

Deuteronomy and the Gospel

Deuteronomy 26:1-19

This morning I am going to make the gospel very clear as we study Deuteronomy 26. As I often say, this book is not simply a history of some ancient country. This book is not simply a book of the Old Testament that has been replaced by the books of the New Testament. Rather, this book embodies the whole of the gospel within that history of the people and nation of Israel. And I want to make that gospel especially plain this morning. It is the same gospel as is proclaimed in the New Testament. It is the gospel that centers its thought and meaning upon the person and work of Jesus.

But in the days of Israel as they were about to enter the promised land, Jesus hasn't yet come. So the whole of the event, the whole of the story is what we call a type, prophecy embedded in history. The story of the gospel embedded in the actual circumstances of the people of Israel. And let me start with that most obvious foundation point, that the people of Israel are the people of God! They are his covenant people, those whom he calls to be his own, called by his own name. They are the family of God. And they are about to enter the promised land.

v.1

Right away we see,

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAND.

"...the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance."

It is clearly noted that God gave his people this land, and those words are repeated in,

v.2 "...your land that the LORD your God is giving you."

And the original promise of that land is mentioned in,
v.3

That promise, of course, goes all the way back to the days of Abraham, when God called him to leave his home and family in Haran.

Gen. 12:1 Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Gen. 13:14 "And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; 15 for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. 16 And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. 17 Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.

Let me say it plainly, and I expect you all realize this.

A. The land represents the covenant promise of God to his people.

So the idea here is that God's promise was not merely geographical, not merely a physical land or a piece of real estate, this was God's promise of the gospel itself. A promise of heaven, a promise of eternal life. And I know for sure that interpretation is correct because we read of Abraham's faith in,

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 next chapter of Hebrews we see how that land, including the city of Jerusalem, would embody the very promise of Jesus himself. Speaking to Christians, the writer of Hebrews says,

Heb. 12:22 “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”

So the promised land is heaven itself. The promise of the land to the people of Israel is the promise of God given to his people of eternal salvation. It is nothing less than the promise of the gospel. And in that same context, we see that,

B. The land represents the place where God meets with his covenant people.

That, too, is built into this whole situation. It’s not just land, but it is the place of meeting, a place where God would choose to dwell, to make his name dwell. A place where the people of God could have the privilege of meeting with their God, entering into his presence.

Look at,
v.2

In the Old Testament, of course, that place was defined by the altar, the place where sacrifices were offered.

v.4

The importance of that place of meeting with God is further emphasized in,

Deut. 12:5 “But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. 6 There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. 7 And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.”

Let me emphasize at this point the ultimate fulfillment of this idea of God meeting with his people, God dwelling with his people. In the Old Testament, that meant land, the promised land. It meant an appointed place within that land, the altar in the center of the temple. But in the New Testament, we don’t need any of that. Because God came to us to meet with us in person. The Old Testament promise of “God with us”, Immanuel, became a person. A man, God with us in the flesh. God incarnate.

John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

God, become flesh. And dwelt among us. Surely that is the most amazing statement of historical fact that has ever been made. God dwells with us as his people. That’s the significance of the land. And yet, even as you live in this age, with all the trials and afflictions of this age, don’t forget what this means for the future, this idea of God dwelling with his people.

Revelation 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.”

The tabernacle of God is with men. That’s the definition of heaven! And that is our great hope. That we as believers in Jesus Christ shall inherit this promised land, and that God will dwell with us forever.

But, to get there in this great story of history, something has to be done about sin. Because, from the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, every human being is dead in sin. And so we have in the history of Israel in the Old Testament,

II. THE STORY OF REDEMPTION.

The story of salvation. The story of the gospel. And that story begins with,

A. The misery of slavery.

v.5-6

I don’t need to recount the details of that slavery, but I want to emphasize how consistently the Lord describes his work of redemption in terms of this deliverance from slavery. For example, as the Lord spoke to his people at Mt. Sinai giving them the 10 commandments, he begins with this great declaration,

Ex. 20:2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Similarly, we read in,

Deut. 7:6 “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. 7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; 8 but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

Thus the bondage of slavery stands as a representation of what it means to be separated from God, lost and dead in sin, under the bondage of sin. And truly, that bondage is misery, the worst kind of misery. Slavery to sin is the worst kind of misery imaginable. So the gospel is well proclaimed to be a,

B. Deliverance from slavery.

That’s what stands out in our text.

v.7-8

Paul describes our salvation in those very terms.

Gal. 4:3 “ Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

And so our salvation is described and defined in this same way, as a deliverance from slavery. Specifically, the slavery and bondage of sin. And we are redeemed out of that slavery into the glorious freedom of Christ, a redemption so well embodied in the history of Old Testament Israel. That's who we are as Christians, those who have been delivered from slavery. And back in Galatians 4 we read,

Gal. 4:22 "For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all...28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise."

In that context, we then read in our text in Deuteronomy about,

C. The blessings of salvation. v.9-11

Such marvelous, wonderful blessings! A land flowing with milk and honey! I believe that all the blessings of the gospels are well represented by those word. Nothing more glorious could be imagined. Nothing more enjoyable could be proclaimed. Thus I read earlier,

Rev. 21:4 "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." 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." 6 And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega,

the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. 7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."

It is so appropriate to recognize and understand God's work of redemption in these terms, deliverance from the misery of slavery into all the blessings of salvation. Chief among those blessings is the forgiveness of our sins, which is itself the redemption from the slavery of the curse and condemnation of the law. So this is how that gospel is now defined.

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.

Col. 1:13 "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

Truly, in Christ, God has delivered us out of the house of bondage.

Now, let me emphasize, that if you are not a Christian, if you are not a believer, if you have not received Jesus to be your Lord and savior, then you are still in that house of bondage. Without faith in Christ, you are still enslaved to sin, including the guilt and condemnation of that sin according to God's own perfect justice. And there is only one way to escape from such bondage, only one way to be redeemed from such slavery. And that way is by faith in Jesus Christ. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. As Paul puts it in,

Rom. 10:9 "...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto

righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

With that salvation comes all the blessings of freedom.
v.11

What then? This story of redemption continues. What is,

III. THE RESPONSE OF GOD’S COVENANT PEOPLE.

And that is always part of the story, the story of the gospel. Our response. And again, that response that we as Christians would have to the saving work of God in the gospel is represented for us and lived out in the lives of the Old Testament people of Israel. Their response was outward, external. It was a response embedded in the life of the nation. And it is a type, a pattern, for us to live out ourselves now in the age of the New Covenant. Specifically, the response is all about,

A. The sacrifices of worship.

So we read,

v.10

Then continuing,

v.12-13

We could certainly study all the different sacrifices that were offered, and we could study all the significant details about the tithes that were set apart, but my focus this morning is upon the main idea of it all. Sacrifices of worship. The people of God respond to the redemption which God has provided them by offering the sacrifices which he has prescribed.

And in terms of the language of the New Testament, that sacrifice is best summed up to be the living sacrifice of your whole life.

Rom. 12:1 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

Similarly,

1 Peter 2:4 “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

That is our response to our salvation, the sacrifice of our whole life. And with that offering to God must come,

B. The commitment of love for one another.

The second great commandment, if you remember Jesus’ summary of the obligations of God’s law. In our text, that commitment of love is expressed this way,

v.12-13

Don’t forget how clearly James emphasizes this commitment of love for one another as well,

James 1:27 “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

That verse leads us to the third definition of our response to the salvation of the gospel, namely,

C. The devotion to obedience.

True religion, true Christianity, includes such devotion “to keep

oneself unspotted from the world.” In our text,

v.13b-14

Moses expresses that obligation more explicitly,

v.16

That is to be our commitment as well, a response to the grace of God which is given to us in the promise of the gospel. It is the commitment of obedience, the devotion to obedience, a devotion which is the expression of love to the God of our salvation. That’s how the law was given by God in the days of Moses, and that is how it is given to us today!

v.17. “Today you have proclaimed the LORD to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice.”

But just to be sure that you never think of this commitment to obedience in any sense of legalism or works-salvation, I want to further emphasize this morning,

III. THE BLESSINGS OF GOD UPON HIS COVENANT PEOPLE.

All of this comes to us in the context of that blessing! The history of the people of Israel in Deuteronomy comes to us in the context of that blessing. It is the blessing of redemption. The blessing of salvation. And in Deuteronomy we even see that the Lord would have his people,

A. Seeking a blessing.

Asking for it! With expectation. We read of God’s instructions, v.12 “When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year...13 then you shall say before the LORD your God...”

v.15

So it is that you and I should seek that same blessing. We should ask for it, and rightly expect it. And again, not because we deserve it but because God promises it! These are words we can and should say to God,

v.15 “Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’”

Let those words be the words of your heart even now, words of faith, beseeching the Lord for fulfill the glorious promise of the gospel by providing “a land flowing with milk and honey.” Pray for the Lord to fulfill that promise in your own life, a fulfillment not necessarily tied to earthly prosperity but to spiritual riches, the blessing of health and life in your soul. So it isn’t the prosperity gospel of health and wealth, but that God would bless us as he promises in,

Eph. 1:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

And notice how those blessings are defined here in Deuteronomy by the descriptive title God gives to his people. They are his...

B. Special people.

v.18

Those words mean that God loves his people above all the other people of the world.

Deut. 7:6 “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. 7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; 8 but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

A special people. Those words I would use to describe my own daughters, loving them with a depth of love and affection that is theirs alone. As much as I love your children, my own girls are “a special treasure.” As we are to God.

Along with that description is that of,

C. A holy people.

v.19

Peter uses this language as well, in a very obvious usage of Old Testament descriptions of God’s people for his new covenant people today. So with all of the Old Testament background to help us understand the meaning of these words, this is who we are,

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

All of that is true because of the promise which God has made

in the gospel. May all you who believe in Jesus proclaim his praise for the redemption he has provided from the slavery and bondage of sin.