

Title: Where Are We Running?  
Date: September 4, 2022  
Subject: As followers of Jesus Christ we should run toward the Lord and not away from him.  
Scripture: Deuteronomy 31: 1-8

College students, recent grads and those newly married often are full of anticipation of what the future will bring, feeling they can conquer anything, do everything. The future is laid out with 5, 10 and 20 year plans. There are prospective employers or consultants who like to ask: where do you see yourself in five years?

How many of them, how many of us, built into the plan for our lives – miscarriage, fired from a job at which you thought you were performing well, premature death of loved ones, serious disease...to name a few? How many of the twists and turns of life did you foresee, ranging from the soul-crushing to the exhilarating?

What do you think it would have been like to have been a teenage Israelite leaving Egypt? Young, full of life, grand expectations of what the future might hold. But within the next 40 years, to see everyone who was 20 and older a year after the exodus was now gone - brothers and sisters, mom, dad, grandma, grandpa, aunts, uncles, distant relatives, the cranky guy in the neighboring tent, strangers - all gone. I don't believe any of those teenagers imagined the future would hold the wiping out of entire generations of people because they had murmured, griped, complained, tested and refused to obey the Lord.

School has just started. Sometimes teachers review or test to see what students remember or should have remembered over the summer. Deuteronomy is a teacher. It's known as the repetition or the second law. It was time for God to reteach the lessons of the past 40 years. God often engages in re-teaching and then re-testing.

In the spirit of Deuteronomy, here's a review of what we've seen in the first four books of the Bible. Genesis presents the promises of God as reasons why we can trust him. Exodus depicts the person of God through his names and actions so we might worship him. Leviticus shows the holiness of God so we'd strive to be holy like him and then love others. Numbers reveals the Lord as the authority and that we shouldn't test God or complain. How did you do on the complain-o-meter, or is it the complain-om-eter?

Deuteronomy repeats these teachings and tries to drive them home so we might worship, obey, and be fully committed to God because of his love for us. This is what the rest of the Bible is about.

There isn't much action in the book. The people are poised on the east side of the Jordan, looking at the promised land, waiting out the final 60 days prior to entering. The content consists of three speeches given by Moses (chapters 1-4, 5-26, 27-33). It's the way the Lord re-established his covenant with his people.

Here's a unique way of explaining covenants: "Covenants weren't unusual in the ancient near East. A typical covenant would go something like this: "Hi. I'm your new king. I just destroyed your entire army and murdered your old king. Furthermore, I'll be happy to slaughter anyone who pushes back against me. Oh, and by the way, here's a treaty so that you know what the new normal is."

“Deuteronomy inverts this common format. It goes something like this: “I am the God who liberated you from oppression and slavery. I have fought, fulfilled, and will continue to fulfill my promises on your behalf. Here’s a treaty so that you will know and remember my affection for you, as well as your responsibilities in this relationship. *This is your new normal*”” (Jeff Mooney, 9marks.org/article/Deuteronomy).

Followers of Christ have entered into a new covenant with God through Christ. He lays out what’s expected of both parties and declares his promises to those who love and serve him. It’s about his provision.

READ Deuteronomy 31:1 – 8.

At this point in the book, it’s down to a few days before the people set foot in the promised land and Moses won’t set foot in another place on this planet. It’s because he “didn’t trust in the Lord enough to honor him as holy” when the Israelites quarreled with the Lord when there was no water. Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it and yet the Lord provided water despite his disobedience.

Moses gave the charge to Joshua, the new leader, to be strong and courageous, not be afraid or terrified. Be assured the Lord your God goes with you, will never leave you or forsake you, so don’t be afraid, don’t be discouraged. These words might seem familiar, like you’ve heard them from a different place. That place would be in the book of Joshua where the Lord delivers these words to Joshua (Joshua 1:5-7, 9, 18). Later, Joshua uses the words of encouragement for the Israelites after they’d scored a major victory (Joshua 10:25).

Some see the reason for the charge to take courage in a character shortcoming of Joshua. They feel he was given to a tendency to not be strong or courageous, that he was fearful. I don’t think that’s the case as Joshua had proven himself several times. He was one of the two scouts who brought back a good report of the land. He had led the people in victories. He was God’s chosen successor to Moses.

I believe these words were given because God knew what was ahead. He knew that conquering the land wouldn’t be as easy as falling off a log. It would require deep commitment that wouldn’t waver in face of the enemies of God or what the future held.

Moses informed Joshua that he **must** go with this people and **must** divide the land among them as their inheritance (31:7). It was a tall order, one which could make a guy swallow real hard.

The order got even taller. It happened when Moses and Joshua went to the tent of meeting to present themselves before the Lord. Here’s what the Lord said. READ Deuteronomy 31:16-18, 27, 29.

God through Moses gave the discouraging news that the people would rebel. Though we’re later told the people of Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders who outlived him who experienced everything the Lord had done for them (Joshua 24:31), during Joshua’s lifetime there were hints at the rebellion to come. It would be tough to lead the people knowing that someday soon they were going to rebel. God chose this time to again encourage Joshua (31:23).

The Lord provided two reminders for the people of what would happen. The first was the Levites were to put a copy of the covenant, the Book of the Law, inside the ark of the covenant as a witness against the people (31:26).

Another witness was a song the people were to learn (31:19-21). Instead of Trust and Obey, it was you won't trust, you won't obey. It was a song of disobedience. It begins with expressions of praise to the Lord (32:1-4). Next is an overview of the way people had acted corruptly toward the Lord (vv. 5-6). Then comes a plea to recall what the Lord had done (vv. 6-14). The bulk of the song details more of how they'll turn away from the Lord (vv. 15-18), the repercussions for doing so (vv. 19-35) and a reminder the Lord is a judge who will also show compassion on his servants (vv. 36-43).

The last chapter of the book gives the account of Moses' death. Joshua takes over and is noted as being filled with the spirit of wisdom (34:9). The book of Joshua opens with God telling Joshua he needs to look to the Lord and his word so he could be strong and courageous, not terrified (Joshua 1:6-9). Toward the end of his life, Joshua challenges the people to choose who they were going to serve - the Lord or somebody else. If they were going to serve the Lord, they were to serve him with complete faithfulness, not follow after other gods, be careful to obey God's word and to love him (Joshua 23:6, 11). As for him and his household, he declared they would serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15).

It's all about where the Israelites were going to run – run away from God or run toward him. Despite their professions of desiring to serve the Lord, they quickly turned away from him and followed after other gods, followed after their own wills. Part of it came when life got tough and part of it came when life was easy. At both times they turned from the Lord and ran away.

They'd been warned not to think they were chosen because they were such a great and wonderful people group who were just so righteous in and of themselves that God had to choose them. They were to understand God chose them because he simply wanted to choose them to show himself strong (7:7-9, 9: 4). When things went well in the promised land and they were experiencing peace and had fantastic crops, they weren't to think of themselves as all that and a bag of chips (8:8-20). They were warned not to forget the Lord. The Lord was testing them to see if they would follow other gods or follow him (13:3).

The people of Israel mirror the human condition. When things are good, followers of Jesus Christ sometimes think of themselves as all that and a bag of chips. It's because of how righteous they are. They credit themselves for what they have. In the opposite situation, when things are bad, when there are struggles and difficulties, there's a tendency among some to feel that if God really loved them, none of the bad things would be happening. In both scenarios people run away from God. We need to run toward him.

In preparation for the message I researched how others handled teaching the entire book. One was Mark Dever whose overview sermon on Deuteronomy was about an hour and fifteen minutes. One thing I picked out is what he said about needing to attack the tendency to elevate ourselves. "If you want to kill pride and fuel hope - come to know God's glory and word, grow in confidence of him and what he is like."

Run to God. If we go back a couple chapters to chapter 30 (30:15 – 20), Moses set before the people two options – life or death. Much of it involved the temporal blessings the people of God at that point would experience from being in the land. We can understand the options in a broader sense - about the alternative

between life and death, or living in ways that evidence the life of God or turning away from him. The idea is to choose life -- listen to God, hold fast to him, love him.

The themes of loving God and keeping his commands are strewn throughout the New Testament. They can be found in Christ's upper room discourse (John 13–17), the letters of 1, 2 and 3 John and many other places.

Deuteronomy provides the first record of God saying he loves people (7:7-9, also 33:3). He doesn't say it very often but he doesn't have to as he doesn't change where one day he'll love us and the next he won't. He's unlike people. A man and woman had been married for 40 or 50 years. The wife told the husband that he didn't ever say he loved her. The man simply responded, "At our wedding, I told you I loved you. If things would have changed, I would have let you know." That doesn't work for people because we drift with the winds of emotion. God however, is always love. And he does tell us plenty of times that he loves us.

More often Deuteronomy speaks of the need for people to be devoted to loving God (6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 18, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20). Accompanying commands flesh out what's involved in loving God: seek, hold fast, obey with all heart, observe, doing what is right in his eyes (4:5-9, 29; 10:20; 13:4, 18; 30:2). God equates love for him with being obedient to him.

This is so important it forms one of the more familiar passages from the book even though people might not realize it comes from the book. READ 6:4-9. This is known as the Shema which comes from the Hebrew word for "Hear." It speaks of the majesty and unity of God. It tells us to love the Lord. It tells us to ponder and think of his instructions and pass them on to others. It speaks of this being a daily duty, an everyday duty of doing so.

Late in the book there are instructions about assembling all people - men, women, children and aliens. This was to be done every seven years during the Sabbath year to re-teach by rereading God's law (31:10-13).

God's expectation is that his words are to be treated not as just idle words but as the embodiment of life (32:47). The reason for all of it to be taken seriously is based on three beliefs. The first is there is no other God like him.

READ 33:26-29. The promises of dwelling in the promised land with its temporary blessings were for the Jews of that era. Our focus is to be in light of Jesus Christ's first coming. We understand there is no God like the God who is the God of Abraham, Isaac Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Paul, Peter, Matthew. He is our refuge, our shield and our helper. He is the one who provides victory that will be fully able to be celebrated in heaven when all things will be completely brought under his reign. Some of the victory carries over into the present but not like it will be when the perfect comes.

The second is we're children of the Lord God. Moses spoke this truth to the people of his time (14:1). The New Testament teaching about the relationship to God includes how people responded to Christ. "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him to those who

believed in his name come he gave the right to become children of God... How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (John 1:11, 12; 1 John 3:1).

By the end of the book of Deuteronomy, those who had been in their teens and younger at the Exodus from Egypt had grown up. The oldest would be nearing 60. They had replaced their grandparents and parents. They became the generations on whom the responsibility fell for following the Lord. They heard from the Lord through Moses that it was going to be a tough road and about their tendency to run away from God.

Followers of Jesus Christ are reminded "the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16). The teaching surrounding that phrase reminds us we need to be very careful how we live. It shouldn't be as unwise but as wise as we make the most of every opportunity. We're to not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is: being filled or controlled by the Spirit, speaking to one another with words of truth and encouragement, worshipping the Lord and giving thanks to him for everything (Ephesians 5:15-20). This is all to be done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I think the question – "Where do you see yourself in 10 years?" - is a terrible question. We can't see the future, let alone have clear vision of the present. Some of you might want to answer the question by saying "being in heaven." Some of you have told me you don't think the world will last another 10 years. I think the best answer to give to that kind of question is that we'll be following Jesus and living for him.

The Lord isn't out to intentionally or unintentionally make life miserable for us. A 90 year old woman named Marie decided it was too difficult to shop for presents for her children and grandchildren. She decided to do what many people do - send a check. Marie wrote on each card "Buy your own present" and sent them out early. The family get-togethers were enjoyable. After Christmas she finally found time to clear off her desk. Under some papers she found the gift checks that were supposed to go with the cards (Readers' Digest, 12/96, Alice Cork).

Chris Tomlin has written numerous songs including How Great is Our God, Love Ran Red, Indescribable, Whom Shall I Fear? and updates of songs Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone). More like the last one is his version of Jesus Loves Me. It can refer to person coming into Christ as their Savior but also when we've tried running away from the Lord. Some of the words are: "I was lost. I was in chains. The world had a hold of me. My heart was a stone. I was covered in shame, When He came for me. I couldn't run, couldn't run from His presence. I couldn't run, couldn't run from His arms. Jesus, He loves me, He loves me, He is for me." Then about a dozen more times he sings about Jesus loving and how amazing it is.

God doesn't make empty promises. Instead, he is like the man who spoke about raising his young daughter. He laid out the ground rules and asked that she would obey as this would please him. "When she agrees and says she wants to make her daddy happy, do you think I'll punish her because she has said she'll obey? No, I'll shower her with my love." A loving God welcomes us to him and wants the best for us and is with us through the difficulties of life. We can run to him at all times.