

Hearing God's Grace - God's Continued Grace

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[0 : 00] with a pen. Okay, so Deuteronomy chapter 1. I'm going to read from verses 1 through to 8, and then Nick is going to take over.

Okay, so...

Okay, Deuteronomy 1 verse 1. These are the words of Moses, that he spoke to all Israel in the desert, east of the Jordan, that is, in the Arabah, opposite Suf, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazareth and Dizahad.

It takes 11 days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir road. In the 40th year, on the first day of the 11th month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the Lord had commanded him concerning them.

This was after he had defeated Sion, king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon and at Edri, and had defeated Og, king of Bashan, who reigned at Ashtoreth.

[1 : 56] East of the Jordan, in the territory of Moab, Moses began to expand this law, saying, The Lord our God said to us at Horeb, You have stayed long enough at this mountain.

Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites. Go to all the neighbouring peoples in the Arabah, to the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev and along the coast, to the land of the Canaanites, and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates.

See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore he would give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to their descendants after them.

Taking up the story at verse 26. But you were unwilling to go up. You rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. You grumbled in your tents and said, The Lord hates us, so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us.

Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart. They say, The people are stronger and taller than we are. The cities are large, with walls up to the sky.

[3 : 20] We even saw the Anakites there. Then I said to you, Do not be terrified. Do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the desert.

There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son. All the way you went, until you reached this place. In spite of this, you did not trust in the Lord your God, who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night, and in cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp, and to show you the way you should go.

When the Lord heard what you said, he was angry and solemnly swore, Not a man of this evil generation shall see the good land I swore to give your forefathers, except Caleb, son of Jephunneh.

He will see it, and I will give him and his descendants the land he set his feet on, because he followed the Lord wholeheartedly. Thanks very much, Nick.

Well, keep your Bibles open in these first few chapters, and we'll pray.

[4 : 56] These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the desert. As we gather together, we pray that the words that Moses spoke would be God's words to us in our time, in our land, and in our generation.

And we pray that we would hear clearly what you are saying to us afresh, and that we would be people who take your words seriously, so that we may be able to enjoy and receive all that you have to give us.

So bless us and help us as we start out in our journey together through this great book. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, how long does it take to get from Cork to Belfast?

Well, just after Christmas, we took a trip to Belfast to visit family. Except what should have taken four hours turned out to be one day, four hours.

[6 : 25] It should have been very straightforward if we had done what we were supposed to have done. More about that a little bit later. Instead, we had to endure standing freezing cold on the edge of the motorway waiting for help.

What should have been an easy journey turned out to be very long and painful. It was a serious problem. How long does it take to get from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea when you take the Mount Seir road?

Well, look at verse 2. It takes 11 days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir road. Except what should have taken just 11 days took quite a whole lot more. Look at verse 3. In the 40th year on the first day of the 11th month Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the Lord had commanded him concerning them.

What should have taken 11 days has now turned into 40 years. That's a long time to be standing on the side of the Mount Seir bypass getting pretty cold.

[7 : 51] If you look on the screen there's a map there. You remember that 40 years ago God had graciously rescued his people from their captivity in Egypt.

So Egypt is over there to your left in the top corner. God brought them from Egypt down to Horeb which is right down at the bottom.

of the sea there Mount Sinai we know it as Mount Sinai where God in his goodness gave them his law his words that he gave them so that they would know how to live in relationship with God in the promised land.

Now all they had to do was to walk from Sinai from Horeb all the way to Kadesh Barnea which is kind of where the squiggles are those red lines.

Takes them eleven days and they would be there at the beginning of the promised land. What should have been an easy journey turned out to be long and painful.

[8 : 57] It was a serious problem. So what went wrong? Well we'll find out in just a minute.

But where Deuteronomy brings us to in chapter one is that these forty painful years are now over and God's people now stand on the very edge of the promised land.

But before they enter into the promised land Moses is giving his people a series of sermons before he dies. Deuteronomy is a collection of talks given by Moses just before his death.

And in these first few chapters he's looking back over those forty years right back to the very beginning reminding us all of God's continued grace to his people.

So first of all God's gracious promise. Look at verse six of chapter one. So he's looking back remember to Horeb.

[10 : 04] This is down in Mount Sinai where they received God's law. So verse six. The Lord our God said to us at Horeb you have stayed long enough at this mountain. Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites.

So here was a command to go from there into the promised land. Verse eight. See I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore he would give to your fathers to Abraham Isaac and Jacob and to their descendants after them.

It was like being given keys to a new home. A home that has been paid for. A home that has been offered to you. Go in take possession of it.

It's yours. And the land was theirs not on the basis of what they had promised to God and all that they would do for God but the land was there on the basis of God's gracious promise to them.

Now with all the news that we see on television about Israel and Palestine today which is actually in the same area we need to be very clear about what this land is and what has been promised to us.

[11 : 25] So I want you to keep your finger in Deuteronomy 1 and jump all the way to Hebrews chapter 11. So keep Deuteronomy 1 open and jump all the way to Hebrews chapter 11.

I think we might have the reference there is it? Yep. Page 1209. As we think about what this land actually is as we trace the theme of the land through the Bible.

Well here we have it. Hebrews chapter 11 verse 8. Remember the promise was first given to Abraham and to his descendants that followed. So verse 8 of chapter 11.

By faith Abraham when called to a place, that's the land he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went even though he did not know where he was going. Verse 10.

For he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. So what's the city that he's looking forward to? Well verse 16 tells us.

[12:36] They were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. It wasn't a physical land. They were looking for something beyond that.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared a city for them. Verse 39. As he goes through all the other descendants and generations it says verse 39 these were all commended for their faith yet none of them received what had been promised.

So even though they actually were in the land it wasn't what they were meant to receive. It was something greater. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

You see the promised land that we read about in Deuteronomy is only a picture of the ultimate promised land which is heaven.

It's salvation. The new creation, the heavenly city where God and his people will live together in perfection for all eternity. This is what Abraham was looking forward to and this is what we are looking forward to.

[13:57] This is the land that has also been given to us. So you see the story of Deuteronomy is actually a story about us.

The words that Moses were speaking to the people then are God's words to us today. And because they are God's words to us today, and because they contain a promise to us today, it requires a response from us.

Have a look at Deuteronomy chapter 30. We'll go back to chapter 1 in just a minute, but Deuteronomy chapter 30. In some ways this is a summary of the whole book.

Deuteronomy chapter 30 verse 15. And remember keeping in mind as we think about land, we're thinking of eternity, we're thinking of salvation today, and all that God has promised.

Deuteronomy 30 verse 15. See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways and to keep his commands, decrees and laws.

[15:23] Then you will live and increase and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. Verse 19. This day I call heaven and earth witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.

now choose life so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God. Listen to his voice and hold fast to him for the Lord is your life and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

you see obeying the promises of God's word is choosing life in all of its fullness.

The promises that have been given to us through God's word is about choosing life. Life today and life in the ultimate promised land.

You see as Moses was speaking and we go back to chapter 1 now, as Moses was speaking to the people, he was not setting before them rules and regulations, he was setting before them God's gracious promise of life.

[16:49] Life for your family, life for your children. And as we listen to these words, and if we do listen, and if we believe, and if we obey, we will receive all that God has to give us.

But it seems that Israel and ourselves have a problem in obeying what God has to say. So second, our persistent rebellion.

Look at verse 21 of chapter 1. Again, the promise is repeated. See, the Lord your God has given you the land.

Go up and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your fathers told you. Do not be afraid and do not be discouraged. So they obeyed and went up as God said.

No, there's a bit of delay tactics. Verse 22. Then all of you came to me and said, well, let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we're to take and the towns that we're going to come to.

[18:08] Verse 25. Taking with them some of the fruit of the land, they brought it down to us and they reported, you know what? It is a good land that the Lord our God is giving us.

So having renewed their confidence, they went up as God said. No, they didn't. Verse 26. But you were unwilling to go up.

You rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. You grumbled in your tents and you said, the Lord hates us. So he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us.

God is patient. and in his continued grace, he reminds these persistent rebels what he's going to do.

Verse 29. Then I said, you do not be terrified. Do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you as he did for you in Egypt before your very eyes.

[19 : 23] God is going to fight for you. Remember how he rescued you from Egypt. Just believe my word. Obey what I tell you to do and enter the land.

It can't get more simple than that. Tragically, and what is so often the story of our lives, they persisted in their rebellion.

Verse 32. In spite of this, you did not trust in the Lord your God. In spite of God's promised word, in spite of everything that he had done for you, you wouldn't trust what God said he would do.

You see, our rebellion is always expressed in our refusal to believe God's word and to obey God's word. God's love and God's arrogance.

In our arrogance, we think that we can somehow receive and get from God everything that we need through our own resources. For failing to trust God is saying, I don't need God.

[20 : 40] It's saying that I'm better off without God. When we don't trust God and when we turn our backs on him, we're just saying, God is not good. God is not generous.

God is not gracious. We kind of echo the words of the people of Israel. The Lord hates us. He's brought us here to destroy us.

We can't trust him with our lives. And so we back off, we back away. But the consequences of not trusting God with our life are disastrous.

Look at verse 34. When the Lord heard what he said, he was angry and solemnly swore, not a man of this evil generation shall see the good land I swore to give to your forefathers.

Except Caleb, son of Jephunneh. He will see it, and I will give him and his descendants the land he set his foot on.

[21 : 50] Why? Because he followed the Lord wholeheartedly. In fact, and these are perhaps some of the most troubling words in Deuteronomy, when we persistently refuse to listen and to trust God's word, there may come a time when God will refuse to listen to us.

Look at verse 45. You came back and you wept before the Lord, but he paid no attention to your weeping, and he turned a deaf ear to you.

And so you stayed in Kadesh many days, all the time you spent there. You see, what should have been an 11-day journey, culminating in a victorious celebration of entering into the promised land, well, it took 40 years, and it ended in defeat and misery.

It seems very clear that our persistent rebellion against God's word stops us receiving all that God has to give to us.

We are in desperate need of help. But third, God's gracious response.

[23 : 33] Amazingly, our persistent rebellion is always met with God's continued grace. Look at chapter 2, verse 7.

Look at how God responds to their rebellion for their 40 years. Verse 7 of chapter 2. The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands.

He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These 40 years, the Lord your God has been with you and you have not lacked anything.

What they deserve and what they get stand in complete contrast. God is so gracious. Jesus. And look at how God responds to them when they stand again, second time round, at the verge of entering the promised land.

there is there is a bit of deja vu about all of this. Look at chapter 2 verse 24. Set out now and cross the Arnon gorge.

[24 : 41] See I have given into your hand Sion the Amorite king of Heshbon and his country. Begin to take possession of it and engage him in battle.

Now these are the exact same people they were up against 40 years ago. Do you remember the excuse they gave 40 years ago?

Go back to chapter 1 verse 27. They grumbled in their tents and they said oh the Lord hates us. He brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us.

Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart they say. The people are stronger and taller than we are the cities are large with walls up to the sky.

We even saw the Anakites they were like giants there. In fact they actually went and tried to fight their own battle.

[25 : 39] Look at the end of verse 41 of chapter 1 thinking it easy to go up or sorry so every one of you put on his weapons thinking it was easy to go up into the hill country that's into the promised land but the Lord said to them tell them do not go up and fight because I will not be with you.

You will be defeated by your enemies. So I told you but you would not listen. You rebelled against the Lord's command and in your arrogance you marched up into the hill country.

the Amorites who lived in those hills came out against you. They chased you like a swarm of bees and beat you down from Seir all the way to Horma.

You see unless God actually journeys with them unless God goes before them unless God goes and fights on their behalf they don't stand a chance.

So let's see what happens this time round. Chapter 2 verse 32. When Sion and all his army came out to meet us in battle at Jahaz the Lord our God delivered him over to us and we struck him down together with his sons and his whole army.

[27 : 12] At that time we took all his towns and completely destroyed them. Men, women and children. We left no survivors.

Verse 36. From Eror on the rim of the Arnon Gorge and from the town in the gorge even as far as Gilead not one town was too strong for us.

The Lord our God gave us all of them. Now I'm sure you're reflecting on the end of verse 34.

It kind of sticks in our throat a bit there doesn't it? It sounds very disturbing. Men, women and children completely destroyed?

Well this theme does come up later on in chapter seven and we're going to deal with it fully then.

But it is something that we don't want to overlook just now.

[28 : 14] So can we just go back to Genesis chapter 15 just to help us out here. Genesis chapter 15 and verse 16.

This is where the original promise was first given to Abraham about going into the promised land and this is what God says to Abraham and to his descendants that will follow.

Chapter 15 verse 16. So he says to Abraham in the fourth generation that's about 600 years later your descendants will come back here for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

in other words God has given the Amorites close to 600 years to sort themselves out.

So what we read in Deuteronomy at first sounds quite unfair and not very nice but in the context of what we read in Genesis it actually portrays to us a God who is long suffering patient and very gracious.

[29 : 40] Now of course it does raise other questions but let's hold those questions we will get to them when we move on later into Deuteronomy. But I don't want us to lose our focus and the thrust of what chapter 2 is telling us here.

That God in his grace has gone out before them and fought the battle that they could never fight. Unless God had gone with them they would have failed and they would have never entered the promised land.

And God has fought the ultimate battle for us. You see as we think about our own rebellion we too deserve to be punished and judged for our persistent rebellion against God's word.

But God in his grace has sent to us his own warrior, his own fighter, his son Jesus Christ who came to fight our greatest enemies, sin and death and he has destroyed them both once and for all.

Not with weapons, not with armies, but through his death on the cross and through his resurrection from the grave. We don't deserve it.

[31 : 13] But yet Jesus has come to take all our failures of the past, our rebellion of today and our sin of the future and he's taken all the consequences of it on himself.

And as it were, Jesus himself was like shut out of the promised land for us. He was barred, he was excluded, he was the one who suffered hell for us, taking the judgment for us so that we might be able to enter into the promised land, enter into life and enter into salvation.

salvation. You see, it's so clear that our persistent rebellion stops us receiving from all the good gifts that God has to offer us.

If it was up to us, we would not have anything. Amazingly, through God's continued grace and his grace alone, we receive freely all that God has to give.

Our life today and our eternal life that is to come. God is so gracious. Which really brings us to the fact that this is problem solved.

[32 : 42] When our car broke down, we resigned ourselves to having to stay in Cork. But we got a phone call from a very generous person. They rang to tell us they were going to give us their car and that we could have it for the time that we were away.

Not just a car, but a car that was full of petrol and fully insured for us to drive. A gracious intervention and without their help we would not have got to our destination.

God is continually gracious to us. And because of what Christ has done for us, that grace flows to us day after day after day.

And as we journey together into 2013, let me tell us this, we are all going to doubt God's goodness. At different times we're going to turn our backs on him, we'll fail to trust him, we'll grumble, we'll complain, we'll say God hates us, he's only brought us here to make a misery of our lives.

[33 : 53] Why? Because we're persistent rebels. And on our own resources we'll never arrive. But thankfully our persistent rebellion is always met by God's continued grace.

grace. And if we are to know this grace and experience it day by day in our lives, we've got to get to the heart of God's word.

To be people who read it and who devour it, because even as we read through these sections here right now, we've come to see a picture of an amazing, gracious God who doesn't treat us as we deserve to be treated, but treats us with grace.

welcoming us into his land, into his family forever and ever. This is not a book of rules. This is a word of grace.

Let's read it as we enter into 2013. Let's pray. Amen. Father, thank you that your word is really a story about us, a story about our lives.

[35 : 21] And sometimes that's painful because it reflects us as we really are. Stubborn, rebellion, rebellious, failing, negative.

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