

Faith Pulpit

Come Home Spot, Come Home—Deuteronomy 4:25–31

My brother used to have a dog named Spot. Neighbors would come over to watch Spot use his front paws alone to hop down the back stairs. Spot would also pace around the backyard hoping to find an escape through the fence. He looked and looked every day to find his escape, wearing a dirt path in the yard along the fence. He probably thought that an escape would make him the happiest dog in the world. He finally did find the strength to dig a hole under the fence and accomplished his life's goal—he escaped to freedom! He made it out and experienced the greatest joy of his life for about an hour. Then he died.

Fences keep little dogs safe from big cars that can kill dogs. People act just like little Spot when they try to escape from God's authority. They may think they are gaining freedom, but really all they are doing is forfeiting God's protection. Apart from God's intervention, all people would get their "freedom" in this life but ultimately experience eternal separation from Him in the Lake of Fire. Deuteronomy 4:25-31 reveals that Israel, just as every other nation, wanted freedom from God's authority.

Moses warns Israel (vs. 25, 26)

25When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: 26I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed.

In Deuteronomy 4, Moses warned Israel even before they entered the land that their stay in the land would not last long if they forsook God. He testified by the heavens and the earth that God would judge disobedience. He knew the ways of the people and gave them a clear warning in verses 25-26 that they would perish and be utterly destroyed.¹ God issued these directions to let them know that He wanted them to return to Him. He would scatter them, they would serve idols,² they would seek Him, and then they would finally return back to Him.

Here Moses told them what was going to happen. They would turn³ to idols though he had told them not to in Leviticus 19:4.

God Will Scatter Israel (vs. 27)

27And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you.

This warning especially applies to the descendants of Abraham because God promised the land to him and his descendants. He promised the land unconditionally, but the secure dwelling in the land would come through Israel's obedience. Ultimately God would circumcise their hearts so that they would be able to meet His conditions through His work in them. Moses told them this truth in chapter 30 where the verb scatter also occurs. God would circumcise their hearts so that they would love Him, and then He would bring them back to the land.

The first step comes when Moses says that God would scatter Israel among the nations. This verse gives the reason for Israel's short stay in the land: God caused their scattering. Deuteronomy 28:64 warned Israel that God would scatter them from the land for their disobedience. They would not, however, be entirely abandoned. God Himself would lead them away, using foreign nations like Babylon as His tool. The verb⁴ gives the idea that He would "lead them like sheep" into exile. Notice how that verb also occurs in Deuteronomy 28:37 with the curses.

Israel Will Serve Idols (vs. 28)

28And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.

Why would a people want to serve something that is helpless? Just as Spot wanted to leave a safe yard for an opportunity for something new that resulted in death, the human heart is wicked and does not seek to serve God unless He impacts the heart. These gods to whom Israel would turn displayed the opposite of the compassion shown by the true God. These gods did not even have the ability to take care of themselves, let alone a nation. Yet Deuteronomy 28:36 also confirms that Israel would choose to serve other gods of wood and of stone.

Israel Will Seek God (vs. 29)

29But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

My brother wished that Spot had made it back home. It is also hoped that Israel, as an entire nation, will soon turn back to God. The bad news is that God's most severe discipline will be required before the nation will return to Him. When Israel finally seeks God, many will rejoice. The place of seeking is the foreign land, not in the land of Israel. "From thence" means "from there." Also, some think that the first phrase (in the tribulation) in verse 30 should go with the end of verse 29. Then it would say, "For you will seek for him with all your heart and will all your soul in your tribulation."

Israel Will Return to God (vs. 30)

30When thou art in tribulation and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice;

The fortunate word from Moses is that Israel will find God. The unfortunate word is that they will not find God until all of these terrible troubles find them in "the latter days." Once again, Moses links this passage with the curses that appear toward the end of the book. The chart below shows how chapter 4 concludes the introduction and chapters 28-30 introduce the conclusion of the book with the same theme.

Deuteronomy 4

4:27 God will scatter Israel.

4:27 God will lead Israel away.

4:28 Israel will serve other gods.

4:30 Israel will return to God.

Deuteronomy 28-30

28:64 God will scatter Israel.

28:37 God will lead Israel away.

28:36 Israel will serve other gods.

30:1-10 Israel will return to God.

God Has Compassion for Israel (vs. 31)

31(For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them. God's discipline shows that He still loves Israel. Jeremiah 30:7 indicates that terrible days are still ahead for Israel in the time known as Jacob's Trouble. The good news is that the certainty of Israel's future distress precedes her future restoration. Her future trouble guarantees her future blessings. God said that He would bring Israel back to the land after He would drive them out. How certain is that promise? God said, "Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul. For thus saith the LORD; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them" (Jeremiah 32:41, 42).

The "latter days" mentioned in verse 30 reach past the church age until Jacob's Trouble" and the millennial rule of the Messiah. Moses told the people all about the future of the nation before they had even entered into the land! Jeremiah based his prophecies on the book of Deuteronomy. Jeremiah's concept of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31) is squarely rooted in the book of Deuteronomy. Jeremiah prophesied that the final re-occupation of the land would come only after a right relationship with God was restored.

God warned the Israelites and gave them conditions to meet if they were to continue receiving the blessings in the land. Israel would need to return to God. Left by themselves the Israelites would end up like Spot—far from their home and dead. The only way for them to return to God would be for God to change their hearts. Later in the book, Moses tells the people that their idolatry came from the condition of their heart: "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them" (Deuteronomy 11:16). They would turn (shuv) away from God so that they would have to turn (shuv) back to God. Moses said, "Return!" The prophets said, "Return!" Jesus said, "Repent!" Paul said, "Repent!"

Notice the similarity between the messages of Moses, Jeremiah, Jesus and Paul. The only part of Moses' warning that does not line up with the message for the Gentiles is the part about the land, which was part of the covenant relationship between God and Abraham's seed.

Deuteronomy 4

Moses says that they would serve idols (vs. 28).

Moses said they would seek after God (vs. 29).

Moses says that Israel would return to God (vs. 30).

Jeremiah

Jeremiah says their gods are as many as their cities (11:13).

They will seek and find God when they search with all their heart (29:13).

God will give them a heart to know Him, and they will return (24:7).

Luke 15

A son went to a foreign wasted his money with loose living (vs. 12, 13).

He came to his senses and realized his sin (vs. 17, 18).

He returned to his father who had compassion upon him (vs. 20).

Acts 17

Paul notices Athens fully given to idolatry (16–25).

God wants men to seek Him and find Him (vs. 27).

God declares that all men everywhere should repent (vs. 30).

Moses based the certainty of the judgment on the stability of the heavens and the earth as witnesses, but Paul based the certainty of the judgment on the resurrection of Jesus. The Maker of the heavens and the earth ultimately will judge those who do not turn back to Him. Even if a person does not have a covenant relationship with God, as Israel does, he still must turn to his Creator or face certain judgment.

God does not delight in the death of anyone, but desires all to repent. He goes out to search for lost people as one would search for a lost sheep or a lost coin and waits patiently as a loving Father for the sinner to return to Him. Truly we serve a just and compassionate God.

Works Cited

1. Both perish and be destroyed have the infinitive absolute + imperfect form to show certainty.
2. See 2 Kings 1:2, 3:2, 5:18, 13:6, 17:30,31, 19:37, 23:10,13, and 1 Chronicles 5:8 for some names of gods.
3. The verb that occurs here in Deuteronomy 4 is panah and not shuv.
4. The Hebrew verb nahag describes Moses' guiding sheep in Exodus 3:1.

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