

“The Lord Your God Has Given You this Land”

Deuteronomy 3:12-29

If you want to remember one simple verse that will always help you understand the Old Testament correctly, it is what Paul wrote to the Galatians,

Gal. 3:21 “Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not!”

More fully,

Gal. 3:17 “And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.”

The law does not cancel the promise. Nor does the second law, the second giving of the law, which is our focus here in Deuteronomy, a title literally translated, “Second Law.” But in that law, the promise of God remains. And I am reminding you of that week after week, so that you can come to expect it. And I’m emphasizing it because it always needs emphasizing. Because the book of Deuteronomy, the book of the second law, is really, more broadly and more fully, the book of the promise. A promise originally made to Abraham, a promise of land. A simple promise.

Gen. 15:7 “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.”

We have that promise repeated in the key verse of our text this morning,

v.18 “The Lord your God has given you this land to possess.”

That promise is so sure, and so certain, that it is spoken in the past tense. Not only has God promised the people of Israel the land, but even now as they wait on the east side of the Jordan

River before the time comes actually conquer and settle the land, even now here in Deuteronomy 3, the promise is that “God has given you this land to possess.” He has given it to you, and it is yours! It is the promise of an inheritance. That is the central promise of the whole gospel.

I. THE PROMISE.

Clearly, that promise is being played out through the real life history of the nation of Israel. There were twelve tribes, and 2-1/2 of those tribes would be settled east of the Jordan River—Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh.

If you have a map, or are interested in visualizing all of this on a map, imagine the small Sea of Galilee up north, the the Jordan River running north/south to the Dead Sea at the bottom of the map. On the right, on the east, at the bottom is the settlement that was given to Reuben, adjoining the Dead Sea. Then right above that, is the land promised to Gad, along most of the Jordan River. Then to the north, above the land of Gad, is the land given to Manasseh. It’s sort of like Manasseh is Virginia, Gad is North Carolina, and Gad is South Carolina. That’s what is described in verses 12-20.

v.12-13

v.18a

That’s the promise. And if you read ahead in Joshua, you read about the fulfillment of that promise.

Josh. 12:6 “These Moses the servant of the Lord and the children of Israel had conquered; and Moses the servant of the Lord had given it as a possession to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh.”

Let me stress this point just a little bit more, because as I’ve said, it is a broad and comprehensive promise that comes to

define the very essence of the gospel in the NT.

A. God promises an inheritance to his people.

And that inheritance is, for us, nothing less than the promise of heaven. The promise of eternal life. The promise of life itself, which means freedom and release from the condemnation of death. The inheritance of land is an accurate symbol of the whole of our salvation. To prove that,

1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Our inheritance is reserved in heaven! And we are preserved, Peter says, so that you can be sure you will inherit it. The inheritance is a living hope, a sure and certain expectation of life.

And what is that inheritance? It is nothing less than the whole of what is referred to simply as our salvation.

Eph. 1:7 “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

Paul is certain to emphasize the certainty of our inheritance, too.

Eph. 1:13 “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Heb. 9:15 “And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

Do you see how central this idea of inheritance is to the gospel? It is, for the people of the Old Testament, a promise initially of land. But they knew! They knew the promise meant far more than just a little bit of land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The Bible tells us what Abraham himself knew.

Heb. 11:8 “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

In the book of Revelation, that city would be called the New Jerusalem.

Rev. 21:1 “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven

saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Beloved, that is the promised inheritance. That is the final and ultimate fulfillment of what Moses proclaimed in Exodus 3.

v.18 “The Lord your God has given you this land to possess.”

But there is something else to notice about that inheritance. Look again at verse 18, how the verse ends.

v.18 “All you men of valor shall cross over armed before your brethren, the children of Israel. 19 But your wives, your little ones, and your livestock (I know that you have much livestock) shall stay in your cities which I have given you, 20 until the Lord has given rest to your brethren as to you, and they also possess the land which the Lord your God is giving them beyond the Jordan. Then each of you may return to his possession which I have given you.”

Do you understand what’s happening? The nation comes to the land east of the Jordan first, and Reuben, Gad and Manasseh are given their land. With little obstacles and almost no military effort. But those two and half tribes had to cross the Jordan with the other tribes and fight together with them until all the tribes came to conquer and occupy their portion of the inheritance. The fighting men of Reuben and Gad couldn’t stay behind in order to settle their land. They joined together so that every could take possession of their land, and once that happened, then and only then could they go back to actually settle the land.

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There is a really important principle embedded in that duty and obligation, namely that,

B. God promises rest to the whole nation of his people.
Corporately. As a body.

Modern day American Christianity is very individualistic. We are very much focused on individual experiences, individual blessings, individual promises of God. And the Bible is very much focused upon the whole nation, the whole body. And in our context, that means the church.

There are a lot of problems with the church, the visible church. Every church. Certainly that includes the OPC. There are a lot of problems regarding the unity of the church, and much is lacking in terms of faithfulness to genuine love for one another. I’m not blind to that. I’ve been in the middle of some of that within our own presbytery. There are conflicts abounding in our presbytery and several others than reflect anything but a biblical, godly love for one another. I’m privy to much of that as a member of our denominational committee that handles judicial matters.

So God’s work isn’t done. And his promise is far from fulfilled, in our own experiences here and now in this age. But the promise is still before us, that this inheritance that God gives to his people is to the whole nation of his people. And until we learn the humility that is needed to put to death pride and the pursuit of

individual glory and honor, we won't come close to entering the promised land.

Again, the point is that Jesus saves us members of one another, members of body. He saves us to be a holy nation. The promise is not simply a promise of individual, personal salvation. It is a promise made to the whole body of God's true people. And in terms of Deuteronomy, we aren't allowed to settle our own individual land until we complete the fight for the conquest of land for the whole nation, the whole church.

There is something here of a surprising restraint, however. A restraint God imposes upon Moses.

II. THE RESTRAINT.

Moses himself would not actually enter the land, despite his very specific plea to be allowed to do so.

v.23-25

There is no sense there of any flattery or impropriety in those words, for Moses is rightly and accurately describing the very nature of God. It is the sincere desire of his heart, and there is nothing wrong or inappropriate about the request. But God did say no.

v.26

A. Judgment is imposed upon the leader of God's people.

"The Lord was angry with me on your account." And what was the issue? We learn a little more in,

Num. 20:12 "Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." 13 This was the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel contended with the Lord,

and He was hallowed among them."

Clearly, Moses as the leader would take upon himself the discipline of God, on behalf of the people. That is part of the duty and responsibility of leadership. And the root sin was grumbling, complaining. But Moses, for his part, contributed his own sin as well, for we read in,

Ps. 106:32 "They angered Him also at the waters of strife, So that it went ill with Moses on account of them; 33 Because they rebelled against His Spirit, So that he spoke rashly with his lips."

And again, the judgment, the discipline, is imposed upon Moses with these words,

Num. 20:12 "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

And he didn't.

Deut. 34:5 "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. 6 And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day. 7 Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died."

Still, however, let me emphasize God's mercy even in this context.

B. Mercy abounds to the leader of God's people.

Moses didn't enter the land, but God let him see it and enjoy it!
v.27

And God renewed his encouragement that the people would, indeed, inherit the land. And Joshua would lead them.

v.28-29

You see, Moses was a humble man. He didn't need to receive the fullness of the blessing himself. It wasn't about him at all. It was about the whole nation. He wasn't jealous of Joshua. He didn't begrudge his own fate. He recognized that God's plan and purpose was bigger than him, and more important than his own desires and wishes. There is nothing here to imply that Moses was frustrated or discouraged by the Lord's answer.

Numbers 12:3 "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth."

Oh that God would raise up such humble men in our day, especially among the leadership of his people. That is our crying need, and that is what stands out about Moses, even as we might be tempted to think that God was being a little harsh with him or a bit unfair. Actually, God's mercy abounds, even with this restraint. Because Moses was given sight of the land, and God's promise was absolutely sure and certain.

With this encouragement,
v.21-22

The point is simple, and I refer to my sermon from last week, with the conquest of the King Og and King Sihon. God provided for the redemption of his people with the defeat of those two kings, and that defeat was to be,

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT.

And I believe the principle can be stated broadly for our encouragement as well today.

A. The demonstration of the Lord's power in the past is an encouragement in the present.

And these words are intended for our encouragement.

v.21 "Your eyes have seen all that the Lord your God has done

to these two kings; so will the Lord do to all the kingdoms through which you pass."

We see that principle often. We have seen it in Deuteronomy.

Deut. 1:30 "The Lord your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, 31 and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place."

And what did he do in Egypt? Do you remember Nehemiah's prayer,

Neh. 9:20 "You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, And did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, And gave them water for their thirst. 21 Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness; They lacked nothing; Their clothes did not wear out And their feet did not swell."

We read further in,

Deut. 2:7 "For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing."

Then again,

Deut. 32:10 "He found him in a desert land And in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. 11 As an eagle stirs up its nest, Hovers over its young, Spreading out its wings, taking them up, Carrying them on its wings, 12 So the Lord alone led him, And there was no foreign god with him. 13 "He made him ride in the heights of the earth, That he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, And oil from the flinty rock; 14 Curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock, With

fat of lambs; And rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, With the choicest wheat; And you drank wine, the blood of the grapes.”

God has done all of that! And he constantly reminds all of us what it is that he has done to accomplish our salvation, as an encouragement to us as well.

Rom. 8:31 “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

Paul was speaking about justification. Even the love of predestination. And the certainty of our future glorification. And in that context, the encouragement comes to us just as Moses sought to encourage the people in Deuteronomy 3.

v.21 “Your eyes have seen all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings; so will the Lord do to all the kingdoms through which you pass. 22 You must not fear them, for the Lord your God Himself fights for you.”

God saved you! God redeemed you out of the house of bondage and slavery to sin. God sent Jesus to die for your sins. He did not spare even his own son. “How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” That’s the encouragement, along with,

v.22

B. The demonstration of the Lord’s power in the past is the affirmation of his faithfulness to his people.

That’s what God sought to teach his people when they left Egypt. For when they complained about the dangers they perceived themselves to be in,

Ex. 14:13 “And Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid.

Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. 14 The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.”

So...God sent his son Jesus to suffer and to die for your sins. And that is the gospel I proclaim to you today. Faith in that gospel is what we heard earlier this morning in a public profession of faith. And that is the context for this encouragement, that whatever the trouble or danger might be in your own life, “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today.”

There is a promised land, and inheritance that is reserved for the people of God, for all you who believe. So this is your encouragement, “The Lord your God has given you this land to possess.”