

"Eleven Days' Journey"

Today we begin a new sermon series on the book of Deuteronomy. It's my hope and prayer that this will be a good complement to our previous series on Mark. In Mark we heard a lot about the kingdom of God. Jesus came announcing the coming of the kingdom. But we saw that a lot of Jews had the wrong idea. They wanted an earthly kingdom, not a heavenly kingdom. Part of that was because many Israelites misunderstood what God had been doing in their midst.

The Jews back then had read their Bibles, which is our Old Testament. They read books like Deuteronomy. They saw that God had promised them a land. A kingdom. They were supposed to be God's kingdom on earth. And that is all true. We'll read about that as we study this book. But they actually missed the point. The big picture. So many of them saw this plot of land in Palestine as an end in itself. But the New Testament repeatedly challenges that interpretation. Jesus challenged that interpretation. When we studied the gospel of Mark we saw that Jesus was talking about a better kingdom. A heavenly kingdom. Jesus wanted people to see that the kingdom in the Old Testament was to draw people to look forward to a better kingdom. To a heavenly one. The New Testament says that many people in the Old Testament recognized this; just read Hebrews 11.

And so as we study this book, we're going to again be studying about the kingdom. In Deuteronomy we'll look at how God's kingdom was being expressed in the Old Testament, under the old covenant. Under the law. We'll put ourselves in the place of the Jews. But we'll be reading it in light of the New Testament. And in light of Christ. A lot of people misunderstood these things, but many also understood them. And so we'll try to think how the New Testament tells us how the Jews were supposed to understand these things in the Old Testament. I draw your attention to a verse we read a few weeks ago: Hebrews 10:1. That verse had told us that the law had a shadow of the good things to come, but it was not the very image of the things. In other words, that law, the old covenant and the things that were a part of it, looked forward. The law was full of types and shadows that looked to something better. Better things that have already come in part through Christ. Better things that will be fully realized when Christ comes again. And if that is true; if the law was a shadow of good things to come, then there's a lot we can learn about these good things, even from the law. That's what we'll be doing as we study the book of Deuteronomy.

That's what this book is about. In one sense it's a book of law. The title of Deuteronomy actually means just that. The word "Deuteronomy" means second law, or a repetition of the law. What we have in Deuteronomy is a repeat of the law that God had given the people in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. These other books take us through the journey of God bringing the Jews out of Egypt to the brink of the Promised Land. Then the book of Deuteronomy pauses just before the people enter the Promised Land. It pauses to look back on what God had done with the people. It's at that point Moses reiterates the law. In this book, Moses reminds the people everything that God had done. And he reiterates to the people the covenant God had made with them. Moses starts the story from Mount Horeb, where God had given the covenant and then the book ends with Moses dying and appointing Joshua to be

his successor. Joshua would finish the long journey. Joshua would lead the people into the Promised Land.

And so what you have in the book of Deuteronomy is really the book of the covenant. It's a sort of charter for the Israelites. Just before they'd enter into the Promised Land, God reminds the people through Moses about how the kingdom should be ran. They'd be a people under God. And so this book tells them God's laws. The Ten Commandments are reiterated. There's discussion of how to worship God, which talk about a centralized place to worship, which of course looks forward to the temple in Jerusalem. There's also provisions for a king. And so Deuteronomy is a book about the covenant. It looks back on what God has done for them and looks forward to what God will do for them. And in looking forward, he tells them how they are to live in obedience to him. He tells them what their life should look like in the kingdom he is making them into.

And so as we turn to these first few verses, that's what we find. We see that the people are in Moab. That's right on the brink of the Promised Land, just east of it. The time is year 40. 40 years after God brought the people out of Egypt. For those of you who remember your bible history, the Jews had to wander through the wilderness for 40 years before they could enter the Promised Land. Well at this point, we're at year 40. They are just about to enter the land. The kingdom of Israel, God's kingdom of his chosen people, was just about to be planted physically in the land today known as Palestine. It's at that point when Moses begins to speak. He speaks not on his own. Verse 3. He speaks what God gives him to speak. These are the very words of God. And God through Moses begins to explain the Law that God had already told them. Verse 5 uses the word "explain." He's explaining and expounding the law, the covenant, just before the enter the Land. And it was typical back then when you had a covenant with laws, that you start out by giving the history between the two parties. That's what happens here. The parties of the covenant are God and his people. God is the Lord of the covenant. And so Moses will begin to set the context for the covenant. And here the story starts a long time back. Way back to when the people had just been brought out of Egypt and were at Mount Horeb. They had gotten the law there and were ready to move into the Promised Land. It was only an eleven day journey from there to Kadesh-Barnea, which is also right on the edge of the Promised Land. That's what verse 2 says. That's an important note. Should be a quick journey, huh? Well, obviously not. The next verse immediately tells us that now it was the fortieth year. Forty years later they were just finally about to enter the Promised Land. Sometimes the journey God has in store for us can take longer than we expect. But God knows what he is doing. And so I'd like to focus now on three verses, verses 6, 7, and 8, in that order. As we dig into this book, I want to bring us into the journey. The journey of the Jews into the Promised Land. And as we take this journey, today, and throughout our study in Deuteronomy, it's my hope that you can see how this is part of your journey as well. This is part of our heritage now if we are a Christian.

So, look with me at verse 6. God said to the people at Horeb, "You have dwelt long enough at this mountain." Again, we're in a flash back here forty years before. They were at Mount Horeb, A.K.A. Mount Sinai. This is the place where Moses went up to the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. This is where God established his covenant with the Jews. This is where he gave them the law. This was an exciting time in one sense. The almighty God is making a special covenant with this people. They would be his people, and he would be their God. They were a long while there. Remember a few weeks

back we studied Exodus 32. At one point Moses was up on the mountain so long that the people grew tired of waiting for him. They wanted to get out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land. And so they sinned horribly against the Lord there by making a golden calf. They broke the very covenant that God had just made with them. And yet God restored them and still was willing to bring them into the Promised Land. And so God finally tells them at Mt Sinai - You have stayed here long enough.

Now I can't help but think about this verse without thinking about Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus had went up a mountain with three of his disciples. Moses and Elijah appeared miraculously to Jesus who became transfigured into some sort of glorious light. Peter spoke up offering to make tents for everyone so that they could stay there on that Mountain of Transfiguration. But it was not to be. Jesus and the disciples had to go down the mountain. Jesus had a journey ahead. He had a mission of suffering ahead. And the disciples had a journey themselves still to go on. They couldn't stay on the mountain.

I could see that it would have been tempting for Moses and maybe others of the Jews to want to stay at Mount Sinai. Yes, certainly they wanted to get to the Promised Land. But you can't ignore the amazing things that had happened at Sinai. Moses himself got to speak so directly with God. He got to see the backside of God's glory from the cleft of the rock (Ex 33:22). But God said per verse 6 that it was time to go. They had stayed their long enough at Mount Sinai. Their destiny was not Mount Sinai. They had a journey ahead of them.

This is a reminder for us as a church too, by the way. Our past might have had different times of glory. It's quite fitting to remember them and look back at them fondly. But those days are nonetheless in the past. We can't stay clinging to the former glory days. We must move on in the journey that God has put before us.

That brings us to verse 7. God told the Israelites at Mount Sinai, "Turn and take your journey." They were to leave the glory of Mount Sinai. They were to head to the Promised Land. We know that their journey should only take eleven days according to verse 2. Sounds easy enough, huh? Should be a nice short journey. Well, we know that was not the case. Eleven days turned quickly into forty years. As we'll study about later in chapter 1, the people would lose faith in God. They quickly show up in Kadesh Barnea and send out scouts to check out the situation. They find that the enemies there are well fortified and like giants compared to themselves. They doubted God's ability to give them the land. They acted like the scared slaves that they had been all so many years in Egypt. And so God disciplined them. He had them wander in the desert for forty years while the old generation died off and the little ones grew up. God said that the old generation would not enter the Promised Land, only their children.

And forty years later, that is what had happened. The old generation had died off. The ones who remained had not grown up in the slavery of Egypt. They had lived in the wilderness of the desert, but they had lived in freedom. Those who only knew a life of slavery had died off, and a wilderness generation had replaced them. This next generation was a people longing for a home. A people waiting eagerly to enter the Promised Land. They would have only been so little when the journey in the wilderness began. But now they were about to come to their home. They would be wanderers no more.

And so put yourselves in the place of those back at Mount Sinai. As God told them to turn and take their journey, they probably thought it was a matter of days to get there. Little did the old generation realize that for the remainder of their life that they would still be on the journey. They'd be "on the way," the rest of their life. They'd not taste of the Promised Land in this life. But even though they didn't know what to expect when they set out for the Promised Land, God knew what would happen. God told them to turn and take the journey. God of course has called us each on a life-long journey as well. But we'll talk more about that at the end of the sermon.

Look now at verse 8. God says through Moses, "See, I have set the land before you." They were to go in and possess it. It was a gift. God had already promised it to their forefathers. He had sworn it. He gave Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob a covenant promise to bring their descendants into this land.

The land is described actually in the previous verse. In verse 7, when they are directed to go on their journey, the different places that are described are really the borders of the Promised Land. This is a pretty wide reaching description of the Promised Land. All the way to the Euphrates River, even up to Lebanon. The sort of language used to describe the borders of the Promised Land is basically the same geography as what God had promised Abraham. Genesis 15:18, "On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates'."

That was quite a promise! It wasn't until King David's reign that Israel had borders that approached this size. Scripture sees that as fulfilling God's promise. For example, King Solomon, David's son, said, in 1 Kings 8:56, "Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses." So, in one sense, Scripture says that God's promises concerning the Land were fulfilled. And yet that was for such a short period of time. The people's prosperity and the borders of the kingdom were in constant flux. And it's the book of Deuteronomy that explains that for us. Toward the end of the book we'll see that God promise blessings and curses to Israel. To the degree they were faithful to the covenant outlined in this book, they'd be blessed in the Land. But to the degree they were not faithful, they'd find curses in the Land. If they persisted in disobedience, they'd even be exiled from the Land.

And yet here in verse 8, God emphasizes his grace and his promise. See, I have set the land before you. He swore the Promised Land to the patriarchs. It would come to pass. It was there for the taking. And it's this book that really ties everything together for us. We'll see that the people will eventually take the land. We'll see that God tells them how to live in the land. We'll see them break the covenant and watch the kingdom destroyed by foreigners and the people exiled. Then we'll ultimately see the people gathered back up and brought back into a new kingdom. All of this is described or prophesied in this book.

Of course it is in the work of Jesus where God's people ultimately take the Land of Promise. "See, I have set the land before you," it says here. It would be God's grace that would bring the people initially into the Land. But they would lose the land by their disobedience. They'd be exiled. They eventually be allowed to return to the Promised Land, but they were never

politically in control anymore. When Jesus comes onto the scene, they were in the Land, but under Roman occupation. But what's Jesus promise? That the kingdom was near. God promised in Deuteronomy 30:5 that after the people are exiled, that God would restore them to a better place. When Jesus announced the coming of the kingdom, that promise was about to be realized.

But God would bring his people into the ultimate Promised Land. Hebrews 11 says that the ultimate Promised Land is a heavenly land. Revelation calls it the New Jerusalem. And God would accomplish this through Jesus. Jesus would deal with the problem of sin. Sin hurled the Jews out of the earthly Promised Land. Sin broke the covenant, so God allowed that kingdom to be destroyed by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. But God by his grace would deal with sin. Jesus would deal with sin on the cross. Jesus kept the covenant by his obedience, earning heaven for us. And he paid the penalty for us on the cross. That's the twofold benefits of belong to Christ. Our sin is forgiven, and we inherit the kingdom. A heavenly kingdom. That's the true Promised Land. And it's ours if we belong to Christ through faith.

Trinity Presbyterian Church, we are on a journey. We are on a journey as a church, and individually we are each on a journey. The journey can seem long at times. The wilderness of life can be tough. The trials can be unexpected. They can go on longer and harder than we ever anticipated.

As a church, we're on a journey. We're about the mission God has told us to be on. We're setting before the people around us the true Promised Land. We set before people a heavenly inheritance. We call people to belong to Christ's kingdom by turning from their sins and trusting in Christ for forgiveness. We engage in discipleship, and evangelism, and worship. This is the journey of the church until God's people are all gathered up at the end and brought into our eternal inheritance. And this work can be tough. Just look around. We have small numbers here. We're just struggling to survive. We'd like to grow quicker and faster. But the church is on the journey. We don't know how everything will work itself out, but we trust that God does. That God's in control of the journey.

And as individuals, we're on a journey. And man we can certainly go through some trials on our individual journeys. Trials with our health. With our relationships. With our careers. We can have unmet dreams. We can become unpopular or just not liked. Everything around can seem bleak. The wilderness of life can be tough. We can feel like we have no true home or family at times.

Now it would be easy to take a passage like this out of context and use it for some inspirational speech to encourage us. It'd be easy to allegorize a bit. To say something like, you've stayed at the mountain too long. You've got to turn and go through the wilderness for a time, but don't worry, because that land of promise is just right around the corner. Just keep your head up and your heart strong, because God has set your land of promise before you. You just got to believe. You just got to go in and possess it. It's yours for the taking.

That might sound inspirational. It might seem to be the prima facie reading of the Word. But I submit to you that it's out of context. First, God has not promised you or me that we'd get a physical plot of Land in Palestine. That was a specific promise to a specific people. And God gave it to them, and then told them if they were to keep it, they needed to be faithful. And they weren't. And God then promised to restore them to something better.

And that's when Jesus came. Jesus came to restore them to something better. And Jesus offered to bring us into that better kingdom. But guess what, when Jesus offered this better kingdom, so many Jews misunderstood what he promised. They assumed incorrectly that it would be some earthly kingdom. Some great new golden age for an ethnic Israel. But that's not what Jesus promised. It's in fact, never what God had in mind. God had promised long before to Abraham that through his offspring, all the nations on the earth would be blessed. Jesus is Abraham's offspring. Through Jesus, all the nations can belong to God's promised kingdom. That promised kingdom is a heavenly inheritance.

Again, that's why the book of Hebrews tells us that the law contains a shadow of the good things to come. The law, and all the things associated with the law, had a shadow of the good things to come. Well, the Promised Land is intimately connected with the law. This whole book of Deuteronomy is about the law and its relationship to the Promised Land. What then is the Promised Land a shadow of? It's a shadow of heaven. Of eternal life with Christ in heaven.

And so read this passage in context. This is a historical record of God bringing the people away from the glory of Mount Sinai, into a tough journey through the wilderness that took a long time, ultimately into a land of promise. That's a shadow of what was to come. That's a picture of our story. Our story as Christians is one where God revealed himself to us. When we become Christians, we enter into a covenant with him. That's the spiritual equivalent to Mount Sinai. But then God calls us on our spiritual journey. He takes us through the wilderness of life. We experience blessings along the way. He leads us the whole time. He watches over us. But we don't enter into the Promised Land until the end. Heaven is the real Promised Land that is given to us.

And so when we study a passage like this, and interpret in context, we do find great hope. But it's not the hope of a health and wealth gospel that tries to motivate you that tomorrow will be a better day. It's not a message that filled with self-help that you just have to find your Promised Land. No, this is an encouraging message that is so true to life. This life as Christians is our spiritual wilderness. We will have troubles. As Christians, we will know suffering and trial. As a church and individually. But God is leading us and caring us through. He will bring us to our final homes. The kingdom will come. Either when we die and go to be with him, or when he returns to usher in the kingdom at the end of history. This is what Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:4. He says that we've come "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials." That's the picture of our life right now as Christians.

This doesn't mean that you will only go through trials. It doesn't mean that you don't experience the power of God's kingdom only in heaven. No, we pray, thy kingdom come, and we already experience the power of his kingdom here and now. We experience it through his Holy Spirit that lives inside us. As much as God leads the people through the wilderness and preserved their clothing and provided for them, he leads us through the journey. He upholds us for the journey he would have us go through. He's got a plan. And it's one where the final destination is heaven. He'll make sure we get there, if we are his people. And we are his people if we've turned in faith to him. God

urges to call upon Jesus for life. To confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you do, then you are grafted into God's family. You are truly a son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Jews during Jesus' earthly ministry misunderstood what kingdom he was referring to. They thought it was an earthly kingdom. So many of them failed to understand what the earthly kingdom in the Old Testament really looked forward to. Let's make sure we don't make the same mistake as we study this book of Deuteronomy. Let's look for how Christ is to be found through this book. Let's look to understand this book in light of the New Testament. And as we do, I'm confident that this book of law will keep driving us to the gospel.

And as for this passage, that means we've been reminded again today that there is hope in the journey. For us as a church and for each of us as individuals. What might look like only a simple eleven day journey might end up being much longer and harder. But if our loving Father has set this journey before us, he will lead us to our true home. It will be a wonderful land. A land of milk and honey greater than anything in this world. And when we arrive and look back on this journey, it will seem so short and so worth it.

Just remember the mountain of transfiguration. Jesus came down that mountain to go to the cross. He had a journey ahead of them of such suffering that words can't fully express. But it was his joy to do it. It was his joy that he could bring us into the kingdom. That he could give us the kingdom that we couldn't earn on our own. What a gracious God and what a loving Lord. This is true hope for the journey. It is certain hope for the journey. Because Jesus left the glory of heaven to go on a journey to save us, we know that he will never leave us on our journeys. There is hope in the journey. Amen.

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