

A LAND GIVEN BY GRACE (9:1–11:32)

The Place of the Passage

Moses has saved for last the two biggest spiritual tests that will challenge Israel's relationship with the Lord. The first concerns Israel's view of themselves: If they defeat the Canaanites, does that mean Israel is more righteous than they? Lest they fall prey to this thinking, Moses confronts them with their stubbornness (9:1–10:11). The second test concerns Israel's view of God: Will they forget all that he has done for them and give their hearts to other gods? In 10:12–11:32 Moses urges them to break with their past stubbornness and give their hearts wholly to the God who has so generously loved them.

The Big Picture

Instead of making empty boasts about their righteousness, Israel should recall their past sins with grief, dedicating themselves to wholehearted obedience so that they might enjoy the land God is giving them.

Gospel Glimpses

JESUS THE MEDIATOR. In chapter 9 Moses recalls how the Lord offered him a chance to be rid of the people whose grumblings had so provoked him to anger and despair. God even offered him the chance to be the head of a new people, who would be named after him (9:14). Yet he does not accept the Lord's offer, instead choosing a much harder route of fasting and prayer—for an additional 40 days (9:18). His prayer in verses 26–29 shows that his passion for the Lord's reputation among the nations and his zeal for the Lord's fidelity to his promises far outweighs Moses' own aspirations for glory and honor. This same heart is seen in even greater majesty in the Lord Jesus Christ, our intercessor. When faced with the cross, He prays, "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your Name" (John 12:27–28). And today, because His zeal for the Father's glory drove Him to the Cross, He is presently praying that the Father would not regard our sin but that the benefits of the Cross might be ours instead (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:24).

THE LAND GIVEN IN SPITE OF ISRAEL. Deuteronomy 9:5–10:12 answers one key question: why does Israel get to enjoy the Promised Land? The Israelites flatter themselves with the lie that it is because they are so righteous, as though they deserved the land (9:4). But Moses bluntly contradicts this delusion. The real reason

for their receiving the land is that the nations who previously occupied it woefully deserved judgment, and God had graciously promised the land to Israel's forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) long ago (9:5). But Moses dedicates the bulk of his words (9:6–24) to showcasing Israel's horrific sin. If they deserved anything, it was judgment (see 11:16–17). When the Lord graciously acquiesces in 10:1–12 to continue the journey toward the land, we realize it is not because of Israel that they receive the land but in spite of them. This is grace—to receive blessing when they instead deserved death. Christians receive their inheritance by the same principle: we were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked (Ephesians 2:1–2), but God made us alive in Christ all the same (Ephesians 2:5): “By grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8).

Theological Soundings

ISRAEL'S SINFULNESS. Moses makes a bold generalization when he says, “You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you” (9:24). His primary example is the sin involving the golden calf at Sinai—a flagrant defiance of the prohibition against images in Exodus 20:4–6. But he also says that the same kind of rebellion characterized the whole time in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 9:22–23), a claim well supported by the book of Numbers. For this reason, Israel deserves to be called “stubborn”, for stubborn people refuse to change their ways even after repeated correction. Israel may be circumcised in their flesh, but their hearts are uncircumcised—that is, unredeemed (10:18). The inability of Israel to repent raises the question of whether they will ever keep God's law, a question to which we will return. But for now, notice that the condition of Israel is the condition of all humanity. Our sin is not a shallow cut but a terminal cancer. Indeed, so advanced is sin's corrupting power that apart from Christ we are dead in our trespasses and the uncircumcision of our sinful nature (Colossians 2:13).

ELECTION. God chose Israel apart from any worthiness in themselves. Indeed, He delights to triumph through a small, sinful people that did not even exist as an independent country before He delivered them (Deuteronomy 4:34; 7:7; 9:24). And yet, we wonder at the mystery of why God would choose to bless some unworthy people and not others. In response to this question, all that God offers is the cryptic phrase that He “set his heart in love on your fathers” (Deuteronomy 10:15). He does not reveal to us the reasons for his electing love, although it does encourage us that He loves us so graciously (29:29). But we must never confuse election with favoritism. God is not partial (10:17), and He holds Israel to the same standards of holiness as He does the rest of the nations. Election is a very difficult teaching in Scripture, and in studying it we are ultimately flung back on God's character. If God chooses some and not others, we must trust that this is somehow an expression of His goodness and justice, and in the end we will praise Him for it (Romans 9:21–24). And that, ultimately, is the purpose for the Bible's teaching on election: to replace empty boasts about ourselves with boasting about the richness of God's mercy in Christ.

Whole Bible Connections

LAND. The Old Testament spends a lot of time talking about the Promised Land. Inheritance of this land is one of the most important promises God made to Abraham (Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8), and as we have already seen several times in Deuteronomy, this land promise continues to drive God's gracious dealings toward Israel (Deuteronomy 1:8; 9:5; 10:11). What becomes of the land promise in the New Testament? How does Jesus, who came to fulfill the promises to Abraham (Luke 1:73; Galatians 3:14), fulfill this all-important promise? The answer becomes clear when we consider how the New Testament speaks of the inheritance Christ has won for His people. The heirs of Abraham are those who have the faith of Abraham, whether Jew or Gentile (Romans 4:11–12; Galatians 3:29). This new covenant people of God receives nothing less than eternal life in the entire new creation: the new heavens and the new earth (Matthew 25:34; Romans 4:13; Titus 3:7; Revelation 21:1–3). They are coheirs with Christ, who has received all things from His Father (Matthew 28:18; Romans 8:17; Ephesians 1:22). As it happens, this better inheritance is what Abraham himself was seeking all along (Hebrews 11:10, 16). One can hardly accuse God of failing to deliver on his promise when He has gone so far above and beyond what He originally said: the ultimate, new covenant people of God receive not a portion of the old creation but the entirety of the new creation. God loves to “hyper-fulfill” (go above and beyond) his ancient promises.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Gentile: A non-Jew.

Please answer the following questions:

Chapter 9

1. What command does God give to Israel? (v 1)
2. How will God destroy their enemies? (v. 3)
3. It is not the righteousness of Israel, but what of their enemies that causes God to drive them out? (vv. 4-7)
4. What terrible thing had they done at Horeb? (vv. 7-8)
5. The LORD would have destroyed them all, but who begged for their lives? (vv. 25-29)
6. How long did Moses fast on the mountain? (v. 18)
7. How were the tables of stone written? (v. 10)
9. What reaction did Moses have? (vv. 15-17)
8. What did Moses do to the idol shaped as a calf? (vv. 15-21)

10. What prevented the Lord from destroying Israel? (vv. 22-29)

11. What was different about the ten commandments on the tables of stone, the second time Moses got them? (v. 9)

12. Who did Moses tell God to remember? (v. 27)

13. What would the nations around think, if God killed the Israelites? (v. 28)

14. Who do these people really belong to? (v. 29)

15. How are we, Christians, like the Israelites?

Chapter 10

1. Who was separated to carry the ark and pronounce blessings? (v. 8)

2. What belongs to God? (v. 14)

3. What causes does the Lord defend? (vv. 18-19)

4. Who must prepare the two tables of stone this time? (vv. 3-5)

5. Where did Aaron die? (v. 6)
6. Who ministered in Aaron's place? (v. 6)
7. How long did Moses stay on the mountain the second time? (v. 10)
8. Why was God willing to still give them the Promised Land? (v. 11)
9. The commandments are for whose benefit? (vv. 12-13)
10. Why should they love the stranger? (vv. 14-21)

Chapter 11

1. What rains would the Lord give them if they hearkened unto his commandments? (vv. 13-14)
2. Why does the author believe Moses is repeating this? (v. 1-7)
3. What must they have within, to possess the land? (v. 11)
4. How long will the land be theirs? (v. 20)

5. How were they assured of a crop to eat in Egypt? (v. 10)
6. How did this land differ from Egypt? (v. 11)
7. What is verse 12 speaking of? (v. 12)
8. What special promise did God make to the Israelites? (v. 14)
9. What, spiritually, do the former and latter rains mean? (v. 14-15)
10. The Word of God is in our what? (v. 18)
11. If their enemies are larger and greater than Israel, why do they fear Israel? (v. 25)
12. What two things did Moses set before them? (v. 26)
13. How can they choose to be blessed? (v. 27)
14. What two mountains were mentioned? (v. 29)
15. Which of them symbolized life? (vv. 30-31)