



Deuteronomy 31:16-29
The Pitfalls of Prosperity

16 And the LORD said to Moses: "Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.

17 "Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?'

18 "And I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they have done, in that they have turned to other gods.

19 "Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.

20 "When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant.

21 "Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them."

22 Therefore Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the children of Israel.

23 Then He inaugurated Joshua the son of Nun, and said, "Be strong and of good courage; for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land of which I swore to them, and I will be with you."

24 So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished,

25 that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying:

26 "Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you;

27 "for I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. If today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the LORD, then how much more after my death?

28 "Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to witness against them.

29 "For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands."

I won't be discussing the commissioning of Joshua in verse 23, because I addressed that in detail in a prior sermon. Instead I will be mostly focusing on this introduction to what is sometimes called the "Song of Moses."

I. The warning God gave of their apostasy that they would turn aside:

Peter Craigie seem like a massive understatement: "The words that the Lord addresses to Moses on the eve of his death must have caused great sadness in the aging leader."

Can you imagine the heartbreak that Moses felt addressing the people with this warning?

Subject of his long speech had been love trust obey of faith and faithfulness

Sadly the time in the wilderness has purged rebellion from the people any more than the flood rid the world of sin and evil.

The change in leadership certainly will not make the people more faithful. And Moses knows that if they have been rebellious while he was alive, and while they were seeing the Lord's mercy towards his people and anger towards the unrepentant, Moses has to wonder how much worse they will be after he dies!

II. The setting of the apostasy and the response of the people:

It would not be a failure on the part of God! Or even a time of hardship.

Prosperity would be the setting for their apostasy

As it so often is

The source of these things they enjoyed would be forgotten

They are like the celebrants at the party of Belshazzar, They use the cups from the Temple and then Daniel 5:4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone."

How often is this scene repeated in the church?

Apostasy is a disaster that doesn't happen quickly

It's like a slow motion car crash

Sadly the people will come up with a false explanation for the hardships that will come upon them. They will say they are suffering because God has forsaken them, as though he abandoned them without cause, when in fact the reason He will forsake them is because their hearts will turn away from God. HE tells them in advance, "No, you are suffering because *you* broke the covenant. You have left God and followed dumb idols." Did you really think that the Lord would bless you in the midst of faithlessness and evil like some sort of trust fund that continued to pay out dividends even though the beneficiary was a hopeless wastrel? 1 Samuel 2:30 ***"for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."***

III. God's prophetic warnings against this:

Moses has given the Words of the Law to the Levites. They had the tablets of the Ten Commandments which were put into the Ark of the Covenant – and then they had the scrolls of the law the Torah which were to sit outside the ark and which were to be read to the people on a regular basis.

Inside the Ark you had God's moral law, which was eternal and equally binding in all places and which summarized the Holiness of God, this is what we would call *prescriptive law*, then outside it you had the civil and ceremonial laws which were an application of the Moral law to Israel, they are *descriptive laws* based on the Decalogue and derived from it. Sadly these should be enough to act as a witness against the rebellion of the people against God. But unfortunately they won't be.

So the Lord also gives them this Song to memorize. It's form would be a prophetic warning – turn back to God before it is too late! This is a function the bible STILL plays in the life of the people of God.

This song, something the people themselves would sing, so if and when they turned away, it would be a witness against them. “Don'tcha remember the words of that song you sang as a kid?” No not Jesus Loves me, “Give Ear O Heavens.” In it the righteousness and redemption of God would be set against the rebelliousness and spiritual adultery of the people.

They need these reminders because their penchant has always been to go towards apostasy.

Applications:

I. It is the duty of God's messenger to preach the truth to the people regardless of what the message is and even when it is heartbreaking to do so

2 Tim. 4:2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

The messenger who loves the sheep is the man who tells them not what they want to hear but what they need to hear, who holds back nothing profitable and even if the people will not hear, yet God is glorified: **“Many a sad thought, no doubt, it occasioned to this good man, to foresee the apostasy and ruin of a people he had taken so much pains with, in order to them good and make them happy; but this was his comfort, that he had done his duty, and that God would be glorified”**

II. The Immanuel Principle for peoples and nations –

Moses understood that nothing was more important than having the presence of the Lord to be forsaken of God was awful

Exodus 33:15 Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.

Psalm 144:15 Happy are the people who are in such a state; Happy are the people whose God is the LORD!

The bitterest lament of Jesus on the Cross **Matt. 27:46** **And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"**

As a people we are forsaking God and assuming that God has forsaken us, the angry atheism that we see everywhere is a manifestation of this idea. We have sown the wind and reaped the whirlwind and as we suffer disaster after disaster we proclaim it to be proof there is no God.

I see this in individual lives of people who have plunged into sin and are reaping terrible consequences. I spoke to a woman who was angry at God amongst other things because he had not given her children with her husband, but prior to getting married she had had six abortions.

Whatever outward troubles we are in, if we have but the light of God's countenance, we may be easy. But, if God hide his face from us and our prayers, we are undone.

III. One of the uses of God's law is to tell us where to flee even if we did not hearken to his word and come back to Him: *"If this song did not prevent their apostasy, yet it might help to bring them to repentance, and to recover them from their apostasy. When their troubles come upon them, this song shall not be forgotten, but may serve as a glass to show them their own faces, that they may humble themselves, and return to him from whom they have revolted. Note, Those for whom God has mercy in store he may leave to fall, yet he will provide means for their recovery. Medicines are prepared before-hand for their cure."* – *Matthew Henry*

God's word sets before us our sin and the eternal consequences of it, and if we have turned away from the Lord like the prodigal, it tells us to return. The prodigal in the midst of the miserable consequences of His sin remembered his father's house and knew to return.

This is very important because it may well be that our children will go astray, but if we have given them a grounding in God's word then they will know where they may go for relief in the day when their eyes are opened to the emptiness of idolatry. John Newton, was raised by a godly mother in Christian family. He ran away to the sea and eventually became a slave trader, and then sank even further, but eventually he remembered the Christ whom his mother preached and ran back to Him and became very useful to the kingdom.