

We Are a Stiff-Necked People – Deuteronomy 9:1-29

Introduction – In Chapter 8 God addressed the sin of forgetfulness: forgetting the goodness of God. In Chapter 9 He addresses the sin of forgetfulness: forgetting our own rebelliousness. They are warned about the temptation of self-righteous arrogance that comes with victory, even impending victory. This is a humiliating chapter reviewing the obstinacy of the people of God. Yet, even in this brutally honest account, the great gospel of God's mercy shines.

Not Because of Your Righteousness (vv1-6) – The odds makers would not favor Israel being victorious over the Canaanites (vv1-2), but God makes clear that all bets should be placed on the underdog because through them He will destroy the giants. When victory comes, the weapons should not jump up and down as though they did it; they were just the weapons (v3). The next temptation will be to think that their victory was a divine reward because of their righteousness or at least their relative righteousness (v4). Nothing could be further from the truth (v5). God had promised Abraham that when the fullness of the wickedness of the Canaanites had come, His descendants would take the land (Gen 15:16).

Universal Tendency – This moral self-righteousness that looks in the mirror and thinks pretty highly of oneself is breaking the first commandment; it is worship of another god. “*If I am not perfectly righteous, I am at least more righteous than so-and-so*” is the mindset that keeps so many from trusting alone in Christ. But Toplady got it right: “*Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling. Naked, come to Thee for dress; helpless, look to Thee for grace. Foul I to the Fountain fly; wash me Savior or I die.*”

The Rebellious Chosen Ones (vv7-24) – God's people were stiff-necked, rebellious, and stubborn. And God was not saying this because of only a single incident (v7). Moses says, “*You have been rebellious against Yahweh since I knew you*” (v24). He then lists several incidents as evidence, beginning with their provocation at Horeb. Moses went up the mountain, miraculously fasted, and received the tablets of stone also called the tablets of the covenant (vv8-11). While Moses was there, the people made a molten image and were engaging in idolatry and debauchery. God threatened to destroy them (vv12-16, same word used of the Canaanites, v3). The covenant tablets are then broken on day one before the people and Moses falls down, interceding for the people because of God's hot displeasure for another forty days (vv17-19). He prays as well for Aaron over his rebellious leadership (v20). Moses then burned and ground the golden calf into powder and threw it into the water (v21). Finally Moses cites several other rebellious actions of unbelief and disobedience, proving that this incident at Horeb was no one-time fluke (vv22-23).

Intercession of Moses (vv18-19, 25-29) – Moses understood that there was no righteousness in the people upon which he could plead for God to turn away His wrath. But he turns and pleads with God nonetheless. Instead, he pleads on behalf of God Himself. The people were *His people* and *His inheritance* (v26, as opposed to v12, “*your people*”). God had redeemed them out of Egypt by His mighty hand (v26) according to the promises made to Abraham (v27) and so His own reputation and vows were at stake (vv26-28). His name, His glory, and His fame were the reasons Moses entreated for their salvation.

The Gospel of God and His Glory – Israel's story is our story as well. We have been chosen by the Father “*to the praise of the glory of His grace*” (Eph 1:6), redeemed through the mediation and sacrifice of Another “*to the praise of His glory*” (Eph 1:11), and sealed by the Holy Spirit “*to the praise of His glory*” (Eph 1:14). We were as good as dead in our trespasses, and He made us alive together with Christ (Eph 2:5).

Another “Filling Up” – Israel came to the land at the appointed time of the filling up of the wickedness of the Canaanites. Christ came in the fullness of time as well (Gal 4:3-5). He told Israel that their wickedness had reached a fullness in that generation (Matt 23:31-35) and that judgment had come upon the land. But the land of Canaan/Palestine was only a down payment of all that Abraham was promised (Rom 4:13), for his spiritual seed would inherit the whole world. And so the Church is called upon to drive out unbelief and disobedience from the whole world (Matt 28:18-20). She will be victorious, not because of her own righteousness, but through faith in her Lord Who will bring praise to the glory of His grace.

The Intercession of Christ – While the world is condemned in her sin and worthy of destruction, Jesus Christ is our Great Intercessor Who has provided for our redemption. Just as God did not actually destroy Israel as He threatened (Deut 9:14) and make a new people, so He has not destroyed the world and yet it has been made new (2 Cor 5:15-21). This is true for every individual as well who finds themselves to have died and now alive in Christ through faith (Gal 2:19-21). The New Israel, the new humanity, the new heavens and new earth, are not new in the sense of God starting over. They are new in that they have died, have been buried, and have risen again in Christ – they are remade, they are born again.

Moses fell prostrate in the gap on behalf of a rebellious people and called upon God to glorify His name by having mercy on them. He did, but the people still later rebelled and Israel fell. A Greater than Moses has come and He hung in the gap on behalf of a rebellious people, called upon God to glorify His name by having mercy on them. But this time, the perfect sacrifice was made, once for all – and salvation has come to all rebellious nations.