

Why Did God Bring Israel into the Land?

Deuteronomy 9

Deuteronomy 9:1-17 - *"Hear, O Israel: You are to cross over the Jordan today, and go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourself, cities great and fortified up to heaven, ² a people great and tall, the descendants of the Anakim, whom you know, and of whom you heard it said, 'Who can stand before the descendants of Anak?' ³ Therefore understand today that the Lord your God is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as the Lord has said to you.*

⁴*"Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land'; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you. ⁵ It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ⁶ Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.*

⁷*"Remember! Do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. ⁸ Also in Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry enough with you to have destroyed you. ⁹ When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. ¹⁰ Then the Lord delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. ¹¹ And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, that the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.*

¹²*"Then the Lord said to me, 'Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly; they have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them; they have made themselves a molded image.' ¹³ 'Furthermore the Lord spoke to me, saying, 'I have seen this people, and indeed they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁴ Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.' ¹⁵ 'So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire; and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. ¹⁶ And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the Lord your God—had made for yourselves a molded calf! You had turned aside quickly from the way which the Lord had commanded you.¹⁷ Then I took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes."*

Background Notes

Deuteronomy 9 continued the second major address that Moses gave to the children of Israel as they camped on the plains of Moab, ready to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

Verse 1 contains “hyperbole” - an acceptable figure of speech, in which exaggeration is purposely used to get a point across. Deuteronomy 9:1 says that the cities of Canaan were great cities, “*fortified up to heaven.*” That’s hyperbole! The walls of Jericho were strong and high - but not literally up to heaven! “Sons of Anak” (v2) was a tribe of Canaanites of large stature.

Another figure of speech, “anthropomorphism,” was used in verse 10. God does not have fingers! “*Written with the finger of God*” is an anthropomorphic expression meaning the stone tablets were the work of God, entirely apart from any human agency. In reference to the whole Mosaic Law of the Old Testament, Moses wrote down the laws as the Lord revealed them to him - but the giving of the Ten Commandments was unique. In a miraculous way, God directly inscribed those commandments on the two tablets of stone.

In verse 14 God said to Moses, “*Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven.*” In the expression “*blot out their name from under heaven,*” there is no idea here (or in any other part of the Bible) of “annihilation.” The Bible does not teach cessation of existence. It teaches the eternal existence of both the saved and the lost. In Deuteronomy 9:14, the Lord meant He wished He could terminate His relationship with the people He had brought out of Egypt, and begin a new nation with Moses as its head.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord brought Israel into the Land because of the wickedness of the Canaanites.

God had promised to bring the children of Israel into the Land and destroy their enemies (v3), but He certainly wanted them to know that this was not a reward for their good behavior! Rather, His reason was to punish the wickedness of the pagan Canaanites. In Genesis 15 God told Abraham that his descendants would be in Egypt for 400 years because the iniquity of the Amorites (Canaanites) was not yet complete (Genesis 15:16). Now it was time for the axe to fall as Israel conquered the Land. But Israel was not to get the idea that God was rewarding them for their righteous living. No way! In fact they were a stubborn and rebellious people, and the forty years they spent in the wilderness was filled with rebellion and disobedience (v6-7).

Even at Mt. Sinai, while God was graciously giving His Law and Moses was fasting for forty days and forty nights on the mountain, the people made a molded calf idol as a “god” (v8-12)! It was at this point that the Lord said, “*I have seen this people, and indeed they are a stiff-necked people. Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from*

under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.” (v13-14). If you were Moses, what would you have said? I think I would have said, “Go ahead Lord. I don’t mind if you begin a great nation with me!” But Moses was a great leader, and he prayed for the people.

When Moses came down from the mountainside with the Law and saw the people dancing around the golden calf, he took the two stone tablets and smashed them before the people (v15-17). That reminds me of the time I smashed two large clay tablets in a Sunday school object lesson. I think we swept up clay fragments and dust from the church floor for hours! (That’s hyperbole!) So it’s clear that God’s promise of victory and possession of the Land was not given as some kind of reward for Israel. No way! The Lord brought Israel into the Land because of the wickedness of the Canaanites.

2. The Lord brought Israel into the Land because of the intercession of Moses.

Deuteronomy 9:18-29 - *“And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. ¹⁹ For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was angry with you, to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me at that time also. ²⁰ And the Lord was very angry with Aaron and would have destroyed him; so I prayed for Aaron also at the same time. ²¹ Then I took your sin, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it and ground it very small, until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that descended from the mountain.*

²² *“Also at Taberah and Massah and Kibroth Hattaavah you provoked the Lord to wrath. ²³ Likewise, when the Lord sent you from Kadesh Barnea, saying, ‘Go up and possess the land which I have given you,’ then you rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God, and you did not believe Him nor obey His voice. ²⁴ You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you.*

²⁵ *“Thus I prostrated myself before the Lord; forty days and forty nights I kept prostrating myself, because the Lord had said He would destroy you. ²⁶ Therefore I prayed to the Lord, and said: ‘O Lord God, do not destroy Your people and Your inheritance whom You have redeemed through Your greatness, whom You have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²⁷ Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not look on the stubbornness of this people, or on their wickedness or their sin, ²⁸ lest the land from which You brought us should say, “Because the Lord was not able to bring them to the land which He promised them, and because He hated them, He has brought them out to kill them in the wilderness.” ²⁹ Yet they are Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out by Your mighty power and by Your outstretched arm.”*

The “forty days and forty nights” in verses 18 and 25 referred to the *second* set of forty days and forty nights that Moses spent with the Lord on Mt. Sinai. The first set of days was in verse 9; then Moses came down from the mountain and smashed the tablets of the Law. This second “forty days and forty nights” was after the sorrowful golden calf event. In

both sets of “forty days and forty nights” Moses practiced a total fast - neither food nor water. That could only be done with the miraculous help of the Lord.

Moses destroyed the golden calf, ground it to dust, and threw the dust into the brook (v21). Exodus 32 says that Moses even forced the people to drink the water. Then about 3000 people were executed for their idolatry, and even Aaron was about to be destroyed. Only by the mercy of God and the intercession of Moses, Aaron and the nation were spared – not only at Mt. Sinai, but at other times of rebellion throughout the 40 years of wilderness wanderings (v22-23).

Verse 24 sums up the overall history of Israel from Egypt to the plains of Moab. Again, the Lord was not bringing Israel into the Land as a reward for their righteousness. No! It was to remove the wicked Canaanites, and it was in answer to Moses’ many intercessory prayers. Moses spent the entire second “forty days and forty nights” asking the Lord to spare the people (v25-26).

Notice the threefold basis for Moses’ prayer of intercession (v26-29):

- a. He reminded the Lord that He would be destroying His own “inheritance” - the very people He redeemed out of Egypt by His great power (v26 & 29).
- b. He prayed on the basis of God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v27).
- c. He suggested that the Egyptians would conclude that God didn’t have enough power to bring the people into the Promised Land - or that He had only brought the people out of Egypt because He hated them and wanted to destroy them (v28).

And God listened to Moses’ prayers! The Lord brought Israel into the Land because of the intercession of Moses.

Practical Application

Watch out for religious pride!

When God is not even acknowledged, and success and prosperity are selfishly claimed as one’s own merit - that’s not religious pride. Religious pride is more subtle. God is acknowledged, but it’s assumed that He’s blessing you because of your righteousness - or because you *deserved* to be blessed. That’s the kind of pride Israel exhibited, and that pride angered God.

God hates religious pride. Even Christians can exhibit religious pride. Some Christians think that they’re living such a “good” life that God owes them a blessing. Some Christians think that if they’re successful and prosperous, surely that’s God’s stamp of approval on their lives and lifestyle. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Watch out for religious pride!