

Deuteronomy: Wholehearted Love

“At the Foot of Horeb”

Deuteronomy 1:1-8

Please turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter one, verses one through eight. We've been in the back of the Bible. For those of you who maybe don't know your Bibles as well, we've been kind of near the back of the Bible in Ephesians. Now we're going to flip to the other side. We're going to go back toward the beginning. So we are five books into the book of the Bible, to the fifth book that is Deuteronomy. It's a joy to be able to begin this new series as we delve into this book.

Now, I do want to give you a little bit of a sense of our flight path. Um, we are probably going to do chapters one through about chapter eleven. Okay. So we're not going to be able to read through the whole of the book in one sitting, as it were. But over the course of the spring and leading into the early summer, we'll do chapters one through eleven. Then we'll take a break and we'll study other parts of the word of the Lord, and then we'll come back to Deuteronomy later and continue on. In it, I just want to say that because I am committed to what is called the *lectio continua*, that means continuous reading of the Bible. In other words, I know that even if you don't know that word, you're familiar with that practice, because that's been the practice of your pastors here at Briarwood that we read through books in the Bible, however, so that we do not spend three years in one book. I want to make sure that you're getting the whole counsel of God, because that's also a commitment that we have here. So we'll read parts of Deuteronomy, then we'll maybe spend some time in the Psalms, and then we'll come back to Deuteronomy, and maybe then we'll do some New Testament. Okay. But we're going to be reading it continuously, and yet we still will break it into parts.

But as we begin now, we're beginning at the beginning of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy chapter one, verses one through eight. This is the word of the Lord.

These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan, in the wilderness in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and di Zahav. It is eleven days journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea. In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the people of Israel, according to all that the Lord had given him in commandment to them, after he had defeated Sihon, the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Ogg, the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth and Edrei beyond the Jordan in the land of Moab. Moses undertook to explain this law, saying, the Lord our God said to us in Horeb, you have stayed long enough at this mountain. Turn and take your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all of their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country, and in the lowland and in the Negev, and by the sea coast, the land of the Canaanites and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. See, I have set the land before you go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their offspring after them.

This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Now, we all love stories, right? That's something we all know. We love stories, but we particularly love stories that have deeper meanings. Okay, I know we all love a good adventure. We love to see something happen. We love to see excitement and climax and resolution and denouement and all those things that come with a good story. But we also really love it when someone can come alongside afterwards and say, did you notice this theme and that theme? And do you notice how he was in the shadows when he said this, and how he was in front of a broken mirror when he said that? Right. These are the classics of movie making, right? Broken mirrors, shadows and rain. Okay. These are like the kind of primary colors on how you communicate ideas. And it's great to sit down with someone who explains what the story was really about, whether it's Homer or Shakespeare, whether it's Pilgrim's Progress or The Chronicles of Narnia. We love stories that do more than just tell a story. And we don't just do this with movies and books and TV shows. We do this with our own life as well. As a matter of fact, there is a postmodern philosopher, Richard Rorty, who taught at Princeton and UVA and later at Stanford, and he put together this whole profile of what it's like to be a modern person. But one of the things he said about being a modern okay is something that I actually think is true for all of humans, okay. All throughout all human history. And he talked about this, all of us, in one way or another, are constantly asking ourselves, what kind of story am I in? As things happen in life, good things and bad things, we all, whether it's consciously or subconsciously, ask ourselves, so is this a turning point in the story? Is this when things go from good to bad? Or maybe this is when things go from bad to good. Maybe things are getting better. Where am I in the story? Am I near the end? Am I in the middle? Am I am I still on my hero's journey? Am I maybe a tragic hero? Or even worse, am I maybe a villain?

See, we're all asking these questions about our own lives because somewhere deep inside. And by the way, this isn't just Christians - This is everybody. Somewhere deep inside, we believe that history and our stories have meaning. What? What does this have to do with the book of Deuteronomy? It has to do with it this in this way, the book of Deuteronomy is like someone taking the stories of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and numbers. And in saying to us, let me tell you what this means.

The book of Deuteronomy is like the exposition at the end of a movie. Have you ever seen a movie? And it's kind of symbolic and metaphorical, or maybe it's a mystery and at the very end someone comes out. Maybe there's even an awkward conversation where they explain what the movie was about, what all the events were leading up to. The book of Deuteronomy is like this. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is telling us this is what all of the stories I've been telling you, all of the redemptive history that I've been explaining to you, going all the way back to creation, this is what it's all about. So that leads us to our first point. The book of Deuteronomy begins with these words. These are the words of Moses, right? *Eleh ha-Devarim* is the Hebrew title for this book, Devarim the words of Moses, because these are the words that Moses gives now as a culmination of the Pentateuch. It's the capstone of all that has come before.

Now, this isn't just my sort of studied analysis and conclusions about this book. Moses tells us himself that this is exactly what he's doing. If we go to chapter four, if you want to read ahead, this is a little bit of a spoiler alert because we'll get to chapter four in a few weeks, Lord willing.

Okay. But if you go to chapter four, verses thirty two and following, you'll see that Moses actually does an interesting thing. He gives a little abbreviated history, going all the way back to creation. He starts with creation. He gets to the fall, he gets to the events that take place, and at the end he says, why am I telling you all of this? Because you need to hear my words and obey them. You need to hear what the Lord is saying to you and follow them. That is why I've told you this redemptive history. That's why we've heard about all these adventures and misadventures, these villains and these heroes, these successes and these failures, these tragedies of the Old Testament leading up to Moses now on the steps of Moab, explaining to Israel what she must do next. Why do I tell you all of this? So that you can understand this book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy is the theological analysis of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and numbers. And the reason why this is important is because Moses is telling Israel you're now standing on the cusp of a major event in human history. For the first time since the fall, humanity is about to march back into a geographical area that has been set aside as a sanctuary unto the Lord. This is, as we say theologically. We could say this is typologically. This is metaphorically, humanity returning back into the garden. As a matter of fact, those of you who know the Book of Joshua know that as they are entering in, what do they do? Just like when they leave the garden, as man and woman are kicked out of the garden, there's an angel left there with a sword. You remember when Joshua was entering back in to the land? What happens? He meets the angel with the sword. Lest we miss it, the Lord is telling us we're returning to the garden. We're beginning the work again. And that's why you need to know everything that came before. You need to know about Adam. You need to know about Noah. You need to know about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. You need to know about the Exodus and what the Lord did there in Egypt. You need to understand that because we're about to charge back into the garden again.

Let me give you this analogy. Think about the way that Jesus talks about the Old Testament. What does Jesus say in passages like Matthew five and Luke twenty four? What does he say in Matthew five? The law and the prophets, they're not passing away. They're not being cancelled out by my ministry. They're not being made obsolete. They're not they're not the religion of the Jews. And I'm giving you a new religion, the religion of Christianity. Notice what Jesus says about the Old Testament. He says all of it is being fulfilled right now in the work that I am doing in inaugurating my kingdom. Not one jot, not one tittle will pass away, but all of it is being fulfilled in my work. Or think about in Luke twenty four as the risen Christ is walking on the road to Emmaus. What does he tell the apostles? Does he say? Well, let me give you I'm going to give you a new religion now, okay? Because I've been resurrected. So I've got to give you all new books of the Bible. Now, what does he say? He says, let's open up our Hebrew Bibles together. Let's look at the Torah. Let's look at Moses. Let's look at the prophets. Let's look at the Psalms. And I'm going to show you how all of them are explained by my ministry right now, that I am the culmination. Jesus is the capstone of the Old Testament. Why am I telling you this? Because that's an analogy for how we ought to look at Moses in Deuteronomy. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and numbers. That's the Old Testament to Moses's New Testament, which is the call to go in and to take the land as the Lord your God has given it to you.

See, Deuteronomy is the capstone of the Pentateuch, and it comes in the form of these three great speeches by Moses from chapter one, one to four, chapter four, forty four. That's the first speech. The second speech is chapter four, verses forty four to chapter twenty nine. That's the bulk of the text, chapter twenty nine, verse one, and then chapter twenty nine, verse two to thirty two, forty seven is the third of the speeches. So the whole book is built around these three speeches where Moses, like a detective at the end of a mystery movie, explains to you this is what it was all about. He gives you the exposition.

So that's the first point that Deuteronomy really is the capstone of the Pentateuch. But here's the second point, because we can't really stop there, can we? For those of you who have read the Bible all the way through, you've noted something about the books that come after Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is not just the capstone of the Pentateuch. It then changes in function and becomes the foundation for everything that's going to come afterwards. Deuteronomy is the pinnacle of the Pentateuch, and it's the foundation of the histories, the prophets, and the writings. As a matter of fact, as soon as you start reading Joshua, you notice it seems like the book of Joshua is like, you know, whoever's writing it has Deuteronomy in one hand, and then his history book in the other hand. He's using language like who loves the Lord, their God with all their heart, soul and strength, which is a clear quote to Deuteronomy. He's talking about the importance of making sure we all worship in the same place, in the place where the Lord puts his name. Where is he getting that from the book of Deuteronomy. He's judging the kings by whether or not the kings love the Lord is God, the Lord their God with all of their hearts and their soul and their strength. Okay, Samuel, Samuel and Samuel. David is described as being that kind of king. Solomon starts off as that kind of king, but then he becomes a divided king, right? And first kings. Okay. One thing we notice is whatever's going on, those history writers know the book of Deuteronomy really well. And then we turn over to the prophets, and we notice that they're also quoting the book of Deuteronomy, even though it disappears for some long period of time, which is really a wonderful. This is one of the questions I want to ask of the priests during Josiah's day, the ones who find the book of Deuteronomy hidden away in the temple when they're doing renovations. I have to say, what do you think happened? Was it lost just because the people fell into unbelief? Is that why? And these people just stopped reading it? Was it hidden away because Manasseh was such a rebellious king and it was during Manasa's day?

Just bear with me for a second if you're interested in these kind of things. Isaiah seems to know about Deuteronomy, but by the time of Jeremiah it has been lost. So what happened in that hundred year period? Well, we know that Manasseh was king for most of that time. Was he the one who was suppressing it? Well, one thing that we find out as soon as they discover it, as soon as they find the Book of Deuteronomy hidden away in the basement, perhaps, and perhaps a scroll closet, a genizah at the bottom of the temple. As soon as they find it, what happens? Josiah gets it verified by Huldah the prophetess, and Jeremiah lays hold of it and says, we need reformation because these words are for us today. These words just aren't for the people of the conquest generation these words are for us today.

You see, Deuteronomy is not just the capstone of the of the Pentateuch. It is the foundation of everything that comes after. We should not be surprised that when Jesus is talking with his

interlocutors and Jesus will sometimes in conversation like we do, just want to say, hey, let's just speak generally right now so we can I can get my point across. He'll say things like this. Okay. Before we delve into the law, just tell me what is the greatest commandment? I think when Jesus says that we should believe him, he's saying, this is the greatest commandment. This is the number one. This is the core. This is the beating heart of the Old Testament law. When he says, what's the greatest commandment? His interlocutors will say, the Lord our God is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. That is the greatest commandment. And Jesus will say, you are absolutely right, because Jesus recognizes that Deuteronomy contains the heart of the Old Testament.

Let's just look briefly at an outline of the book so that you can see the logic of how it works. You'll see this again over the course of this series. Um, and we'll find ways to get some more information out to you if you are interested in these kinds of things. If you want some more background study on this, but this is a general outline of the book, and it shows how the book follows a covenantal order. Now I'll talk more about that in later series. We can't put all the introductory stuff in one sermon. Okay, so we'll come back to this later. But I just want to help you see the covenantal logic of the book. Notice how the first four chapters that we've already begun today are starting with a historical remembrance. You notice how they're talking about things that have already happened. He's talking about being at the foot of Mount Horeb. I mean, this was forty years ago. Okay. Why is he talking about this? And it shows the kind of, um, covenantal logic, if you notice the Bible in all of its covenants, which is the way, just the way that God relates to us. They all follow this similar logic. You begin by remembering what the Lord has already done. Think about with Abraham in Genesis fifteen, the Lord Abraham says, how will I know that you're going to give me an heir? And what is and what does the Lord say? He says, I brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees you want to go? Yeah. Okay. We all we know that, Lord, he's asking about a future heir. And the Lord says no. You have to think, Covenantally.

Remember what I've done in the past so you can be faithful for what I will do in the future. Think about Moses. Excuse me. David rather, as David's running out onto the field of battle with Goliath, does he run out and say, my hope is in my sling and my staff? Is that what he says? No. He runs out and he says, I remember when the Lord saved me from bears and lions as a youth. I know that he will protect me from this Philistine. He's remembering his past. He's showing himself to be a covenantally, thoughtful person. We do this as well when we participate in our covenantal meal of the Lord's Supper. Why do we do this? We do this in remembrance of him. What's another way to say that as we do it, we proclaim his death? That's in the past, right? As a statement of faith about the future until he comes again. This is covenantal logic.

So Moses starts this covenantal book with a historical prologue. All the things that have happened, how Israel has been saved, even though they have failed over and over and over again. It's then followed by the core of the book, which is the stipulations. Now notice that starts in chapter four forty four. I already mentioned to you that's the second speech that Moses gives. And actually, if we had a bigger slide, a way of doing larger slides, I'd then show you how under those stipulations, what happens first you have the Ten Commandments in

chapter five. And they act as a kind of table of contents for the rest of the stipulations. Okay, we'll get a chance to look at this as we get further through the book. But I want to argue the Ten Commandments aren't just kind of floating there in chapter five on their own. There's a reason why they come at the beginning of the stipulations, because they are a guide to the rest of the stipulations. Okay, then we have a ratification ceremony. Okay. The Lord says once you come into the land, you're going to have to do this ceremony and will involve the sprinkling of blood and sacrifices, because you're going to commit yourselves again anew to this same covenant that I made with you at Sinai. And then it's followed by some future blessings and curses, where the Lord lays out what will happen if they turn away from him. And then finally, a historical epilogue at the end that deals with the end of Moses ministry in the beginning of Joshua's.

Why do we lay all this out in this way? First of all, it's always important to know where you're going in a book. But secondly I want to point this out. In the New Testament, sometimes Paul or Jesus or others will refer to the law and they'll mean the whole Old Testament. Okay, but we have to recognize that the Old Testament really works in this way. The whole of the Old Testament is, in a way, the law. And yet the core of the Old Testament, the hub. As I've been saying, it's not just a capstone, it's a foundation. It's kind of like a hub of a wheel that everything rotates around is the book of Deuteronomy. So, in the Old Testament, what's the core of the Old Testament? Deuteronomy? What's the core of Deuteronomy, as you've just seen the Ten Commandments. And then, as Christ points out to us, what's the core of the Ten Commandments? That passage in Deuteronomy six four through nine known as the Shema hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, and all of your strength. You see, there's a logic to the order of the book of Deuteronomy, and it helps us better understand the whole of the Old Testament. This really is the core. It's the hub. So as we commit ourselves to the study of the whole counsel of God, there's few better books that we can start with in the book of Deuteronomy.

Now, I want to turn to our passage this morning and just consider it in brief chapter verses, chapter one, verses one through eight. So let's look at this now as our last point. And I want to divide this up into two major points about this section. First of all, is this just making two observations about this opening passage?

The first one is this notice the emphasis on the Word of God. Notice the emphasis on the word. And then secondly, notice the emphasis on the waiting, the word and the waiting. First of all, look at the word. As I said already, the title of Deuteronomy in the Hebrew tradition is Devarim. These are the words okay. And they even kind of believe that to mean not just the book of Deuteronomy, but really the Ten Commandments, which in Hebrew are referred to as the ten words. Okay. These are the words the book, and these are the words the Ten Commandments. So where do we get this name Deuteronomy from? Okay. Many of you all know that it means the second law or the second giving of the law or something like that, but it actually comes out of the book itself. It's not a great title, because in the passage where this word Deuteronomy actually occurs, it's not talking about all of Israel, it's just talking about the King. It's in Deuteronomy seventeen verse eighteen, where Moses is writing about the king, who they will

one day have. By the way, do you notice that the king, that they will one day have that Moses says, yes, you should have a king. Just want to remind us of this. We were always meant to have a king. Adam and Eve in the garden are told to fill the earth and have dominion. Right. That language of having dominion is kingly language. Noah is called to do the same. Abraham is told in Genesis twelve, Kings will come out of you. Moses writes in the book of the law. This is how your king should act when you get a king. Okay. Why do I say this? Because we don't want to think that a king is somehow plan B. We were always meant to have a king. We were always meant to have Messiah King. When the Israelites say to Samuel, give us a king like the like the other nations, and the Lord says, don't worry, Samuel, they're not rejecting you, they're rejecting me. A lot of times we miss the point, and we think the problem is that they're asking for a king. That's not the problem. The problem is that they're asking for a king like the other nations. Lord says no, no, no, no. You don't want a king like the other nations. Or rather, I'll let you try one out.

Here's Saul. But then he gives them a king who's after his own heart. We were always meant to have a king. Messiah was always a part of the plan. However, here where Moses is talking about the coming king, he says it's crucial that the king writes down with his own hand. Okay? Writes down with his own hand the whole book of the law, referring to Deuteronomy. Okay. And that copy of the law in Hebrew is translated into the Greek Deuteronomy. And so that's where we get the name of this book, the second giving of the law. But if you think about it, it's not really a second giving. Moses is not going back up onto the mountain, Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai to get the law. What is he doing? He's just repeating the law now and expanding on it, as we see here in our passage this morning, he is undertaking to explain what the law means. And notice Moses does not need an introduction in this book. Moses is the one through whom the Lord gives his words. Israel knows this. At this point, there is no competitor to Moses. There's no other prophets who can also vie for the authority of being a prophet of the Lord. Moses is sui generis, right? He is the only one who can actually fill this role. But it's helpful because it helps us understand how our God reveals himself to us. It's an amazing thing that the God of the universe has not just made a creation that he can reveal himself into, but that he has also formed us in such a way our finite selves, limited by thinking, limited by hearing and seeing and smelling and touch. And we really only can know what we know. We can't know more than we know. I can't know things that I don't experience and all of that. But then in his creation of us, God, he installed this, little chip. Right? We got a little computer chip into our operating system that makes it possible for us to hear and understand the creator. Now, it's interesting. He doesn't do it through sort of osmosis. He doesn't just feed it, download it into our brains while we're sleeping at night. He doesn't do it from writing words on the sky that we all have to listen to. It's interesting. The way he chose to do it was through the form of prophets, of whom Moses is really the first writer of Scripture and the greatest prophet of the Old Testament. The Lord does it through the mouths and the personalities of inspired prophets. I would actually argue, by the way, this is an innovative or let me put it this way, this is a unique Christian and biblical way of thinking about prophecy in other traditions. Your prophets eyes roll back. They go into fits and have seizures and words come out and they don't know what's being said. Because of course, if it's going to be the Word of God, it has to come like that. Do you notice that the Bible doesn't do this? Moses is quite in his right mind when he

is giving the word of the Lord. As a matter of fact, Moses has his own writing style, and it's different from Jeremiah, and it's different from Isaiah, and that's different from Luke. We call this organic inspiration that our Lord doesn't speak outside of the consciousness of its prophets. He speaks through the consciousness of the prophets. And notice how this book starts. It begins in this way. These are the words of Moses that are given to Israel, and they are given by the Lord. These are the words of God to you.

So I want to start with the focus on the words, because we will come back to this over and over again in the book of Deuteronomy. But it's fitting that the book begins with that introduction. Secondly, the waiting, the waiting among all of these place names that that Moses begins us with kind of telling us where they were and where they had been. All of this is kind of, you know, definitive of places in between Sinai down in the southwest and Moab kind of generally on this map that we're imagining, which is kind of up in the North East. Okay, particularly along this area of the Arabah, which is this big geological divot that takes place around the Dead Sea and then extends south down to the Gulf of Aqaba. If any of you all remember the movie Lawrence of Arabia, whenever I talk about the Arabah, I think about this. Remember Lawrence of Arabia having to go down through that desert and they all the whole army almost dies, right? What's he doing? He's going down through the Arabah. All right, so Moses is telling us, out of all of these places where we've been. Okay? And now ending up here on the steps of Moab, the mountain steps looking down over the Jordan. All of this is important because if we were to have left Horeb, that is Mount Sinai, right as the right, after the Lord gave us the law, if we were to obey him and come up and invade the land back then, it would have taken us, oh, about eleven days, if we had gone from Mount Horeb to Kadesh Barnea, which is to the south of the land, which is the way that they were planning to go up into the land and to invade it. If we had done it, we would have had a hiatus of about eleven days between Exodus and Conquest. Forty years later, here we now stand on the gates of the eastern side of the Promised Land could have been eleven days, but it was forty years. What are we to make of this discrepancy? How did eleven days become forty years?

Now, the question is kind of hinting at something that will be discussed over the course of chapters one through four in this book. Why is it that it took them all this time? But of course, we know if we've read Exodus and Numbers, if we've read the rest of Deuteronomy before we know what the problem is, you see, after giving them the law, the Lord told them, now go up north. It's going to be about eleven days. Go up north and take the promised land that I have given to you all the way back. You can remember all the way back to Genesis fifteen. I gave it to your forefathers. And notice we even get those borders to in Genesis fifteen from the rivers in Egypt up to the river Euphrates, which, by the way, is quite a considerable plot of land. And he says, go on up and take it. It's yours to take. As a matter of fact. Exodus. Exodus out of Egypt was always meant to be followed by conquest, or, to put it in use, a kind of Greek turn of phrase. Right?

What is Exodus mean? Do you know this is where we get the word odometer? It just means way. ex means out. The way out. That's the exodus -the way out. It was always supposed to be followed by. How do you say in in Greek ice. So Exodus was always supposed to be followed by ice. The going out was always meant to be followed by a going back in. The Lord never leaves

his people kind of in a liminal space without anywhere to go. You've been taken out of Egypt, slavery, suffering, and you are now being brought in to a place of abundance. And yet Israel, in a kind of ironic act of cowardice. Having just seen Egypt, the great Empire, who believed that their own king was a god Pharaoh, to see that huge imperial army brought to their knees and swallowed up in the Red sea, to have seen these amazing plagues, to see Pharaoh beg them to leave, submitting to their God, Yahweh. Israel, having just seen all of this, now goes up to the north of the land, and they poke their heads over the hills north of Kadesh Barnea, and they look down into the land, and they see fragmented tribes of Amorites and Canaanites and Jebusites and parasites and all these different kinds of ites that are down there in the land. And they look at them and they say, that's too much for us. We don't have the resources, Lord, we don't we don't have the humans. We don't have the military technology to have victory over people like that. Do you see the irony in it? They just seem that one of the greatest powers of the ancient Near East brought to their knees. And now they're standing and out of a crisis, a deficit of belief. They do not have the courage to listen to the Lord, and to follow him by faith and to take the land.

Now we have to understand something. The postponement, then, of the gift from eleven days to forty years. The postponement of the inheritance of the promised land. This is not God just being vindictive, by the way. He could have done that. He would have been entirely just. Okay. He said, I saved you. I'm giving you the land. You won't take it. I'm done with you. That would have been an entirely just act for him to do that. And yet I want us to be sure about this. Don't think of the forty years of the wandering as just a vindictive, vindictive punishment of God. The waiting is part of the formation of the people. The waiting is how he forms them to make them able to go into the land with courage and with bravery, to say, as for me and my family, as Joshua says, we will follow the Lord. Be strong and courageous. How do we get from Kadesh Barnea to that? It's through forty years of wandering.

This is the life of Abraham. If you go back and you watch him slowly waiting and waiting and waiting for the Lord to finally give him the seed that he desires. What do we see, Abraham? Do we see him mature From sort of, in some ways a kind of spoiled patriarch who's given everything he could possibly want to finally trusting in the Lord. As a matter of fact, those forty years of wilderness wandering are used most commonly as a metaphor for the exile that is to come to Israel, that when Israel goes into exile, it is talked about by the prophets. As another wandering, the Lord is again preparing us. He's forming us. He's shaping us. As a matter of fact, that metaphor even extends into the Christian church, so that the Christians of the New Testament will refer to this time in between Jesus' salvation of us on the cross and our waiting for the new heavens and new earth as a kind of wandering or exile. You know, the Apostle Peter himself and his first letter says, I am writing to the elect exiles. You see, like Israel, we've seen the wondrous salvation. We've seen our enemies of Satan, sin and death conquered. We've seen the Lord pull us out of lives of despair and destruction and put us on solid ground. And yet we haven't quite attained the thing that we're longing for, which is the new heavens and the new earth. Yes, a land flowing with milk and honey, but so much better. New life. Life imperishable. The thing that the promised land was pointing towards.

But in the meantime, we live in these lives of wandering, of unmet expectations. I think the Lord does this the way he does because he knows how we are, how we think. In Hebrews twelve, the author of Hebrews says, trust in the Lord, even in your sufferings, even in your trials. Why? Because the Lord is a loving father who raises you up so that you can be formed by him. You can. You can desire him. You can get a heart that is. Sometimes some Christians use the language of being cruciform, formed unto Christ crucified. Now this is the strange dynamic of the Christian faith, because on one side, our faith is easily gotten right in one way. It's like there's nothing I can do. I don't strive to get saved. I don't work really hard so I can earn my salvation. It is given to me as a gift. No man can boast. It's a free gift. It's offered to me. And yet we also have to remember that it's not cheap.

We use the language of the cost of discipleship. The cost of what it means to be a follower of Christ. What it means to follow our Savior even in his death, picking up our cross and following him. The suffering, the unmet expectations, the very things that he himself experienced in his own life. We are experiencing them too. And they form us and conform us to his character. I think we often experience our lives as wandering through unmet expectations, and that wandering kind of emphasizes the frustration. It amplifies the frustration we feel. Just like the Israelites in the wilderness who are longing to eat. And so the Lord gives them manna. Manna, which is incredible, just shows up in the morning having fallen from the sky. But they get sick of it and they're frustrated with it. And so the Lord then shows them mercy and gives them quail, but then they get sick of quail too. We see the frustrations being amplified because they know about the promised land, and yet they haven't obtained the Promised Land. It even hits Moses. When, out of frustration, he hits the rock more than once because he's just angry.

We've had the unmet expectations as well. Relationships that we invested in that we hoped would pay off and they didn't pay off. Investments that we invested in that we hoped would pay off and didn't pay off, jobs that we thought would give us meaning and satisfaction. And they don't give us meaning and they don't give us satisfaction. And we keep grasping like the Israelites in the wilderness. And guess what? I hate to tell you this, Christians, this is even a little harder because we've tasted of the new heavens and new earth. We're led by the spirit, but it's not a column of fire and smoke. Smoke. It's a spirit that dwells within us. And I actually think this.

Okay, here's my hot take on the Christian life. There's a little bit more tension in Christian, in Christians than there is in non-Christians, because we've tasted the better thing we know about the Promised Land. There's sometimes even a little bit more internal conflict within the Christian, because we've tasted of it. We know what we're waiting for. There's a part of the Lord of the Rings, a fellow in the fellowship of the ring, where the great wizard Gandalf is singing a song about his friend. His friend's name is Aragorn, and if you know the story, you know the background of Aragorn. Aragorn looks like a homeless guy. He looks like a vagabond. He looks like an outlaw. He's used to forging around in the northern wilderness. People kind of treat him sort of like, you know, he's sort of a hermit or an ascetic who lives out in the wilderness. And yet he's not he's actually the great king of Gondor who is just waiting for the right time to take his throne and to have his victory over the forces of darkness. And as Gandalf is singing a song about him, he's singing about the fact that not all things are as they appear.

He says this not all gold glitters. But then he says this line, not all who wander are lost. You see Moses writing now, forty years after setting out from Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai, he's reminding Israel that though she has wandered, she was never lost. Though she waited. She was never forsaken.

Sometimes our lives can feel like wandering, just one instance of unmet expectations after another, when our hopes don't seem to pay off. And yet, in the midst of the wandering, let us never think that we are lost. Is it any wonder that in the Psalms, the most common metaphor for the life of faith is the life of a pilgrimage through valleys and canyons, but ultimately leading up to the sanctuary of the Lord. Why is the Lord a good shepherd? Because he's guiding me, and he's with me. When I'm in the valley of the shadow of death, he's guiding me when I need to be fed on the pilgrimage on the way into the house of the Lord. You see, we may feel that we are in a wilderness at times, but the wandering, the waiting is the work of the Lord in our lives. He's conforming us. He's shaping us for his glory. He's coming alongside us, and he's being present with us through acts of special providence. I want you to think about it this way. When you deal with struggles in life, when you deal with unmet expectations, when you deal with anxieties, I want you to go to the Lord and say, Lord, thank you for this special providence as you shape me. Let me not squander it. But I pray that it would draw me and draw my eyes forward to that promised land that awaits the land that flows with everlasting milk and honey. The world made new. The new heavens and the new earth.

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, as we come before you, I pray that you would shape us, your pilgrims. You have put us on this pathway. I pray that you would watch over us, that you would protect us both our going out, our exoduses, and our going in our eyesight. Bless us Lord, as we walk along the path. Draw us to you in Christ, good Shepherd. Walk alongside us and strengthen us, Lord. But never, Lord, never we pray let us go astray.

In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.