

“You Have Stayed Long Enough At This Mountain”

Deuteronomy 1:6-8

by Felton Spraggins

“The Lord our God spoke to us at Horeb saying, ‘You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them’” (1:6-8).

When Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage, they found themselves at Horeb in a place of comfort, security, and high honor. Moses, as their leader, talked with “the Lord” as a friend talks with a friend, and they heard the echoes of the message. They were safe from their enemies. They had enough to eat and drink in a dry and barren land. But, in their hour of comfort and security came the divine message, “You have stayed long enough at this mountain” (1:6).

Moses began with the explicit command by God to leave Horeb and possess the land of Canaan. In verse 6, “the Lord” is *Yahweh* in the Hebrew and translated at times “Jehovah.” Jehovah, who is Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of Israel, had given the order to leave the mountain. He is the sovereign ruler who acts, intervenes, judges, and presses His people into the immense challenges and privileges of being a chosen people, a holy nation.

Notice the emphasis on their relationship to God in the phrase “the Lord our God.” *Yahweh* is described as “our God” to emphasize the close and personal relationship that exists between God and His covenant people.

PREPARE

The mountain had been a place of preparation. God did not want His people to be satisfied. At Horeb, Israel had been given the law to prepare them for Canaan (5:2, 3).

Their stay at the mountain had been a period of learning for Moses. After having received the civil law while in the mountain, Moses was to teach the Israelites that which he had received. “Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments, which the Lord your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it” (6:1).

It had been a time of building. God had given the instructions for the tabernacle, and they built this while they were at the mountain.

It had been a time of training. The Levites were taught how to fulfill their obligations to the Israelites and how to care for the tabernacle.

It had been a time of organizing. Since there had been no organization when they came out of Egypt, this was an important part of their preparation. The tribes were taught to camp around the tabernacle in the order God had given to Moses. This enabled them to travel and not forget their relationship to one another. At this time, Moses, at the suggestion of his father-in-law, Jethro, delegated men to relieve him in his burden of judging the people (1:9-17; Exodus 18:13-26).

Israel had been at Horeb for about a year (Exodus 19:1; Numbers 10:11, 12), and it was time for them to put into practice God’s law. Israel was ready to go forth to become doers of the word. If those great hours at Sinai were to mean anything, Israel had to come away from

the mountain, plant fields, build homes, and work out those activities related to ordinary life.

In life must come times of getting, of learning, of training, of building, and of organizing. However, God's people must not remain in a constant state of preparation. We receive and learn only that we may apply and act. Religion divorced from active employment will soon lose its zest and degenerate into a sickly religiosity. Too many Christians have been at the mount far too long. It would be better for them if they heard the voice summoning them forward.

PART

Leaving the mountain was actually progress. Progress is not necessarily pleasant. Moses said,

Then we set out from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw, on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, just as the Lord our God had commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea (1:19).

That was progress, but it was through the great and terrible wilderness. It was not a pleasant experience, but it was progress; it was moving onward. It was a further march into the purposes of God. Strike your tents; get away from the mountain.

God's people move in a plainly marked pathway, step by step.

"Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates" (1:7, 8).

God is the great executive of the universe. He planned the vast scheme of worlds, making up the universe and every detail. And He is our God. He has each of us in His heart.

The church's responsibility is to move forward in God's great work. When the church concentrates her attention exclusively on her own improvement and forgets her mission to the world, she has "dwelt long enough at the mount" and needs to turn and take her journey into her true mission.

Phillips Brooks said, "Sad is that day for any man when he becomes absolutely satisfied with the life he is leading, the thoughts that he is thinking, and the deeds he is doing. Then there

ceases to be a desire to do something greater for God than ever before."

The mission of the church is to make known the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10). The church's calling is to conquer those in the world for Christ. The command is expressed in Matthew 28:19, 20 and Mark 16:15, 16. He gives no alternative. We may talk and sing about the glorious church and pray that souls be saved, but until we go forward, we know nothing of what it is really like to live in the kingdom of God and under the government of the Great Executive of the universe.

POSSESS

Where to? The land! The ultimate goal, mission, and purpose was the possession of the land that had been promised to Israel by God. God said, "See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them" (1:8).

When God disturbed their security and peace, there was a clearly defined purpose: "See, I have placed the land before you." Their task was to continue moving until they saw and possessed the land. Israel was not brought out of Egypt to remain in the wilderness. It would be too easy to settle for less than God's best. They were to "see . . . the land" and remember God's plan for His chosen people.

Over thirty times Moses told Israel to "go in and possess the land" given by God. This offered a practical consideration in their relationship with God. They had to do their part in taking possession of the land. They also had to recognize that God was giving them the land. God's provision through His grace and man's efforts as He directs are both essential in man's spiritual achievements.

"Go in and possess the land" was God's command when Israel left Horeb. The Hebrew word *yarash* occurs over fifty times in Deuteronomy and means "take possession of; to subdue; or to dispossess." It generally applies to property or land. The emphasis on "land" is continuous in Deuteronomy, occurring almost two hundred times. Repeatedly, Moses referred to the covenant promise (Genesis 17:1-7; 13:14-17; 15:18; 22:16-18) to give them Canaan. These passages are a few examples from Deuteronomy: 1:15;

4:31; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:8, 12; 8:1, 18; 9:5; 10:11; and 11:9, 21. The Israelites were to claim and possess what God had promised.

A description of the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was given.

“... go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates” (1:7).

The promise consisted of about sixty thousand square miles, which is a little more than the state of Georgia (58,876 square miles). The boundaries consisted of the Great Sea on the west, the Arabian Desert on the east, the Euphrates in the north, and the river of Egypt (Wadi El 'Arish) in the south (Negev). Genesis 15:18 and Numbers 34:1-12 also set forth the boundaries for the land that Yahweh swore unto the children of Israel. This land promise was not fulfilled until the reigns of David and Solomon (1 Kings 4:21; 2 Chronicles 9:26).

When God commands us to go forward in our Christian service, He sets the heavenly Canaan before us for encouragement. Many make no progress because of their inability to keep their eyes on the heavenly land. They are like the farmer who one morning decided to plow the south forty acres. His tractor needed oil, so he started for the barn to get it. On the way he noticed that the pigs had not been fed. Near the corn crib was a pile of sacks, reminding him that the potatoes were sprouting. On his way to the potato pit, he passed the woodpile and remembered that the kitchen stove was burning low. While picking up wood, he saw that one of his chickens was ailing, so he dropped the wood to doctor the chicken. So it went till the end of the day, and he still had not oiled the tractor or plowed the south field.

CONCLUSION

During the Civil War, the Confederate army was approaching the lines of battle. As night fell, they stopped just a short way from their destination. Quickly, they began setting up their tents, preparing for a night's rest. Walking among the soldiers, the commanding officer continually exhorted them: “Don't drive those stakes too deep; we're moving up in the morning.” That is what God was saying to Israel. They were to “see . . . the land” and not forget God's plan.

The same is true for us. We need to beware of becoming too placed in our personal lives. It is too easy to settle for less than the best. Let us remember the potential within us in our service for the Lord and the fulfillment of His purposes in our lives.

Let us depart from the mountain and go forward!

Putting Our Plans in God's Hands

An acquaintance of mine was expecting some relatives to spend a week's vacation at his home. He told me that a portion of their letter giving their plans read: “We will arrive at your home on Monday, God willing. We will certainly arrive by Tuesday in any event.” Unintentionally, they may have used words which are a parable of our times. Out of respect for our tradition of piety we may allow God to tamper with our plans to the extent of one day more or less, but we will not tolerate his interfering any more seriously than that. This is a far cry from the psalmist's words, “Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand” (Psalms 31:14-15).

Clifford Walter Edwards,
Christian Being and Doing

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