

A Time of Deliverance

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[0:00] We can turn back to our reading in Deuteronomy chapter 29. We're going to be looking at the whole chapter. We can read again at verse 9.

! Deuteronomy 29 at verse 9. Therefore keep the words of this covenant and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do. A nation stands on the threshold of freedom, having been under the rule of a foreign nation for many years.

The people are being encouraged to make a choice, to make a stand that will affect their future and the future of generations to come. It sounds like something we hear almost on a daily basis just now, whether we're looking at our own nation or other nations around the world.

People looking for deliverance, people looking for a way forward. But this is not a present-day political rally. This is turning to the Word of God and what we see here in the book of Deuteronomy is this very kind of setting.

And it's hard for us to imagine what it has taken for the children of Israel to arrive at this point that we're reading of in chapter 29 of Deuteronomy.

[1:21] They have come through so much. When we were singing there in Psalm 114, we were given a little taste of just the kind of things that they came through, coming out of Egypt, having been an oppression there for many years as slaves and suffering under the cruelty of that, and then being led out of Egypt, but not an easy way, a very difficult way, coming through many different challenges, to such a point that the people cried out, would it not have been better for us to stay in Egypt where we were?

And yet all the time God was leading them to that promised place, a place that's described as flowing with milk and honey, a place that the spies spied out.

And only two of them, Joshua and Caleb, came back saying, here is a great land, a place that God has prepared for us that we can go into. And others said, no, it is too difficult.

They've come through so many challenges. And from that point, when the spies returned and said, no, it's too difficult, and the people went along with them, they were then 40 years wandering in a wilderness, so that none of those who actually came out of Egypt, far from Joshua and Caleb, would go into the promised land.

The rest lost their way. They lost their focus on God. But what Moses is here doing is bringing them to that point where they're here on the border of the promised land, saying, how are we going to go forward?

[2:54] How are we going to go into this land? How are we going to go from strength to strength? And Moses is saying it is by putting the Lord central to it all, by keeping the Lord as our focus.

Otherwise, we lose our way. Otherwise, the devil comes in and displaces us, misguides us, leads us in the wrong ways. In the former Soviet Union, government frequently published maps that were inaccurate.

They had false information put on them. It was vague. Towns, rivers, roads, they were all misplaced or mislabeled. Why?

Why? Why would anybody want to do that? Well, it was for national security. That's what they said. So if anybody came and tried to spy the land or find a way or where a city was, then they would be confused.

They would be in the wrong place. They would be looking in the wrong places. But it caused confusion for everyone. It was a tactic called maskirovka.

[4:03] It means misdirection or misinformation. But all it does is lead to confusion. And you can almost say that's a devil's tactic, maskirovka.

It's the kind of thing that he wants us to fall into as well. Misdirection, confusion, not knowing the way we should go by looking in the wrong place. But God speaks to us and God guides us. And that's what we need. We need an accurate map to have an accurate way. And God's word is just that. And that is what Moses is giving to the people here in Deuteronomy. As they're about to go in to this great land that they've been promised. He speaks from the outset of the book in this way. He says in Deuteronomy 1 verse 1, These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness. God was speaking through Moses. And you see it here again in 29 verse 1. These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel. [5 : 09] God was speaking. God was giving them guidance. A nation to go forward. A nation to be blessed. A people to be blessed.

It was by trusting in the Lord. You know when we think of nations and our own nation today. Leaders will produce manifestos. They will talk about this is the way we are to go forward. This is the way we will go forward and prosper in so many different ways. Information and plans for a better future. But does it become reality? So often it doesn't. So often it doesn't because the promises that are made just cannot be fulfilled. But above all there's no thought of God. There's no putting God first in it all. And for God's people, whether it's in the days of Moses or our own day, what we need is God first and foremost. And that's what Moses is doing here in Deuteronomy. [6 : 09] He's giving them a manifesto, if you like. A manifesto to live and to prosper and to be blessed. A road map that is one that is accurate, that is true.

And so we need it to go forward. And as with any manifesto, there's key points. And that's what we're going to think about this morning, the key points of what Moses is telling the people here in chapter 29. You see, there's four things just very quickly we want to look at. An overview, an observation, an outcome, and an offer. An overview, an observation, an outcome, and an offer. So the first thing is an overview. The book of Deuteronomy can be outlined, and it's been outlined by some people like this. Chapter 1 to 4, it's about looking back. End of chapter 4 through to chapter 26, it's about looking up. And then chapter 27 to 34, it's looking forward. [7 : 14] That's the kind of outline you have in the book of Deuteronomy. But it's hard just to separate them, isn't it? You can't look forward without looking back and looking up. You can't look back without looking up as well. They all just go together. But so often we can be guilty maybe of just maybe taking one or two of these things. We can be guilty of looking back and looking forward without looking up. And you can just rehash them all. Because we need to have all three, really. And that's what you see with Moses here in chapter 29. And as he is seeking to go forward, he does it by both looking forward, but also looking back. But above all, looking up. Looking up to God. Because when you see in the outset of this chapter, what you see is this overview of things, this review of things like any kind of manifesto would have. [8 : 14] Where are we now? What resources do we have? What kind of infrastructure do we have? How can we go forward? Moses does this with God in mind. And that's what you see at the outset. These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel. And then in verse 2, he summoned the people to him. You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt. So he's taking them back. He's taking them back there to Pharaoh, to all his servants, and then to the journey that they've had coming through to the point they're at now. The great wonders that they have seen. All the different things that are going on. So there's a whole overview of things here for them. And it's a good thing to do. As we think of anything that we're involved in in church or as a people, we need to look at the bigger picture. To look at what's going on. He reminds them here that they can look back and see that God has been with them faithfully through 40 years.

[9:24] 40 years of wandering through the wilderness. And he's never failed them. And you see it in just the way the clothes that they wore, the shoes that they wore.

They had food, they had drink. For 40 years, everything. God has been faithful. What do we see? What do you see when you review your life? When you do an overview of your life?

Looking back over all your years, what do you see? Each of us might see different things. We will. We've all come through different experiences. Some will say, I was my happiest when I was close to God.

I knew great blessings. I was lost before I came to faith and everything was wonderful. But others might say, well, my life I felt was good before I found the Lord, before the Lord found me.

But when I came to faith, suddenly my life started to unravel in so many different ways. How can we marry the two together? Why should one person have one and another person another?

[10:32] We cannot understand. You just have to look at the last words of this chapter. God has revealed to us a way of faith.

God has revealed to us a way of faith. So that in any overview that we're looking at, we have to look at it in the bigger picture. That God has allowed things into our lives. Some are good.

Some are hard to understand. But all the time, God knows. And God is leading. And we come to a point where we can look back and say, God has been with us every step.

Never failed us. Can you look back like that? Are you able to see the bigger picture? To see in an overview of all things the way the Lord has led to this point?

Are you able to say, hitherto, the Lord has helped. What a blessing it is when you can. And if you can't. If today you're saying, I just cannot see God in the midst of my life.

[11:47] He is calling you to look to him. To trust in him. To lean upon him. He is saying that, keep pressing on. They couldn't see it in all these years.

40 years of wandering through the wilderness. Just what was ahead. But they were kept going.

They were kept. And that is the way we are to be as well. The Lord will keep us.

Through the hardships. Through the joys. Through it all. The Lord keeps us. So the first thing we see here is an overview. And in an overview we see our need of God.

And how God is there for us. The second thing we see here is an observation. In the bigger picture we focus in on some of the smaller issues as well.

We hear problems today. The usual problems when people are talking in a political way. Poor health care. Unemployment. Poverty. Education. The economy.

[12:50] Crime. All of these things are mentioned. But what is the observation that comes from Moses here? When you come to this place.

When you come in to this land. What are they going to find? What are they going to see? Well the biggest problem is idols. Idols.

But it points them back to the observation overall. That the problem with the people is the heart.

Because our hearts are drawn towards idols. Do you think that's true of yourself today? How is your heart with God today?

Are you feeling that sense of closeness? Are you trusting in him? Or are you leaving him out? Are you pushing him away?

[13:53] That's the problem that the people here were facing in the days of Moses. They are going forward but what to? There are going to be many different challenges for them.

They are familiar with idols. They have seen them before. You look at verse 16. You know how we lived in the land of Egypt. And how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed.

And you have seen their detestable things. Their idols of wood and stone. Of silver and gold which were among them. Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe.

Whose heart is turning away today. Whose heart is turning away today. It is the heart that is being led astray. John Calvin once said, The heart is an idol factory.

In other words, the heart is able to produce idol after idol after idol. And an idol is something we put in the place of God. And he is warning them here.

[14:58] This is the observation that he has. This is going to be your greatest danger going forward. Your heart. Frank Sinatra said, I did it my way.

It's a common song at funerals. And it's what we see in this chapter as well. We see that that is the danger of this attitude.

Of making it out that it is about our ways. Look at verse 19.

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.

There is the attitude of doing it my way. What is the idol of your heart today? What is it that comes between you and God?

[15:58] What easily leads you astray? There are so many because we can just produce them over and over. Pride. Pride can so often be in our hearts.

Humility can stop us coming to God. Now that doesn't sound right, does it? Humility. We are told to be humble, and yet we can have a false humility. And say that my heart is just so wretched, so wicked that I'm not good enough to come to God.

It's a false kind of humility. But it can be a big problem. Stubbornness. Or too easily led us astray.

They both seem like opposites, and yet they can lead us in the same direction, the wrong direction. Greed or covetousness. There's just so many. Think of this little story of a salesman. He used to go around and would make hundreds of sales, going door to door.

How did he do it? Well, just in a few words. He would say to the people he was visiting, let me show you something. Several of your neighbors have said you couldn't afford.

[17:11] What does that make you do? What would that make you do if someone said that to you at your doorstep? It makes you want to prove them wrong, doesn't it? That stubbornness, that covetousness, that pride, it can so easily come in.

And Moses knew the kind of people he had. He knew how easy they would be led astray. He knew the challenges that they were going to face up to, the challenges we read there in verse 16 to 18.

And he says, beware, beware. And look at how seriously he puts it at the end of verse 18. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit.

That's how dangerous it is. Poisonous and bitter fruit. That's how easily the heart can become hardened against God and against his people and against his ways.

When we are led astray, when we are led by idols, false gods, and turn away from God, a poisonous and a bitter root takes over.

[18:22] And that is one thing we have to guard against at all times. So we have an overview, we have an observation. Then thirdly, we have an outcome.

An outcome predicted. Any kind of manifesto, anything that's looking to the way ahead, it always tries to predict the outcome. If we go this way, we will prosper, we will do well.

But it's always so difficult to predict. Over the years, people have always tried to predict the way things would go. Famously, Thomas J. Watson, who was chairman of the board of IBM back in the 1940s, said, I can see a market for computers in the world of only five.

Five computers. That was then. Look at the world we live in today. There's computers everywhere. There's computers in your hands. Another man, an author, Geoffrey Gittimer, I think it is, he said back in 1963 when I graduated, there were no personal computers, no cell phones, no internet, no credit cards, no cassette tapes, no satellite TV.

In the space of 60 years, all of these things have come. In fact, some have come and gone.

Cassette tapes, now people don't even know what they are. Back in 1963, they hadn't been produced.

[19:51] It's hard to predict. But what God does is deal in certainties. In certainties. Because there's nothing hard for God to predict.

And the predictions that he gives in this chapter are warnings. If you continue in your own way, if you turn to these false gods, you see it in verse 24 to verse 26.

A long list of predictions and disasters, but there's a reason given why. Verse 24, all the nations will ask, why has the Lord done this to the land? Why this fierce, burning anger?

And the answer will be, it is because this people abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt.

They went off and worshipped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, gods he had not given them. This is the outcome predicted. They will go because that's their natural way.

[20:56] But when they go they will find it empty. They will only find destruction. That is the warning. It's the same warning as Jesus gives in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 8.

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? what's it worth? What's your soul worth today to you?

Is it worth turning away from God and losing it? It's not something God wants. And you see that as you go on into chapter 30 in this book.

Repentance and forgiveness is the heading at chapter 30. But just look at verse 6. The Lord will God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, that you may live.

He doesn't want you lost. He wants you to live. And that is the power that He is able to produce in your heart. To circumcise your heart means to open your heart before God.

[22 : 11] To change your heart. That is the power that He has. And that's what God wants. That is the outcome He is looking for.

not that we would perish, but that we would live. And that leads us to the final thing. Because the final thing we see here is an offer.

An offer. You see it again in chapter 30 verse 11 downwards, the choice of life and death. You see it here in chapter 29 verse 9 that we read, therefore keep the words of this covenant and do them that you may prosper in all that you do.

That you may live. That you may know deliverance. That is what He wants for His people here. That is what He wants for His people today.

The choice that is put before us. The choice that is there. Choose God and live. That is so often the choice that we see throughout Scripture.

[23 : 23] The choice that God calls us to. That is the real call of this passage. To find a way to prosper. To find a way of deliverance.

To put our trust in God. That is what verse 9 asks of us. To consider. To look at all that we hear in these words.

keep the words of this covenant. A covenant is a promise. God makes His promise to us. He will be our God.

We will be His people when we put our trust in Him. And it comes with a warning. There is always a warning.

Just think of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 7 of Matthew. There He presents that great picture. Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide, and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

[24 : 27] For the gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. He puts the choice, the broad road and the narrow roads. The choice between life and death.

It's that stark. The choice that Joshua and Caleb put before us so often as well, when you go back to Numbers, before they went into the promised land, Joshua and Caleb said to the congregation of the people in Numbers 14 verse 6 to 9, the land which we passed through to spy it out is an exceedingly good land.

If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord and do not fear the people of the land. The Lord is with us.

Do not fear them. There was a choice. They chose to turn away from that, to turn away from God, and they ended up being lost in the wilderness. And here we are now 40 years later, and they're waiting to go on again.

And which way would they choose? That's what's being put before them. Keep the words of this covenant and do them that you may prosper. What does it mean for you?

[25 : 44] What does it mean for us today? Keep the words that God puts before us. The words of his covenant. The covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

That deliverance is found in him. And when we put our trust in him, we are to follow his ways, all the ways that he commands us.

And there are many things that that leads us to. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself.

That's the summary of it. Is that what we are doing? is that the way that we are living? Is that the way that we are going forward?

Because if it's not, there is that danger that we read of here, a poisonous and a bitter fruit when we turn away from God.

[26 : 47] So let us turn to him. Let us look to him and go forward trusting him, honoring him, loving him with all our hearts, loving our neighbor as ourself, seeking his blessing and his good to us.

he is faithful who has promised. Let us be faithful to him. Let us pray. Lord, our gracious God, we thank you for the promises that you give to us, that you are a faithful God, that you are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of old, but that you are a God for all your people down through all generations, that your promises we see fulfilled in Jesus Christ, our Lord, the one who directs us, the one who shows us the way, and may you help us to walk in his ways.

May you lead us by your spirit, may you guide us by your truth, may you forgive us in all our sin as we ask it all, in Jesus name, Amen. We'll conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 138, Scottish Psalter Version, page 431 of the Psalm books, Psalm 138, we'll sing from verse 3 to 5.

Thou didst me answer in the day when I to thee did cry, and thou my fainting soul was strengthened, strengthen inwardly. All kings upon the earth shall give thee praise, O Lord, when as they from thy mouth shall hear thy true and faithful word.

We'll sing from verse 3 to 5 to God's praise. O tits me answer in the day when I to thee did cry, and thou my painting soul with strength, this strength and inwardly.

[29 : 22] All kings upon the earth that heart shall give thee praise, O Lord, when last they from thy mouth shall hear thy true unfaithful word.

In the righteous wish of God, with pout this they shall sing, great the glory of the Lord, who doth forever reign.

After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my right. We'll close with the benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rest upon and abide with you all, now and forever more.

Amen. Amen. Amen.