

Walking. It is something we take for granted. We are exciting when a child walks. We speak of “*following in his father’s footsteps*”? If you are Christian, this is an all-important question: *are you walking in your Heavenly Father’s footsteps*? “*We cannot possibly be satisfied with anything less – each day, each hour, each moment, in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit - than to walk with God.*” (Bishop H. Moule)

Proposition

Today we start a series, “**Walking in the Way of God**”. We will confine our study to **chapters 1-6**, but our title is from Deuteronomy 10:12-13 – the phrase “*walking in obedience*” which is repeated in 5:33; 8:6; 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16. Deuteronomy is recited and recorded on the edge of the “land of promise” or “Canaan”. This **map** highlights Moab, where Israel was camped (Deuteronomy 1:5).

Deuteronomy gives a glimpse of Israel at the end of forty years between Israel’s **rescue** from Egypt until claiming the **reward** of Canaan. In the wilderness there was barrenness. God was **punishing** and **purifying** His people (see 8:2-5 cf. 1:31). “Deuteronomy” is from Greek meaning “Second Law”. Does this sound like lifeless legal code? The Hebrew title is “these are the words” (1:1) or sermons of Moses.

Speech One (1:1-4:43) – Looking back

Speech Two (4:44-28:68) – Looking up

Speech Three (29:1-30:20) – Looking ahead

Transition (31:1-34:12) – Enter Joshua, exit Moses

In these final months when Israel was poised to possess the promised land, God had more vital lessons for His people. The book captures life-giving Law review! Our topic today is “**From Wander to Wonder**”.

William Williams wrote “Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah” and used crossing into Canaan as a metaphor for death. “*When I tread the verge of Jordan / Bid my anxious fears subside / Death of death, and hell’s destruction / Land me safe on Canaan’s side*”. This metaphor may not be **inaccurate** but it is **inadequate**.

There is “Promise Land Living” for believers here and now. In a book by that title (Moody, 1984), J. Oswald Sanders calls Canaan a “suburb of heaven” (19) and lists five blessings: *liberty instead of bondage; rest instead of wandering; variety instead of monotony; possession instead of promise; joy instead of depression*. Sanders asks the obvious: “*Why do we not possess our possessions?*” (21-22)

Before the people of God stepped into their inheritance, they were reminded of their rebellion. This **map** highlights Kadesh Barnea where Israel failed to obey God (see Numbers 14). We read of their refusal to follow God and bitter **grumbling**. Though God forgave, that generation would die in the **wilderness**. So let us consider how they moved from a place of wandering into a place of wonder: “*When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land He has given you.*” (Deuteronomy 8:10)

[A] Wander

The review begins at verse 6 and extends to the end of the chapter. There are six sections to note:

1. Special Purpose – vv. 6-8

4. Stubborn Rebellion – vv. 26-33

2. Strategic Leadership – vv. 9-18

5. Serious Consequences – vv. 34-40

3. Spectacular Report – vv. 19-25

6. Significant Regret – vv. 41-46

What did all this produce? The wilderness wandering was punishment and purifying. As a result, there was tremendous **complacency** rather than the victory God intended. God’s people settled for so much less than the amazing promises and purposes of God. What does complacency look like? It is the hardened and unbelieving heart described in Hebrews 3. It is being stuck in two unfortunate patterns.

Celebrating mediocrity – This is illustrated by the teacher who was so proud of her 38 years of teaching. However, her teaching was anything but effective. They way that her principal put it was to say that she was just like a first year teacher, 38 times over! See **Hebrews 5:11-6:1**.

Offloading responsibility – This is illustrated by a Calvin & Hobbes cartoon! See **I Corinthians 10:11-13**.

FRAME 1 Calvin: "Nothing I do is my fault"

FRAME 2 Calvin: "My family is dysfunctional and my parents won't empower me. Consequently, I'm not self-actualized."

FRAME 3 Calvin: "My behavior is additive functioning in a disease process of toxic codependency! I need holistic healing and wellness before I'll accept any responsibility for my actions!"

FRAME 4 Hobbes: "One of us needs to stick his head in a bucket of ice water." "I love the culture of victimhood."

[B] Wonder

How do we move from wander to wonder? This spiritual course correction which has at least four steps.

1. Recognize

This motto may sound trite, but it summarizes our passage: "Hats off to the past. Coats off to the future." There may be **thanks+remembering** (8:10-18) and **disobey+remembering** (1:6-46). Both help us overcome complacency as we recognize the wonderful promises and purposes of God for our lives – and own our past failures to obey (and the resulting time of punishment and purifying) – see **II Corinthians 3:5-6**.

2. Receive

We need to embrace and welcome God's corrective action in our lives. I may seem hard to read stories of the wilderness wandering and not see God as harsh and vindictive. Yet His ways with His children are always loving and redemptive. Our Heavenly Father patiently and wisely prunes the vine for greater fruit – see **John 15:6-8**. *"It's the hand of Love Divine / That holds the knife, that cuts and breaks / With tenderest touch / That thou, whose life has borne some fruit / May now bear much."* (Annie Johnson Flint)

3. Recommit

After rebellion Christians must repent and recommit to the will of God. It was God's design for Israel to discern and follow His will, not their own – see **Deuteronomy 4:5-8**. *"The Israelite journey is really a story of ongoing discernment. It is a story of a group of human beings who learned how to recognize the presence of God and then then followed that Presence where it went."* (**Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership**, Ruth Haley Barton, IVP, 2008, 193)

4. Rejoice

Grumbling marks rebellion. Wonder is the marks of a liberated life. God wants to accomplish in and through us much more than we could ask or imagine, all to His glory – see **Ephesians 3:20-21**. Opportunities into which God calls are not crushing, though we will need courage! We must learn the joy of living in the center of God's promises and purposes. As we do, we will be drawn to worship! *"Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"* (Psalm 32:10-11)

Conclusion – Digging Deeper

Moving from **wander to wonder** is to leave soul weariness to find the joys that God has in store. This is the story of the travels of the Israelites from slavery to freedom. They, like us, were in a struggle for Shalom: *being in the wholeness of restored relationship with God, others, creation, and self*.

Colin Kerr described the "promised land" as *"the land of the life I want to live, and the life that God's Word tells me I may live, and therefore should live – a life of victory...peace...happiness...joy...a life of spiritual prosperity...leaving a blessing behind me..."* (quoted by Sanders, 17)