

AT A CROSSROADS (PART 13) - HE WILL NOT LEAVE YOU OR FORSAKE YOU

Deuteronomy 31-33
11/19/17 - Matt Heerema

Topic: Grace

Key verse:

Deuteronomy 32:36 (ESV)

For the Lord will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free.

INTRO / REVIEW

Here we are now in week 13 out of 14 in our series through Deuteronomy. We are now at last at the end of Moses' sermon. (And you thought *our* sermons were long!) By way of review, remember that Moses is reminding the new generation of Israel of the nation's history and laws: its history of fearfulness, rebellion, and grumbling against God in the midst of God rescuing them with powerful signs and miracles and displays of power! Moses also reminds them of God's faithfulness to His promises to them even in spite of their rebellion and fearfulness.

Moses spends a majority of His sermon recounting the details of their law, and he tells them of all the **amazing blessings** that will come as a result of living according to God's design. Every aspect of their life would be blessed beyond measure with material prosperity. He then details an even more comprehensive list of the **curse that will result** from ignoring God's design and living as they see fit among themselves. Horrible, physical curses of starvation, disease, murder, conquering enemies and raiders, and even all the way to the depravity of cannibalism.

And then Moses does something pretty interesting to me: He prophesies their failure. The curse will come upon them because of their refusal to live according to God's design. And with that prophesy, he also gives them a promise - a third aspect of this covenant: He's promised blessing for obedience, curse for disobedience, he predicts their failure, and then promises **restoration for repentance**.

READ: Deuteronomy 30:1-3 ESV

"And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God

will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.

What a promise!

Then Moses goes on and says, "So there it is, your choice - God is being extremely clear about His will, His commands, and His promises! Choose life, not death! Choose blessing, not curse!" A simple choice, right? That's pretty straight-forward!

And now we come to today's passage which picks up where we left off last week, no actual break, and we find Moses declaring another promise from God, making another prophecy of failure (actually reiterating what he just got done saying), and then giving his final blessing to Israel before dying. I'm going to focus on the promise and the prophecy today.

The promise: Israel will take the promised land because God is going with them.

The prophecy: That once they are in and get comfortable, they will turn away from God.

GOD'S PROMISE MOTIVATES OUR OBEDIENCE

Deuteronomy 31:1-8

Our obedience is about walking in trust even when we can't see it.

READ: Deuteronomy 31:3-6 ESV

The Lord your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them, and Joshua will go over at your head, as the Lord has spoken. And the Lord will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. And the Lord will give them over to you, and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

Notice the way God's promise and Moses's exhortation works here. "God is going to make this happen. You are going to be victorious. So be strong and full of courage and do not fear! He will not leave you and will never forsake you." The way God's promises work require action on our part. "Don't be afraid, you are going to win, so go to war." As we see in Joshua and Judges, as this narrative continues to unfold, Israel never did completely conquer everyone in the promised land.

Do you think that is because God's promise was wrong? That God wasn't strong enough to uphold his promise? Or was the fault with the people not trusting the promise and acting accordingly? War is scary! If you're an Israelite warrior, In the moment you are facing a heavily armed enemy, it could be very difficult to believe God's promise that he will be with you and you will be victorious!

It is trust in the clear promises that God makes that He is after.

A side-note about swindler-preachers

There is a necessary caveat here in our day: swindlers and con-men posing as preachers will use this same sort of logic to entice people to do things they shouldn't do.

We are being shown, correctly, in this passage that in order to experience the blessings of God's promises, our faith needs to work out into obedience in action. But the swindler comes along as a predator on our naïveté, and bends the definition of blessing, and makes promises that God never makes in order to get you to do something God never asks you to do.

We must be very careful and very discerning about what is being promise to see if is actually something that God promises. Let me say that all the true promises that we have from God are clearly spelled out in His word, accurately interpreted. (All the verses taken in their correct context, etc.) These promises of material prosperity that God makes to Israel that we read about in Deuteronomy no longer apply. They are part of the Old Covenant promise that is now (according to Hebrews 8) obsolete. Replaced by a better covenant with better promises, that Dave talked about a few weeks ago.

Here's a good rule of thumb: if you are listening to a preacher who is telling you that you will experience blessing by sending money to his ministry, all your alarms should be going off. No true teacher of God's word will ask you to send money to them so that you will experience a material blessing from God.

COMMISSIONING THE LEVITES AND JOSHUA

Deuteronomy 31:9-15 Moving on in the passage.

After delivering these promises, Moses then commissions the Levites to be keepers of the law, and charges them with the responsibility of making sure the whole nation, generation after generation, knows God's law and promises and Israel's history. Moses then commissions Joshua to lead the people in his place, and then God lets Moses in on the foreseen "news" of Israel's eventual failure.

THE PROPHESED FAILURE AND THE THREE WITNESSES

Deuteronomy 31:16-29

READ: Deuteronomy 31:16 (ESV)

And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them.

Deuteronomy 31:19-21 (ESV)

"Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel. For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are full and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant. And when many evils and troubles have come upon them, this song shall confront them as a witness (for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring). For I know what they are inclined to do even today, before I have brought them into the land that I swore to give."

God knows what we are inclined to do.

By the way, this is an important aspect of how God knows the future. He knows our inclinations and He knows them perfectly. He knows them because he created us and everything around us. A quick analogy:

IF you have children (and I suppose this work for any sufficiently close relationship) you generally know how your kid is going to respond given a certain circumstance, right? You know the kinds of things that they love to do and hate to do. You know the kinds of things that entice them or repulse them (and as parents we leverage this knowledge to manipulate our kids, to bend their will. Just kidding. Sort of.) This knowledge, the ability to predict how your child will react in a given situation, is a big part of how God knows and controls the future perfectly, while simultaneously not somehow diminishing our free will. We know our kids pretty well. He knows them perfectly.

God knows what we are inclined to do, which is how He knows that Israel will rebel. And so God calls out three witnesses against Israel. A song (v 19), the written law (v 26), and Heaven and Earth itself (v 28). That is, God is putting gIsrael on display in front of all creation, according to the standard of the clearly written law, and He's even simplifying the whole equation into a song that summarizes the situation. This song will remind Israel of who the are, where they came from, who God is, ho much He

cares for them, what He wants from them, what they owe him, and how egregious their rebellion against Him is.

Let's skim the song:

READ 32:3-6, 8-18, 35-39, 43

Deuteronomy 32:3-6 (ESV)

For I will proclaim the name of the Lord;
ascribe greatness to our God!
"The Rock, his work is perfect,
for all his ways are justice.
A God of faithfulness and without iniquity,
just and upright is he.
They have dealt corruptly with him;
they are no longer his children because they
are blemished;
they are a crooked and twisted generation.
Do you thus repay the Lord,
you foolish and senseless people?
Is not he your father, who created you,
who made you and established you?

Deuteronomy 32:8-18 (ESV)

When the Most High gave to the nations their
inheritance,
when he divided mankind,
he fixed the borders of the peoples
according to the number of the sons of God.
But the Lord's portion is his people,
Jacob his allotted heritage.
"He found him in a desert land,
and in the howling waste of the wilderness;
he encircled him, he cared for him,
he kept him as the apple of his eye.
Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
that flutters over its young,
spreading out its wings, catching them,

bearing them on its pinions,
the Lord alone guided him,
no foreign god was with him.

He made him ride on the high places of the
land,
and he ate the produce of the field,
and he suckled him with honey out of the rock,
and oil out of the flinty rock.
Curds from the herd, and milk from the flock,
with fat of lambs,
rams of Bashan and goats,
with the very finest of the wheat—
and you drank foaming wine made from the
blood of the grape.

"But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked;
you grew fat, stout, and sleek;
then he forsook God who made him
and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.
They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods;
with abominations they provoked him to anger.
They sacrificed to demons that were no gods,
to gods they had never known,
to new gods that had come recently,
whom your fathers had never dreaded.
You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you,
and you forgot the God who gave you birth.

Deuteronomy 32:35-39 (ESV)

Vengeance is mine, and recompense,
for the time when their foot shall slip;
for the day of their calamity is at hand,

and their doom comes swiftly.
For the Lord will vindicate his people
and have compassion on his servants,
when he sees that their power is gone
and there is none remaining, bond or free.

Then he will say, 'Where are their gods,
the rock in which they took refuge,
who ate the fat of their sacrifices
and drank the wine of their drink offering?
Let them rise up and help you;
let them be your protection!

" 'See now that I, even I, am he,
and there is no god beside me;

I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
and there is none that can deliver out of my
hand.

Deuteronomy 32:43 (ESV)

"Rejoice with him, O heavens;
bow down to him, all gods,
for he avenges the blood of his children
and takes vengeance on his adversaries.
He repays those who hate him
and cleanses his people's land."

This song is haunting in its foreshadowing of what is to come. It actually provides the initial seeds of imagery that several of the major prophets will use when calling Israel to repentance. It sums up the blessing they receive from God and the curses they will experience for disobedience. It couldn't be more clear about the consequence of going against God's design for life.

And yet they do.

We see that God has provided Israel with a perfect law, clearly spelled out. A group of people whose sole job it is to pass the law on. He's provided them with ample warning about the consequences of abandoning His way, and He's given a clear promise that He will be with them always and provide them with victory, safety, and blessing. He couldn't be more kind and loving and merciful toward them!

And yet they still leave him.

Why is that?

GOD WILL NOT MERELY FORGIVE

Deuteronomy 29:18-21 (ESV)

Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. The Lord will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven. And the Lord will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law.

It's easy to think of these blessings and curses, in history, befalling the whole nation or a large group of people, but this is an individually oriented thing. God tests the hearts of every one of us. This is a terrifying passage. The kind of passage that makes us realize that we are all completely exposed before a holy and righteous God, and we will not simply "get away with" anything. Our sin will be discovered and it will be punished.

We are not safe, walking in stubbornness of heart.

ISRAEL AND US

I'm making the leap here to application. I hope you're still tracking with me. I think that the parallels between Israel's situation and ours is apparent. Their response to their situation is something we can recognize in ourselves.

RESTORATION FOR REPENTANCE.

Have you ever stopped to think about 29:20-21? A man, singled out from the tribes of Israel to experience the calamity of God's judgement, the anger of the Lord and his jealousy will "smoke against this man", and the curses in the book will come upon him....

This happened to Jesus. For us. Though Jesus did not commit any of the sin, and wasn't the one saying in his heart "I shall be safe though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart." (That was us.) Jesus took that kind of punishment for us so that our rebellion could be forgiven and God could be just and right in offering us the promise of restoration for repentance!

CONCLUSION

When we keep reading after Deuteronomy, we see that the prophecies of Israel's failure all came true. In spite of repeated promises that God was with them, they were still fearful. In spite of having the written plan of God's design for their life so clearly spelled out, they ignored Him and went after other "gods" AND when they were expelled from the land, and when they returned to the land in small ways (they never fully did return to the land as a nation, though there were small and incomplete revivals) their fortunes were restored for a time, or they were spared from complete calamity and annihilation. But they were never fully restored to the land.

It was as they were in their own land but subjects to foreign rulers (The Roman Empire) that God sent His rescue mission in Christ!

This ought to bring us hope and encouragement!

God knows us. He is never surprised by our rebellion. He is grieved by it, but never taken by surprise. God holds out the offer of restoration for those that will return to Him, in humility and contrition. It is in the midst of our exile and rebellion against God that He rescues us through Christ's work!

I hope you turn to Him today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

SUMMARY:

We are now coming to the end of Moses' sermon to the nation of Israel before they enter the promised land at last. Moses prophesies the success of their entry into the land, and also their eventual failure to live up to the law of God. Moses teaches them a song that will remind them of who they are and call them to repentance and hope in God generations later. We can take heart today that God sees us, his people, and has compassion on them, even in their worst rebellion.

DISCUSS:

The last several weeks have touched on God's promises to his people and the blessing they experience when they trust His promises, and the curses they experience when they do not.

Trusting God's promises can be difficult in the moment, especially in the face of hardship! The nation of Israel had a promise that God would go with them into battle and give them victory over their enemies. This was meant to give them courage as they entered the uncertainty and fear of battle.

- Take your discussion time and think about promises we have from God that are meant to give us courage in our uncertainty and fears as we face our daily challenges to walk in the ways of God?
- Be sure and discuss how we know that the promise is intended for us and our situation.
- How have these promises helped you through the years?