

THE BACKWARD LOOK
Deut. 8:2, 3

Scripture reading: Deut. 8.

Intro: 104 years of ministry!

Many blessings, problems, victories, defeats, regrets, etc.!

In reaching such an anniversary as this it is right that we should take a backward look, and then a forward look.

I want to do this today -- the backward look from the OT,
the forward look from the NT.

Actually Moses was doing both in the book of Deuteronomy. But let us use the experience of the children of Israel as recorded in Scripture for our backward look. I could not review the history of Grace Bible Church this morning, and probably none of you could either -- but there are certain similarities which we can find between Israel's experience and yours which can be a blessing to all of us -- if the Lord wills it to be.

My text is actually in vv. 2, 3. (Read.)

Notice first:

- I. THE SUBJECT: "all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness" (v. 2).

The subject is actually the leading of the Lord.

What a tremendous subject this is -- and how constantly you see this in the Word! You see it in the life of every person who is mentioned in any detail in Scripture. It speaks of a divine purpose. It indicates that the children of Israel were not going where they chose to go, but they were going where the Lord was leading.

Thus, the history of any work which the Lord has raised up is a history of the Lord's leading -- what the Lord has done for His people and in His people and through His people, often in spite of them, but it is what He has done.

Note the details in what Moses has written:

- A. The Leader: not Moses, not Aaron, but "the Lord thy God!"

There may be human leaders, many of them, but THE Leader is "the Lord thy God."

Think with me about these two names: Jehovah and Elohim -- thy Elohim!

In Jehovah we have the ever-living, unchanging One. In Elohim we have the sovereign, mighty God -- the Maker of the heavens and the earth!

And He is OUR God, OUR Jehovah, as well as Israel's. There never would have been a Grace Bible Church if this were not the case. We must honor and glorify Him today.

B. What did He do?

We have already said it. He "led" them.

What does this mean?

It means not only that He guided them from place to place but it means that He provided for them, He protected them, He disciplined them -- He did everything that was necessary to get them from Egypt to Canaan!

And, although it is not mentioned in the text, let me ask, HOW DID HE DO IT?

Ex. 13:21, 22 give us the answer:

- 1) He did it personally.
- 2) He went before them.
- 3) He was there 24 hours of each day.
- 4) He led them so that they knew what His will was -- a cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night.

C. Who did He lead?

Moses said, " . . . thee . . . " -- those whom He had redeemed from Egypt.

This is a provision and a promise for those of us who have been redeemed.

D. Where did He lead them?

Again notice what Moses said: " . . . all the way . . . in the wilderness . . . "

E. How long did He lead them?

The answer: " . . . these forty years . . . " (although it did not need to be that long.

Now take all of these details and put them together to see what the Lord has done right here at Grace Bible Church -- not in the same way, but all of the principles apply: the Lord leading, all the way, every day, through 104 years, in this wilderness world when many times, most of the time,

you have not known what to do.

And you probably can be more assured of the Lord's leading now that you look back than you were while you have been on the way!

II. THE OBJECT -- or, Why has He led you the way He has?

If we are thinking of Israel, it is not said here that the Lord led them the way that He did just because He wanted to punish the Canaanites, or other nations along the way. Or because He wanted to make them famous. Or because He wanted to use them as a testimony to the world. He has done all of this. BUT THESE WERE NOT THE MAIN REASONS!

Before we see what those reasons were, let us notice that the Lord had reasons then for doing what He did, and He has reasons today for doing what He does! This is a great comfort to us.

What was His object? There are two things mentioned -- one in v. 2, and the second in v. 3.

A. To test them concerning their obedience (v. 2).

B. To teach them how absolutely essential His Word was to them (v. 3).

The journey from Egypt to Canaan was a forty-year revelation of what was in the hearts of the Israelites -- and it was not a very pretty picture!

You see, God's leading was concerned with what they were, not primarily where they were.

And there is a very important relationship between these two points in vv. 2 and 3 because it is only as we learn the first that we come to know the second -- "that man doth not live by bread only."

Have you learned this individually, and as a church? Does your daily life indicate this? Is this what you expect of your pastor -- not a high-powered program, not a lot of tricks, not entertainment, but just feeding you each Lord's Day on the Word of God.

This is where the professing church is losing out today -- the Word of God is being placed in the background, and we are trying to attract people with other things -- but not the Word of God!

One thing your past history will demonstrate, I can guarantee

you, is that things have always been the best when the Word of God was in the pre-eminent place, and when Christ has been exalted through the ministry of the Word.

How well have you learned these lessons -- of the need of your heart to obey the Word, to live by it?

But now my last point:

III. THE REASON FOR MENTIONING ALL OF THIS JUST NOW (at this point in their history when Moses was leaving them and they were getting ready to go into the promised land).

The reason is given in one word: "REMEMBER."

This is one of the major purposes of the Word of God. This is why the OT continues to be important to us -- at least one of the big reasons. Deuteronomy has a lot to say about remembering. Amazingly, this is why we are to observe the Lord's Supper -- so that we will not forget our Lord and what He has done for us!

Is it not a shock to you and to me that we could forget -- that Israel could forget "all the way . . ."?

But the sad fact is that they could and they did!

And we can too -- unless we ask the Lord to write these things on our hearts. The history of Grace Bible Church has to be full of many, many lessons that the Lord has been teaching you as a group of His people -- and the days ahead will be blessed of God to a great extent by the way you profit from the blessings and the mistakes of the past -- seeing the sovereign hand of a faithful God in all that has taken place.

Concl. and Appl.: Perhaps the backward look is very short for some of you because you have only been here for a short time. It is longer for others. Perhaps it is very long for some. But however long it may be, look back, not at people, not even at those who have been your leaders, but look back at what the Lord has done and why He has done it according to our text this morning -- and then pray, as you turn to look at the future that you never will forget the sufficiency of the Lord, His faithfulness, His GRACE (a wonderful word and a wonderful name), His purposes -- so that you may recognize two things:

- 1) The needs in your own heart.
- 2) The fact that you cannot live or be blessed with His Word.