

The Book of Deuteronomy

Lesson 7: Not by Your Righteousness -- Deuteronomy 9:1–10:22

Imagine standing on the edge of the Jordan, looking across at walled cities that scrape the sky and at people so tall the spies once felt like grasshoppers. You have waited forty years for this moment. And just as your chest swells with the thought that surely you have earned it, Moses turns and says something that lands like cold water: “Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, “It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land.”” Friend, before God lets you take a single step forward, He wants to settle the question of why.

We love a good underdog story where the hero finally gets what he deserves. But Deuteronomy 9 refuses to be that story. Three times in three verses Moses says it plainly: not because of your righteousness. The land is coming to Israel because of the wickedness of those nations and because God swore an oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Israel is not the hero who earned the prize. Israel is the recipient of a promise and the object of mercy. That is a harder word and a sweeter one, all at once.

Then Moses does something bracing. He drags the memory of the golden calf back into the light. While God was writing the covenant in stone on the mountain, the people were melting their jewelry into an idol at the foot of it. Moses tells how he fell before the Lord forty days and forty nights, how he broke the tablets, how he pleaded for a people who deserved to be destroyed. This is the resume Israel actually carries across the river: not a record of righteousness but a record of rescue.

And here is why this ancient sermon still has your name on it. We are forever tempted to read our blessings as wages, to assume the good in our lives is the paycheck for the good in us. Deuteronomy 9 reaches across the centuries to loosen that grip. What if your standing before God was never about your goodness at all? What if it rested entirely on His promise and His mercy? That is not a smaller hope. It is the only hope steady enough to stand on when you finally see yourself clearly.

Group Discussion: Why do you think God was so insistent that Israel understand they were not entering the land because of their own righteousness, and what happens in a community when people quietly believe their blessings are wages they have earned?

Personal Reflection: Where in your own walk with God have you slipped into thinking He owes you something because of how you have lived, and how does the truth that your standing rests on His mercy rather than your merit change the way you come to Him?

Read Deuteronomy 9:1–10:22

Study Questions

1. According to Deuteronomy 9:1-3, what does Moses say about the nations Israel is about to dispossess, and who does he say will go before Israel to subdue them?
2. Moses warns Israel not to say in their hearts “because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in” (9:4). Where in your own thinking do you catch yourself crediting your standing with God to your own goodness?
3. In 9:4-6 Moses gives the real reasons Israel receives the land. What two reasons does he name, and what does he repeatedly insist is NOT the reason?
4. Moses calls Israel “a stubborn people” (9:6) and rehearses their rebellions. How does honestly facing your own record, rather than your imagined record, change the way you approach God?
5. Trace the account of the golden calf in 9:8-21. What were the people doing while Moses was on the mountain receiving the covenant, and what did Moses do with the tablets and the calf?
6. Moses fell before the Lord forty days and forty nights, eating no bread and drinking no water, interceding for the people (9:18,25). When have you carried someone before God like that, and whom might He be calling you to plead for now?

7. What do Moses' intercessory prayers in 9:26–29 and 10:10 reveal about the grounds on which he appeals to God, and what does that teach us about how God deals with His people?
8. In 10:12–13 Moses asks what the Lord requires: to fear Him, walk in His ways, love Him, and serve Him with all the heart. Which of these is hardest for you right now, and why?
9. In 10:16 Moses commands, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn", set within a passage that grounds Israel's standing in God's oath and mercy rather than their merit (9:4–6; 10:14–15). What does this whole section teach about righteousness as God's gift rather than human achievement, and how is that truth carried forward in Christ?
10. Looking back across Deuteronomy 9 and 10, name one specific way the Lord is using this passage to form humility in you and to teach you to rest in His mercy rather than your own record.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Exodus 32:1–14, the golden calf and Moses pleading for the people Moses recounts here; Romans 3:21–26, righteousness given as a gift through faith apart from earning it; Titus 3:4–7, saved not because of works done in righteousness but according to His mercy; Ephesians 2:8–10, saved by grace through faith, the gift of God, not a result of works; Deuteronomy 7:7–8, God set His love on Israel because He loved them and kept His oath, not because they were great