

The Choice of a New Generation | Deuteronomy

The Value of Dwelling On the Past

Deuteronomy 1.20-21, 24-38, 41ff

10.8.17

(These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness) "I said to you, 'You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the LORD our God is about to give us. ²¹ 'See, the LORD your God has placed the land before you; go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. Do not fear or be dismayed.'

²⁴ *"They turned and went up into the hill country, and came to the valley of Eshcol and spied it out. ²⁵ "Then they took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought us back a report and said, 'It is a good land which the LORD our God is about to give us.'²⁶ "Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; ²⁷ and you grumbled in your tents and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us. ²⁸ 'Where can we go up? Our brethren have made our hearts melt, saying, "The people are bigger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified to heaven. And besides, we saw the sons of the Anakim there."²⁹ "Then I said to you, 'Do not be shocked, nor fear them. ³⁰ 'The LORD your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, ³¹ and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked until you came to this place.'³² "But for all this, you did not trust the LORD your God, ³³ who goes before you on your way, to seek out a place for you to encamp, in fire by night and cloud by day, to show you the way in which you should go. ³⁴ "Then the LORD heard the sound of your words, and He was angry and took an oath, saying, ³⁵ 'Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give your fathers, ³⁶ except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and to his sons I will give the land on which he has set foot, because he has followed the LORD fully.'³⁷ "The LORD was angry with me also on your account, saying, 'Not even you shall enter there. ³⁸ 'Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter there; encourage him, for he will cause Israel to inherit it.*

"Then you said to me, 'We have sinned against the LORD; we will indeed go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us.' And every man of you girded on his weapons of war, and regarded it as easy to go up into the hill country. ⁴² "And the LORD said to me, 'Say to them, "Do not go up nor fight, for I am not among you; otherwise you will be defeated before your enemies."⁴³ "So I spoke to you, but you would not listen. Instead you rebelled against the command of the LORD, and acted presumptuously and went up into the hill country. ⁴⁴ "The Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against you and chased you as bees do, and crushed you from Seir to Hormah. ⁴⁵ "Then you returned and wept before the LORD; but the LORD did not listen to your voice nor give ear to you. ⁴⁶ "So you remained in Kadesh many days, the days that you spent there.

Today kicks off the celebration season of our 60th Anniversary as a local church. And we are, of course, looking back, grateful to God for His faithfulness to HIS work here (and maybe we're a bit nostalgic). And we're looking ahead to all the events that are planned...AND beyond that...we're thinking of our own lives and the FUTURE of this local congregation...thinking about South Florida... our young people, thinking about the NEXT GENERATION.

That's why Deuteronomy seems like the right book for this moment, the Fifth Book of Moses and the conclusion of the Torah. It's a series of sermons for the New Generation...meant to shape their choices.

Today, we drop in on Moses...the old man...he's led the New Generation to the edge of Canaan, the Land of Promise. They're camped at Kadesh-barnea and THEY have been here before...at least their parents have.

We read about it last November – the central rebellion in the Book of Numbers (seven rebellions and THIS one which is retold in Moses' opening, THIS is the fourth, the central rebellion around which the whole Book of Numbers revolves). This is the MAIN failing of the Exodus Generation (led to 40 years in the wilderness...where they all died).

And now Moses uses this failure as his introduction to this long, three-point sermon... Moses uses it to say, "Sometimes, it's very valuable to dwell on the past... and I don't want to wallow in our failures but IF we are to move ahead...and IF the new generation will make the right choices...WE MUST FIRST TAKE A SANE, OPEN, HONEST LOOK at our past...those who refuse to study history are destined to repeat its failures! (paraphrase of Santayana)

This retelling of the central rebellion diagnoses what is really the problem with us ALL as fallen humans...and it also points out how our attempts to FIX our problem don't work...AND most important, this text sweetly allures us to the ONE true fix:

- 1) Big Central Obstacle
- 2) Failed Attempts to Get Around It
- 3) The Key to Future Success

The painful story that Moses has to recount for this New Generation is how their parents flinched at the decisive moment – they refused to enter the Land God had promised them.

God had promised this Land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... God had miraculously saved the family of Jacob...brought them into Egypt and many generations later, after they'd multiplied wildly and became the slaves of Pharaoh – God rescued them by miracles ...the plagues...the Passover...the Exodus!

And then after they came through the sea and their enemies were defeated – truly FREE...THEN God met with them at Sinai for a year and finally they came to cross the Jordan and go into their promised home... They sent in spies...and that seemed like a good idea (strategize!)... and the spies returned with that strange fruit (see last year's sermon!)

The fruit was not what they were used to in Egypt. It was sweet and exotic and really BIG...and wonderful! It should have been a sign that, "YES! God has unimagined adventures in store for us...we've really underestimated His good plans – look at this fruit!"

But... where there are BIG CROPS there must also be BIG FARMERS...and big warriors...and they reported, "THERE BE GIANTS in the land!" The scouts gave a "bad report" and the people melted.

Only two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, were in favor of going in...but they could NOT sway the people. This is the central rebellion of the seven in Numbers...a decisive turn, AWAY from obedience and AWAY from the terms of the Covenant.

And the question is WHY? What drove them, a generation that had seen miracles...and who'd been shown evidence that God was real?

And Moses tells this new generation that the MOTIVE behind their parents' disobedience...and behind the fear of giants...was an unshakeable DOUBT in the character and goodness of God: v. 27, "You grumbled in your tents and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of Egypt to destroy us!"

And WE, on this auspicious occasion...all in our nice clothes and gathered together...WE may be thinking, "REALLY?! After all they'd seen...can they doubt the goodness of God? Why would they have DONE that?"

But think how really easy this IS to DO ... Is it possible to find evidence that might suggest that God is NOT good? Did you, for instance, find any hints in the news this week? Or last week or the week before?

We're all reeling from a horrific, demonic, senseless crime in Las Vegas... could God have stopped that? Why, if God is GOOD, would He not STOP that?

And before that, the hurricanes in Puerto Rico and in the islands and here in South Florida... and before that...world leaders who boast in the most cavalier way about launching nuclear weapons...

OR we may, on a much smaller scale, look back on our own lives and hurts inflicted on us by others... and we could easily conclude, "How could a God who COULD have stopped that...but didn't...how could He be good?"

OR we may think of certain delights and pleasures we've enjoyed... clearly signs of goodness in the universe...BUT we MAY NOT remember them that way... We may attribute the vacation to the Napa Valley to the HARD WORK we put in...so we could afford the trip. We may look at our

children succeeding and think, “Hmmm! I guess I REALLY am a great parent after all!” (Wait! Doesn’t your joy and satisfaction prove to you that God is good? ...Uh...yeah...that’s what I meant!”...)

OR sometimes...we may...just like the Exodus Generation...we may get some sense of the holiness of God. “For Thou art not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with Thee.” (Psa 5.4) And when we think of that verse...it may dawn on us, “Uh, oh! This is NOT all good news for ME...because I have DONE evil... and if I’m really open and honest, I’d admit – if God hates evil and I AM evil...” Well...do the math. God can’t LOVE me in light of what I’ve done and in light of what I AM... He must have bad plans for me. (Personally speaking, this was a HUGE obstacle for me at the time of my conversion...and ever since!)

Someone once told me, “The assertion that God is good is an article of faith...” and I would add, “And we don’t always see evidence for the claim!” (And we’re all going to die!... And that’s horrifying in itself!)

And this was the problem with the Exodus Generation... they saw a lot of evidence that God was NOT good...that God hated them.

They had seen in Egypt the way the gods play with us MORTALS... “The gods of Egypt were cruel and I suppose the God of Abraham is sort of like the gods of Egypt...right?”

Moses diagnoses the problem as a lack of trust. They feared the giants and feared war...and they disobeyed God...BECAUSE v.32 “you DID NOT trust the LORD your God...” IT WAS A MATTER OF TRUST.

And yet when they failed...back in Numbers CH 13, Moses reminds them: when faced with this BIG decision (choice of the old generation!) you did TWO THINGS that had nothing to do with TRUST. We could refer to these two failed attempts to get around their problem as FLIGHT or FIGHT.

Your first instinct was FLIGHT, “Uh uh! We aint goin’ up against those giants! They’ll kill us and take our children! We won’t DO it!”

And we often do the same. God calls us to trust Him and do some act of obedience that expresses this trust and we simply run away...it could be how we manage our money...it could be how we use our words...it could be about stepping deeper into the waters of this 60 year old church...to actually reach out and make friends...join a class or a small group or volunteer for some ministry...and YOU REALLY HAVE A SENSE THAT YOU ARE BEING CALLED...but we run away... FLIGHT. That’s one way to respond...but the call doesn’t go away...

OR FIGHT – when Moses called them on their FLIGHT response and they could see that God took their rebellion very seriously... then, v.41, they recant! They “cry uncle” (as if that’s what God really wanted) and they say, “Ok...ok ...ok just get off our back and we’ll JUST DO IT!”

“We have sinned against the LORD; we will go up and fight just as the LORD commanded us’ And every man ... put on his weapons of war and regarded it as easy to go to easy to go to the hill country!”

And the LORD replied, “Don’t go – I am NOT going with you...”

“Oh, THAT’S OK LORD, we got this! Don’t trouble Yourself!...Look we’re obeying...just like You wanted!”

And they were defeated badly...they stepped into a real hornets’ nest (v.44)... because it WASN’T EASY... and in fact it was humanly impossible...but more important, they DID NOT repent of their real sin which was not fear or even disobedience...

Their real sin was their suspicious outlook on the goodness and character of God. They judged by what they saw...not by what God had said...and promised...

He had promised to give them this land. He had demonstrated that He would be faithful to His promises and had given them real evidence that (v.31) “you SAW how the LORD your God carried you, just like a man carries his son...”

God has proven that He is not fickle and cruel like the idols of Egypt... He’s NOT like them at ALL! Instead, He’s a Father! He carries you, Israel, like a Father carries His own child...tenderly...lovingly! He loves YOU...even when you don’t see it...even when the news gives you APPARENT evidence to the contrary...”

Even when your failures make it impossible for a HOLY GOD to even look at YOU...HE DOES LOOK AT YOU...and His eyes are full of love and tenderness and empathy (“He knows our frame that we are but dust!” – Psa 103.13-14)

But that’s IT – T.J. – how do I see the eyes of God, tender and warm...and accepting...how can I have confidence...when everything in my life just seems to be going wrong...my marriage...my singleness...my work...my children... my failings/sins/guilt/regrets...?

Well...I’m glad you asked.

Did you notice...that Moses’ sermon to this New Generation (and to US – the New Park Road Presbyterian Church – the new generation) how God points to the real key to future success.

“Lord...we are JUST as afraid as our parents were...and we haven’t seen all the miracles they did...we’re tempted to run from the Land more than they were!”

And God says, (v. 38) “Yeshua, will cause Israel to inherit it!”

Remember, God has ONE Only begotten Son...and when that Son became a Man, He was named after THIS character... the Messiah’s name is Joshua!

And this passage is a subtle...sign ...an emblem or symbol...it’s a WHISPER FROM OUR FATHER...a whisper louder than the pain...clearer than the news ...more lucid than what our eyes see, “I will give MY JOSHUA...My YESHUA...and He will claim the inheritance FOR YOU...”

“See Him living the life YOU have failed to live – obeying IN YOUR PLACE! And all His obedience is credited to YOU when you simply trust Him!”

“See Him dying under the weight of your sin...all your guilt/regrets...all your shame and your dirty secrets are laid on Him – My Yeshua!”

Look at Him... As Joshua would carry that new generation into the Land...so, Yeshua, Jesus Christ will carry YOU! “He will cause Israel to inherit it!”

Use your sanctified imagination to imagine the Real Canaan-Land...the Land full of fruit you've never dreamed of...where even the leaves of the trees will heal the nations...like Puerto Rico and Bangladesh and Syria... (Rev 22.2)

God is saying to US – in our own generation – “Look, I have carried this church...like a Father carries His child... but what will really bring this church forward into the purposes I have for YOU...is to look forward to what the Greater Joshua, Jesus Christ has done and will do...” HE IS THE LENS that helps you Trust My good intentions and love for YOU.

I love you with an everlasting love...doesn’t the life death and resurrection of My Beloved Son prove it forever?...Don’t doubt My love and the good plans I have for YOU... “Eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1Cor 2.9) Only trust Him.