



## **History is a Delightful Necessity (Deuteronomy 1:6-18)**

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How many of you love history? How many of you would rather study anything but history? I am not here to alter your classroom preferences. To each his own. However, if you are a Christian, if you're a follower of Jesus, well then for you, history is a necessity and delightfully so. For you, history matters.

Think about it. What's the gospel? It's the good news of the person and work of Christ and all God has done *in history* to rescue us from sin and death. What is the Old Testament, the entire first half of the Bible? A history of God's dealings with his people given to inform and guide our own relationship with him.

1 Cor 10:11-12, "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

There is nothing new under the sun, my friends. The mistakes God's people made in the past are the same mistakes we make today. Yet history does significantly more than help us to avoid the sins and errors of men. History confronts us with the character and ways of God with whom there is "no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas 1:17). Biblical history in particular shouts of the faithfulness of God, that he is sovereign, loving, and wise, worthy of our trust, worthy of our obedience.

The book of Deuteronomy is part of that history, not only for us, but for the original listeners. It consists primarily of three sermons Moses preached to the Israelites in the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC. The first generation of Israelites whom the Lord delivered from slavery in Egypt is gone. They all died in the wilderness. The second generation is gathered around him, poised to enter the Promised Land.

They're about to make a critical decision. Will they obey God's Word, enter the land, remain faithful to the Lord, and receive the blessings he promised? Or will they fail just like their forefathers? The spiritual tension is palpable. So what does Moses do? He goes historical. He devotes the first 3 chapters to the history of God's relationship with Israel.

Why would he do that? Because Moses knows something that was true back then and is still true today. **God's faithfulness in the past empowers obedient trust in the present.** History is a delightful necessity because history confronts us with the faithfulness of God and compels us to follow him accordingly. The lessons Israel needed to learn from her story are the same lessons we need to remember in our own.

### **1) EXPERIENCING THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISES REQUIRES OBEDIENT TRUST**

Moses begins in v. 6 by rewinding to a moment 38 years earlier. Israel had been camped around Horeb (Mt. Sinai) for the better part of 2 years. The Lord did some amazing things there. He revealed the splendor of his glory. He made a covenant with them. He gave them the gift of the law. He manifested his presence in their midst by taking up residence in a tabernacle or tent in the middle of the camp.

And then he said, "You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Turn and take your journey and go to the hill country of the Amorites..." He doesn't say, "Move on and settle somewhere else," or "I don't care where you go as long as you leave Sinai." No, the Lord gave them detailed, geographic markers outlining the exact land he had prepared for them.

Beginning with Garden of Eden in Gen 1-2, God's plan, his eternal purpose, has been not only to have a people, but to plant and locate his people in a particular place – his place. God's ways haven't changed. What does Jesus promise in Jn 14:3, anticipating the work he's doing even now? "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." The land of Canaan is a type, a symbolic gift, that anticipates and points forward to the greater dwelling place of the new heavens and the new earth.

The human longing for a sense of place is not an accident. God created us that way. Why do road warriors get weary? Why do the homeless feel discouraged? Because God hardwired us with a longing for home. It's why a peaceful home is such a blessing, refreshing the soul no less than the body. It's why membership in the local church is such a blessing.

He didn't leave Israel homeless. He has not left us homeless. He adds us to his body. He places the solitary in a spiritual family. For you to abandon your local

church, Christian, is to say, “No thanks, Lord. I’d rather sleep in my car.” The church isn’t a building. It’s a Christian’s place. It’s your home, brothers and sisters, because it’s God’s place. What does Jesus say? “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them” (Matt 18:20).

When God draws his people to himself, he always points them to a place. And in Israel’s case, it wasn’t any old land. It was the very land (v. 8) the Lord promised to give to their fathers, “to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob...and to their offspring after them.”

What did the Lord promise to Abraham? Gen 15:18, “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abraham, saying, ‘To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates...’” He made the same promise to Abraham’s son, Isaac, and his son, Jacob. Gen 28:13, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring.”

The promise of a dwelling place where they could enjoy the blessing of life in God’s presence is one of the most important promises the Lord makes his people under the Old Covenant. It’s a promise he fulfills in part in the book of Joshua when he leads Israel into the land. It’s also a promise that illustrates the way God brings so many of his promises to pass in our lives.

Look carefully at v. 8. When it comes to the land, does God say he will give it to Israel, or must Israel go in and take possession of it herself? Is it God’s work or her work? Is the Lord sovereign or is Israel responsible? What’s the answer according to v. 8? Yes! Both are completely true.

The image of God setting the land before them reminds Israel it’s been his all along, his to possess and his to distribute according to good his pleasure because he created it! IF they receive it, it will be because God sovereignly determined to bestow it. He’s in complete control. Israel isn’t wresting a blessing from a reluctant God. The Lord is keeping his promises by giving them the land.

And at the very same time, what does the command to “go” and “take possession” tell us? That God accomplishes his sovereign will through our obedience, through the faith that says, “Lord, because we trust your promises, we will do what you have



commanded us to do!" I'm not talking about God doing his half and us doing our half. Do not think God is partially sovereign and we partially responsible. God is fully sovereign, and we are fully responsible. As John Piper says, "We act the miracle."

If you want to experience the fulfillment of his promises in your life, friend, you must respond with obedient trust. How does God provide for our physical needs? By enabling you or someone else to work and earn a paycheck. How does God provide for our spiritual needs? Through Christians who are diligent to tell us about Jesus and urge us to trust him. How does God provide for our relational needs? How does God sovereignly raise up another generation of saints who will advance his kingdom in the world? Through parents who do the hard work of discipling their kids.

If you long to be married, should you trust him and wait for a spouse? Or should you intentionally pursue friendship with godly members of the opposite sex? Yes! How does a Christian grow in personal holiness? Do we pray and ask God to give us a desire to repent? Or do we submit to his word regardless, trusting that as we honor him in our actions, our feelings will follow? Yes!

The principle in Deut 1:8 is the principle in Phil 2:12-13, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." 1 Tim 4:10 points in the same direction, "For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God who is the savior of all people..."

Do not denigrate God's sovereignty by undermining the importance of your obedience. And do not assign a sovereign power to your obedience as if you are God and God is not. Trust his promises and obey his Word as God's means of fulfilling his promises in your life. Experiencing the fulfillment of God's promises requires obedient trust.

## **2) ALL OUR PRESENT NEEDS ARISE IN THE CONTEXT OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS**

At first glance, vv. 9-18 seem like an apple in a box of oranges. What does leadership delegation have to do with the land promise? Moses hasn't lost his train



of thought! He's helping Israel trust God to fulfill the land promise by reminding them of a second (and no less important) promise the Lord had already fulfilled. He promised to give him a multitude of offspring.

Gen 15:5-6, "And he brought [Abraham] outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be. And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness." Don't you love that line, "If you are able to number them"? What a picture of the incomprehensible greatness of God's goodness!

It took 400 years for God to bring that promise to pass, not because he's slow to fulfill his promises, but because he is perfect in wisdom. And he didn't do it in the way any of us would have chosen. He did it through suffering. He did it through generations of oppressive slavery in Egypt. Ex 1:12, "But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad." That's always been God's way, brothers and sisters. He does his best work through tears of sorrow. It's the way of the cross.

And as Moses stands on the plains of Moab, surrounded by several million Israelites (as Num 1:46 confirms), what does he perceive? The leadership challenge he faced 38 years ago was a direct result of God's faithfulness to do exactly what he said he would do. V. 10, "The LORD your God has multiplied you, and behold, today you are as numerous as the stars of heaven." Yes, I had limitations. But that moment in our history wasn't primarily about my limitations. It was a testimony to the goodness of the Lord. "Israel, the Lord has given you abundant offspring just as he said! As you prepare to enter the land, trust him to keep that promise too."

Delegating leadership responsibility was the immediate need. But it was a good problem, a problem that comes to pass in the larger context of the faithfulness of God. Friends, follow Moses' example. I'm not talking about looking on the bright side. I'm talking about refusing to overlook the way present challenges in your life are embedded in the larger context of God's faithfulness.

Are you facing problem at your job site? You wouldn't have them apart from God blessing you with the gift of work. Are you facing challenges as a parent? You wouldn't have them apart from God blessing you with the gift of a child. Is it hard



for you when a longtime member of the church suddenly departs? It wouldn't be apart from God pouring his love for his people into your heart.

And consider this, Christian. The entire story of your life is going down in the context of God's faithfulness to you in the gospel. If you respond to God's offer of salvation from the divine judgment you deserve by turning from your sin and trusting Jesus, then you can rest in knowing his story will be your story, for your life is wholly bound with his. You too will rise. You too will overcome. You too will be vindicated. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Remember that! All your present needs arise in the context of God's faithfulness to you in Jesus. And at the same time, take heart in knowing that God delights to provide for you in very practical ways. He doesn't say to Moses, "Hey pal, the fact that you're overwhelmed is actually signpost to my goodness, so get over it!" No. He provided help for Moses and Israel in the same way he provides for his people today.

### **3) GOD PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE THROUGH THE GIFT OF HIS PEOPLE**

V. 12, "How can I bear by myself the weight and burden of you and your strife?" Caring for God's people in any capacity, whether you are leading a church or discipling a friend one-on-one, has always included an element of weight or burden. I think of Paul's reflection in 2 Cor 11:28, "And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches."

The idea that bearing one another's burdens in the community of the church should be stress-free is a product of our self-love culture, not the wisdom of God. Notice Moses does not say the weight and burden is the problem. It's the fact that he's trying to bear it all himself! So what does he tell Israel to do? V. 13, "Choose for your tribes wise, understanding, and experienced men, and I will appoint them as your heads."

Now remember what I said last week. On this side of the cross, the people of God are no longer defined through physical membership in the nation-state of Israel. We are defined spiritually through membership in the church of Jesus Christ. Under the Old Covenant, church and state were one, a single entity. Under the New Covenant, they are two, separate entities. The leaders Moses' appointed here had a

combination of civic and religious authority leaders in the church do not have today.

So we cannot map what Moses did here directly onto the church. But we can ask, and need to ask, “What biblical principles inform the way God provides for his people, both in Israel before Jesus arrived and in the church after Jesus rose?” I’ll briefly mention 3.

### **A) Leadership is plural**

Plurality in Christian ministry has always been God’s design. As Americans, we are often drawn to celebrity pastors. We love larger-than-life heroes. But more often than not, God does his best work through faithful teams. It’s why you don’t find solo pastors in the New Testament. Wherever Scripture describes elders who pastor, the word is nearly always plural. Plurality in ministry provides longevity in ministry. It makes the sacrifice sustainable.

### **B) Leadership is qualified**

Notice Moses doesn’t conduct a popularity contest. The commanders and officers he appoints are “wise, understanding, and experienced.” We see the same principle in 1 Tim 3 and Tit 1 where Paul lays out specific character qualifications for elders and deacons in the church.

We must ask more than, “Is this person gifted?” in determining who we give significant ministry responsibility in our church. We must evaluate their character, their convictions, their understanding of God’s Word and whether they have proven their ability to apply God’s Word to the challenges of life. And it’s precisely at this point why pastor-elders exercising oversight in our church need all of us to be involved!

As the spiritual authority God established, Moses “appointed” the leaders who served under him in v. 13. He “took” and “set” them over Israel in v. 15. And “charged” them in v. 16 with their God-given responsibilities. But the congregation played a critical role in the selection process. We do the same thing in our church when we gather written feedback from all our members before adding a new elder to our pastoral team. We all have a role to play in ensuring only qualified leaders are serving in positions of ministry responsibility.

### **C) Leadership is male**

The fact that Moses only appoints men for positions of spiritual authority over the men and women of Israel isn't a cultural artifact or a vestige of patriarchal oppression. It's consistent with God's design in Gen 1-2. Even before sin corrupted the world, God charged and entrusted Adam with a unique leadership responsibility for Eve, not to domineer over her, but to care and provide for her so she could flourish in the unique responsibility God gave her as a helper.

The same principle carries forward under the New Covenant in 1 Tim 2 where Paul reserves teaching and spiritual authority roles in the church for qualified men, appealing not to 1<sup>st</sup> century culture, but to God's creation ordinance.

Mind you, that does not mean women cannot occupy any leadership role in the church. I praise God for the essential work sisters like Sara, Lauren, Donna, Karin, and others are doing to serve our body in King'sKids, Communications, Hospitality, and International Missions. It does mean God has entrusted you, gentlemen, with responsibility for setting the spiritual tone in our congregation. May the way we lead in our homes and in the church always spur our sisters onward in godliness!

Those leadership principles are important. But don't miss the bigger picture. The people of God had a need. So how did the Lord provide for their need? Through members of their own body. He provided for his people through the gift of his people. The same pattern continues in the church today. Let me give you an illustration.

Are the guidelines Moses lays out in vv. 16-17 for rendering righteous judgments applicable to men and women who serve in our legal system or on a jury? Be impartial. Don't fear man. Insist on equal treatment under the law. Protect the vulnerable. Remember God's authority stands behind your own. Absolutely.

But there's another application Scripture makes we move from the Old Covenant to the New. Under the New Covenant, responsibility for judging the people of God – evaluating our conduct according to God's Word, maintaining the boundaries of our corporate holiness – isn't reserved for a few. It's a responsibility given to every member of the body.



In 1 Cor 5, Paul rebukes the entire church in Corinth for tolerating sexual immorality in their midst. They compromised their witness to the truth and power of the gospel. 1 Cor 5:1-2, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you." Paul concludes with these sobering words a few verses later: "Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?"

Brothers and sisters, when you confront a wayward member of our church as an expression of the Lord's redemptive discipline (as God requires in 1 Cor 5) or mediate a conflict between two members of our church (as God requires in 1 Cor 6), you are exercising the holy responsibility Christ has given all of us to oversee our mutual profession of faith.

Under the leadership of our elders, it's our collective job to judge one another, to lovingly discipline one another, by taking the righteous standard of God's Word, God's commands, and holding each another accountable for following Jesus. I need you to hold me accountable. You need me to do the same.

"Judge not, that you be not judged," does not mean we stand idly by as a professed Christian drives their spiritual car off a cliff. It means we refuse to arrogantly act or speak as if we are the ultimate authority in their life. Instead, we humbly point to the righteous judgments of the One to whom all will give an account. We implore one another through tears, "Friend, God says you cannot live this way."

Given our collective responsibility, we all need to hear the sober warning in v. 17. "You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's." God knows how much fear of man hides behind our choice to not correct one another in the name of "maintaining relationship" or "not offending someone."

If you are a church member, if you are a parent, if you are a spouse, if you are a friend, if you are an employer or employee, if you are a ministry leader, I charge you on the authority of God's Word. Do not revere the opinions of men. Do not play favorites. Fear the Lord. Stand in awe of him. Be more concerned about the prospect of displeasing him than displeasing man. Speak the truth in love. Your holy calling is not to make everyone happy, Christian. Your job is to be an



ambassador for Christ and boldly contend for righteousness, especially in the church.

God provides for his people through the gift of his people. That gift includes the leaders we need. And let me tell you. I thank God big-time for the leaders he has raised up in our midst – for my fellow elders, for our ministry team leaders, for our Community Group Leaders, to name just a few! But the Lord’s provision for our church ultimately includes every member of our body. For God calls all of us, not just some of us, to maintain the purity of our witness to the world.

Our Church Covenant says it this way. “We will diligently encourage, exhort, and admonish one another with a spirit of gentleness and meekness in our battle against sin.” May we do that impartially. May we do that courageously. May we do it by appealing to God’s perfect judgments, revealed in the pages of his Word. In v. 18, Moses instructs the entire nation to order their life according to God’s commands. May we follow his example, my friends.

## **CONCLUSION**

What do we learn from the beginning of Moses’ sermon on the plains of Moab as he rehearses Israel’s history? Experiencing God’s provision requires obedient trust. All our needs arise in the context of God’s faithfulness. And God provides for his people through the gift of his people.

May his faithfulness to us in the past, KingsWay, starting with his goodness to us in Jesus, empower our obedient trust in the present. That’s why history isn’t optional for the Christian. History is essential. It’s a delightful necessity. Israel’s history declares the faithfulness of God. Our own church’s history declares the faithfulness of God.

May their story, our story, Jesus’ story, assure your heart that God is worthy of your trust and steel your resolve to obey him come what may. For this we know, the best is yet to come.