

Bound for the Promised Land

Deuteronomy 1:1-5

Introduction

Waze App, ETA, When Are We Going to Make It?

Deuteronomy 1:1-5

¹ These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the wilderness east of the Jordan—that is, in the Arabah—opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth and Dizahab. ² (It takes eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir road.)

³ In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the LORD had commanded him concerning them. ⁴ This was after he had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, and at Edrei had defeated Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth.

⁵ East of the Jordan in the territory of Moab, Moses began to expound this law, saying:

Exposition

Deuteronomy 1:1-5 is the preamble for the book of Deuteronomy. These verses provided invaluable details regarding the historical and geographical context in which the people of Israel heard the message from Moses. As we will see throughout our study of Deuteronomy, Moses was nearing the end of his life and he was preparing the next generation to enter into the Promised Land.

In order to understand the significance of the people entering into the Promised Land, we have to go back to **Genesis 12:1-7** where we find the LORD promising to make Abram's offspring a great nation that would dwell in the land that we know in the Old Testament as the "Promised Land." Genesis 12:1-7 says, "¹ The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ² 'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' ⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. ⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.'" So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. If you continue to read in Genesis, you will encounter these promises being repeated in **Genesis 17**, where the LORD again tells Abraham that He will make him a great nation and give them the "whole land" that was possessed by the Canaanite people.

Hundreds of years after the LORD made these promises to Abraham regarding His descendants, after Isaac was born, then Jacob, who was later renamed Israel, and after Israel had twelve sons who later became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel, and after the twelve tribes of Israel

were delivered from their slavery in Egypt by the LORD through His servant, Moses, the people of Israel were bound for the land that was promised to Abraham. As they began their journey, the LORD established a covenant with His people. The essence of that covenant can be found in **Exodus 19:3-6**, which says: ³ Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

The LORD established this covenant with His people so that they might fulfill the promise that was made to Abraham that through his seed, his offspring, “all the nations of the earth would be blessed.” In brief, God made a promise to Abraham that through his offspring all of the nations of the earth would be blessed. In other words, God chose Abraham and Israel for the purpose of blessing all the inhabitant of the earth through them, and part of that blessing included inheriting the land of Canaan.

Thus, the great nation that the LORD had promised to Abraham in Genesis 12 was on the move to inherit the land that the LORD had likewise promised Abraham for his descendants. And Moses, the LORD’s servant was responsible for leading them into that Promised Land, yet the journey to the promised land was fraught with problems. The generation of Israelites that had been delivered from Egyptian slavery and constituted as the “great nation” promised in Genesis 12 was prone to disbelief and idolatry. They would question God’s goodness and provision, even after He would work great miracles in their midst. In fact, the Exodus generation made it to the land of Canaan, but while spying out the land, all but two of the spies came back with bad reports about the land. While Caleb and Joshua believed that the LORD would give them victory over the “giants in the land of Canaan,” the other spies discouraged the people, warning them that they would be destroyed. The LORD was exceedingly displeased with the spies and the people’s faithless response.

The rebellion of the Exodus generation was so great that in **Numbers 14:20-25** we see the LORD telling Moses and Aaron that He will not allow the people to enter into the Promised Land. He said: ²⁰ The LORD replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. ²¹ Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, ²² not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times— ²³ not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. ²⁴ But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. ²⁵ Since the Amalekites and the Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea.” So, after being on the brink of entering into the Promised Land, because of their sin, rebellion, and faithlessness, the Exodus generation was turned away and forced to wander for 40 years until the time that their children could enter into what had been promised to their ancestors.

Deuteronomy 1:1-5 brings us to this point. As a long-suffering leader, a pastor of an unruly congregation, Moses is primed to deliver a final message to this new generation of people who will enter into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. It is interesting to note Moses' care and concern for such a difficult people. At one point in the book of Numbers, the LORD offered to destroy the whole nation with a plague and make Moses Himself into a "greater and stronger nation." Yet, Moses demonstrated greater concern for the glory of God than his own glory and interceded that God would spare them (Exodus 14:11-19).

By the time we reach Deuteronomy 1:1-5, Moses is tired, ready to be "gathered unto his people," but he knows that the people will need one last word. "Deuteronomy is Moses' last will and testament" (Sherwood, *Berit Olam*, 211). A concluding series of sermons to prepare them for life in a land that he longed to dwell in but never reached.

The essence of these opening words in Deuteronomy 1:1-5 introduces the audience to what they would need to know in order to enter into the land. For us, this morning, there is much that we can glean from these opening verses in Deuteronomy. For we, in a manner similar to the generation that Moses led right up to the brink of entering the Promised Land, are journeying on toward life in the New Jerusalem in the New Heavens and New Earth. We are passing through land that is not our home. We are exiles and sojourners looking forward to the day when we enter into the city of God.

As **Hebrews 11:10** tells us, "¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." As people living by faith, we acknowledge the truth of **Hebrews 11:13-16**, which say, "¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them." Such people confess with **Hebrews 13:14**, "¹⁴ For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."

Therefore, we, as Christians, share a similar experience and longing to enter into the fulness of God's promises like the audience of Deuteronomy 1:1-5. Thus, I believe there are at least four principles from Deuteronomy 1:1-5 that we should see and seek to live by as those journeying forward to the inheritance of God's promises:

1) Remember that your sins have consequences.

In **Deuteronomy 1:2**, we read that the journey that has taken the people 40 years to complete should have only taken 11 days. As a sidenote, it's worth mentioning that "modern travelers" have confirmed that this distance is correct (Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 127).

As commentator Raymond Brown has noted, "In other words, it might have all been accomplished in a few weeks. The additional, agonizing years, with all their extended pain, continuing hardship and unnecessary discomfort, were entirely due to their disobedience and rebellion of the people."

Because of the people's fear and lack of faith, they did not enter into the Promised Land forty years prior. It did not have to be the way it was, but the people chose to rebel against God. Their sins had consequences.

The author of Hebrews understood this reality when he wrote **Hebrews 12:1-2**, “¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Sin weighs us down. It slows our progress. It complicates our lives. It keeps us from running the race of the Christian faith with the speed and endurance that God has called us to. Sin typically promises a shortcut in terms of progress or pleasure, but it never delivers. Instead, it derails and distracts us from trusting in and pursuing after Christ. For example, the sin of adultery promises pleasure, but it ends in brokenness, pain, sorrow, and dissatisfaction. With the Israelites, their sin turned an 11-day journey into 40 years of wandering. For us, when we do not put aside “everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles us,” we incur, as the rest of Hebrews 12 teaches us, the discipline of God. Thus, we ought to remember that our sins have consequences. We should put them off as those who desire to live faithfully, committed to the journey toward God's promises.

2) Rejoice and Repent because God is patient with you.

While in the midst of reflecting upon the consequences of Israel's sin which led to them wandering for 40 years in the wilderness, we are also reminded that God tolerated 40 years of rebellion and grumbling so that He could fulfill His promise to His people.

God was and is patient. We see this not only in God's treatment of Israel in the wilderness, but also in places like **2 Peter 3:9**, which says, “⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” In **Romans 2:3-4**, Paul speaks of God's patience saying, “³ So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”

Just as God's patience with Israel was intended to turn their hearts back to Him, so with us, God is patient that we might repent of our sins. His patience should not cause us to persist in our rebellion but turn from our rebellion. You may be thinking, “You know, I've been getting away with sinning against God for a long time. Why should I change now?” Here's the reality, you have not gotten away with anything. In fact, Romans 2 tells us that you have actually been storing up wrath for yourself if you do not repent, which means, turn away from your sin. Instead of rejoicing that you have not been caught, you should be rejoicing this morning that you can be forgiven, if you turn from your sins and ask God to have mercy on you. While our sins have consequences in this life, they do not have to have eternal consequences because Christ willing

went to the cross to bear the consequence of our sin and rebellion.

3) See your need for God's instruction.

In Deuteronomy 1:1, 3, and 5, we read of Moses instructing all of Israel by speaking God's instruction to them. In fact, the language used in verse 5 is very close to the idea of Moses preaching God's instruction to the people. As they prepared to enter the land, they needed to hear God's Word for them. As one commentator noted, "Within the Bible itself, Deuteronomy is an exercise in biblical interpretation. As such, it serves as a model for all future generations of God's people" (Biddle, *Deuteronomy*, 16).

Again, in a similar way, we, as the people of God preparing to enter into the fulness of the promises of God, we need God's instruction. When the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about what the church in Ephesus needed, in **1 Timothy 4:11-16**, he told Timothy, "¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

When the church does not give due attention to the Word of God, the people of God suffer because they are ill-equipped to live in this world according to God's calling upon them. This is what Paul has in mind in **2 Timothy 3:1-4:5**, where he writes,

¹ But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

⁶ They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, ⁷ always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. ⁹ But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

¹⁰ You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹ persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evildoers and impostors will

go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

^{4:1} In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

As the people of God, we need the Word of God. We need to study it. We need to meditate on it. We need to hear it preached. For through His Word, God forms us and directs us for His glory and our good. As Christ Himself taught us in John 17, it is the Word of God that sanctifies by truth. The Word of God reveals the character of God to us. As we move forward, we need to be reminded daily of who God is and what He is capable of, lest we live like the generation that heard the reports of Promised Land from the fearful spies and chose to doubt God's provision and power. We are so prone to forget who is on our side, who is with us, as we journey forth into His promise. Believer, do you realize that God is with you? He is for you! He will fulfill His promised work in and for you. His Word will not fail. Oh how we need to hear and heed such instruction!

4) Recount the victories that God has already won in your life.

Deuteronomy 1:4 recounts God's victories over Israel's enemies under Moses' leadership. It was important for the Israelites to remember that God had already started to fulfill His promise to them by defeating Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan. It was part of the fulfillment. Knowing that the LORD had won these victories should have encouraged the people, strengthening their faith to move forward when a previous generation only saw the obstacles in front of them.

While there are many potential passages in the New Testament that could illustrate how this principle works for us, I can think of no other example greater than 1 Corinthians 15:50-58:

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must

clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

In Jesus, God has already declared victory over sin, death, and hell for all who put their trust in Him. Jesus’ death and resurrection mean that our greatest enemy has been defeated, even if he currently refuses to acknowledge His loss. The day is coming when the fulness of Christ’s victory will be revealed and all of the kingdom of darkness will fall, bowing to His Lordship, declaring that He is Lord! If we have placed our trust in Christ, the key battles have been won. There is no reason for us to doubt that God will be faithful and completely bring His promised salvation to fruition in our lives or in the lives of our loved ones that have gone before us. We have confidence that we will enter into all of God’s promises because of what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf. As 2 Corinthians 1:20 tells us, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.”

Conclusion

As we have read Deuteronomy 1:1-5, you can almost see the families gathering around to hear Moses deliver his final sermons before they enter into the land. The people are looking around, full of wonder and excitement. The scene is teeming with anticipation. They have heard about this land for decades from their parents who could not enter the land because of their lack of faith. But this generation was different. They would listen to Joshua. They would enter into the land and take possession of what was promised. Their minds set on what was coming!

As followers of Christ, **Colossians 3:1-4** points us to the same mindset: ¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Likewise, in the face of suffering and pain, Paul reminds us in **2 Corinthians 4:16-17**, “¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

We too are a people bound for the Promised Land, facing difficulties in this life while possessing an unfathomable hope of glory. We are headed for the New Heavens and the New Earth in the New Jerusalem. And we are all on the brink of entering into that glorious reality with the return of Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham, the One in whom, by faith, we are heirs (Gal. 3:29).

We possess and enjoy this inheritance through faith in Christ. Have you placed your faith in Jesus? In the one who qualifies us to share in the inheritance of eternal life? Have you turned to Jesus who sets sinners free from the slavery of their sin? Have you turned away from your sins, confessing that you need God's patient mercy to save you? Will you enter into this Promised Land when the time comes?