

Part 1: How We Got to Now: Stories of Faithfulness

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I really want to get our juices going today by reading the Security and Exchange Commission's rule #156.

This rule prohibits intentionally spreading misleading materials to investors including: "representations, whether express or implied, about future investment performance including: Representations, as to security of capital, possible future gains or income, or expenses associated with an investment; representations implying that future gain or income may be inferred from or predicted based on past investment performance; or portrayals of past performance, made in a manner which would imply that gains or income realized in the past would be repeated in the future."

In other words do not believe the lie that past performance predicts future success.

Just because your parents made a similar investment doesn't mean it will work for you. Just because the guy you traded for in Fantasy Football last week had a big week, doesn't mean he will again. Just because successful person "X" got that degree, doesn't mean that you will have the same success with the same degree. Past performance doesn't predict future success.

In writing laws like the one listed above, legislators are actually trying to legislate the desires of our hearts. They know how our hearts are factories of hope, and more often than not, factories of false hope.

We live in a world where marketers have shifted from advertising which features an expert in the field talking about the product, to consumers speaking of their experience with their product. They know how susceptible we are to the claim: "If it worked for me, it will work for you."

Can you imagine how wonderful and how easy life would be if past performance could indicate future success? How much easier would parenting be? Imagine knowing that one good date was a guaranteed sign of a perfect and enduring relationship! Or, if that one good paragraph you just wrote for your thesis paper unlocked academic gold for everything that followed?

Wouldn't we be able to know the products, people and experiences which are so clearly devastating and the ones which are so clearly delightful? Life in a world of options would be so much easier.

A couple weeks ago we started the book of Deuteronomy, which is a sermon given by Moses to the people of Israel as they are about to enter into the Promised Land they always dreamed about.

It was in the Promised Land that God swore to give the people rest with each other, and peace with himself. In this Promised Land there would be new challenges, new opportunities, new adventures and new investments. And in the face of such opportunities Moses wants them to understand the wonderful reality of being God's people.

And as he is encouraging them to cross over the river into the Promised Land he tells his people the unthinkable: Past performance always predicts future success when it comes to the God of the Bible.

The SEC needs to make rules because they know how quickly people and products fail. But God never does. Everything else fails, but God never does.

That's what Moses wants Israel and you to see this morning: the key to the life in the Promise Land is to remember that God's faithfulness will never lead us astray, even when his faithfulness brings you to fearful places.

In the first three chapters of Deuteronomy Moses is reminding Israel of their own history. Our text today shows God's unending faithfulness, but this comes right on the heels of Moses reminder of Israel's catastrophic failures. As simple as trusting in God's faithfulness sounds, our life experience shows how difficult it is to believe. We like Israel rebel, disobey, and think God to be unable to do what he has promised, and this only leads to pain.

But as Moses concludes his brief history of Israel today, he wants to show us that regardless of what lies ahead, it is for our good to know this faithful God. Whatever experience you have in your life right now, he wants you to see the wonder of this faithful God.

We aren't going to read all of chapters 2 and 3 today, but in looking at God's faithfulness there are three truths we see in this text: **God knows your wilderness, God knows your enemies, and God knows your future.**

Let's start by reading **Deuteronomy 2:1-8.**

So if you remember in Deuteronomy 1, we saw all these failures of the Israelite people. They were so close to being God's people, in God's place, living under God's presence, but in the span of a couple days, everything fell apart.

Remember they had made it to Kadesh-Barnea, which was the southern border to the Promise Land, but there they refused to obey God's call to go into the Land and because of that, God said that he was going to punish them by causing them to wander in desert for 40 years.

And this text picks up with Moses describing the end of that forty years of wandering. God says, "You've been wandering in this land long enough, go north."

In our text today we are going to see Israel go from door #1 to the Promise Land, wander south for 40 years, and then head further north to door #2 to the Land. They are going from the wandering wilderness to the welcome mat part two.

And it's in this passage we begin to see how wonderfully gracious and kind the God of the Bible is. This is our first point today: **God knows your wilderness.**

Look with me at **Deuteronomy 2:7.** Yesterday was my son's birthday, but despite that there was a moment of the day where he had done something to one of his sisters and I told him to go sit in his room. If you're a parent you might know what happened next. About 15 minutes later my son came out and said, "Dad can I come out now." I had totally forgotten about his time out.

Here Israel is in the world's most warranted timeout, but God hasn't forgotten them in their punishment. But God does not forget us even when he is disciplining us. What a beautiful truth.

Moses knows his audience needs to know this relational truth. He is talking to a generation of people consisting of two parts. Part of this generation are those who were 20 years old or younger when they were brought out of Egypt. These people would have seen the signs and wonders of the plagues, would have participated at least in part in the rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea, and saw the wanderings for the full forty years in the desert.

Then there are those who are under forty. These are the kids who weren't even around at Kadesh-Barnea and yet they are affected because of it. I'm guessing that each of us has easily found ourselves in one of those camps. We feel the weight of a wilderness either because we have sinned, and now we bear the consequences of it, we have been sinned against by someone else, or we are just fully aware of the harsh reality of life in this present world.

And when we encounter those things, it is very easy for us to think in those investment terms: God may have been good or great in the past, but he can't be now, at least not in this.

But here we see God, and his intimate knowledge of your wilderness, whatever it is. He knows it. He cares about it. And he wants you to see what he wanted the Israelites to see: Even in this wandering you have lacked nothing.

They know this. When they wandered in the wilderness God fed them with mana in the morning and quail at night. He gave them a cloud to conceal them from their enemies during the day, and a pillar of fire to protect them at night. You may go through the wilderness itself, but if you are one of God's children, God will never forget you.

If God doesn't forget us in our sin or in our brokenness, then how much more will God be mindful of us when it comes to our restoration?

In this text we see a journey which should have taken 11 days completed in the span of forty years. It had its problems but when all was said and done, here they were, once more right where God wanted them to be. And in this we see two truths about our experience.

First, sometimes it takes us longer to get where God wants us to be because of sin. That's you sinning, someone sinning against you, or living life in a sinful world. But second, anytime you get to where God wants you to be, it's only because of grace.

These people didn't un-sin in the wilderness. In fact what Moses leaves out is that during their forty years of wandering there are many more things that go wrong. Yet here they are again, at the door of the Promised Land. Why? Because God is gracious to keep his word. He promised his people this land and this experience with him, and by grace he is going to keep it.

And we see how faithful he is to his word as we see Moses instructions' for God's people during their journey. Over the course of this text we are going to see the people of Israel come in contact with five kingdoms: Edom (which is land of Esau), Moab, Ammon, Heshbon and Bashan.

God tells the people to go to war with the latter two, but to simply pass through the former three. Why? Look with me and see if you can tell: **Deuteronomy 2:4-5, 8b-9, 17-19.**

Why were the people of Israel not to attack the land of Edom, the land of Moab or the land of Ammon? Because God had already given that land to other people. Who? Well Edom and Mount Seir was given to Esau and Moab and Ammon were given to the descendants of Lot.

Now who are Esau and Lot? Esau was the brother of Jacob. Jacob's name was later changed to Israel. Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes. Was Esau chosen by God to be the son of promise? No, Jacob was. Who is Lot? Lot is the nephew of Abraham. Was Lot the man chosen by God to possess a land and be a people? No, Uncle Abraham was.

What do these two men share? Neither of them are part of God's covenant people, but each of them received a promised portion of land from God and not even God's people can take that land away from them.

Why do you think Moses is sharing this with the people? If God gave them their land, if God is protecting their land, don't you think that he is able to also give you your land? Don't you think that he will be more faithful to his people than to these people?

Do you maybe hear Jesus in here? When Jesus says this in **Matthew 6:26-33**?

God knows what you're going through, and he's able to bring you through it. Whatever you're going through, God brought you to it, and God is able to bring you out of it. How do we know this? This leads us to our second point today: **God knows your enemies.**

God not only knows what you are up against now, but he knows what lies ahead. He not only knows where you are now, but he knows where one day you will be. And regardless of what will come, God is stronger than what you will face.

The Israelites knew how hard life in the wilderness was, but they also feared life in the Promised Land. That's how they got here, back at Kadesh-Barnea, the Israelites refused to go into the land because they feared the report of the spies: **Deuteronomy 1:28-32.**

The people wanted what God had for them, but at the end of the day they were scared off by two things: tall walls and big people.

Inside the land were walled cities, cities like Jericho. And inside the land were big people: the Anakim, huge men of war often called giants.

The Israelites knew that attacking giant walled fortresses filled with giant armed men was generally not good for your success. Don't we often think this way as both believers and non-believers? We have cultivated a healthy life-style by avoiding things which threaten and clinging to things which comfort. But there are times where God calls us to turn away from people or things which seem to provide comfort and instead cling to a Jesus whom you cannot see. Being calculated risk takers, we say: this doesn't add up, this can't be wise.

In our own lives it is easy to either fear the weapons of the world, or trust in the weapons of this world. But what Moses wanted the people of Israel to see is that God knows exactly what they're up against, and he is more than able to bring you victory in it so long as you trust in him. Often times when we feel small, God is intentionally doing it so that we can see how big he really is.

Look at the context of this battle: **Deuteronomy 2:16-19** (Moses gives a brief aside) **24-25**.

Now God is not preparing Israel to pass through a kingdom, but to contend, to fight with a Kingdom. And God in his wonderful humor waited until all of the men of war had died off before he did so. This is quite possibly the worst time to start a military campaign by human standards.

But remember it is God who fights for them. God wants us to realize that we will always feel weak when it comes to facing our enemies, but God is more than strong enough to be trusted in those moments. God is able to be trusted.

Remember the big people and the big walls the people feared? Well after the people passed through Edom and Moab they came to Heshbon, and there they meet King Sihon. And look at what happened: **Deuteronomy 2:30-36**. They took all of Heshbon, even the cities which were on high ground.

Then immediately after they fought Sihon, the enemies kept coming: **Deuteronomy 3:1-5**.

This untrained and rookie army went and took the high places and the walled cities of two powerful kings. Why? Because their God was bigger than their enemies' walls. God had promised to bring them success, and God was faithful to his word.

Now this is one of my favorite portions of this text. And it runs all the way through chapters 2 and 3, so follow with me here. Remember the tall people, the fearsome Anakim? Well look at this progression starting all the way back when God when God described the land he gave to Moab: **Deuteronomy 2:10-11**. The people of Esau fought the giant people and won. Look at what Moses says when he talks about the land given to Lot: **Deuteronomy 2:20-21**. The Ammonites fought the giant people and won. Then look at the details Moses gives after they beat King Og: **Deuteronomy 3:11**.

Now this is really a weird aside unless we understand what Moses is doing here. Why is he talking about the museum in Rabbah which still has Og's bed? Because it's a huge bed (13.5' x 6'). But it's an empty one. I love what one commentator said at this point: "Giants are scarcely a problem if they are in their coffins."

Why is Moses telling us all this? Some called the big people the "Rephaim" which means "ghosts," others call them the "Emim" which means "terror," others the "Anakim" which meant "giants," and my favorite, the "Zamzummim" which means "terrifying sound." But Moses calls them nothing in the face of God's promise to his people.

In this text there are big people and high walls everywhere, but you know what is to be feared most: unbelief. Look back at **Deuteronomy 2:14-17**.

The only casualties Israel incurred were the casualties of those who doubted God's promise. Did you hear how clear Moses was being with his words in that passage? The men of war, the generation that died in the wilderness did not die randomly, they died because they were being judged for their rebellion. Just as God is faithful to provide grace, God is faithful to judge those who reject his grace.

The greatest threat you have are not the enemies in this world, but the enemies which lurk in your own heart. God will judge those who fail to respond to his message of grace. Moses pleaded with these men

forty years ago to believe, but they refused. And the same offer stands for those today. There is someone greater to be feared than giants. But by grace he can be on your side if only you trust in him.

Look at how the author of Hebrews reflects on this story: **Hebrews 3:16-4:2**. Moses wants you to see God's faithfulness here because he wants you to listen and believe in this God. Have you done that? Are you doing that?

Because right after we see God's faithfulness in the wilderness, then we see God's faithfulness to defeat Israel's enemies, and in chapter 3:18-20 God begins to actually give the land of Og and Sihon to some of the tribes of Israel. God's faithfulness is becoming a reality. They have land!

God has done just as he promised. And as they sit at the banks of the river Moses wants them to know one more thing: **God knows your future.**

Moses makes this point in an odd sort of way: **Deuteronomy 3:21-29**.

Here we see this odd encounter between Joshua and Moses, and then Moses and God. Now why is Moses sharing this with the people? If this were you, and you were the leader of God's people and you went up to God and got rebuked like Moses got rebuked, you probably wouldn't be sharing that update on Facebook.

But here Moses does. Why? I think there are two reasons.

Moses is giving this sermon in a time of transition. The leader who brought God's people out of Egypt and through the wilderness will not be the leader who brings them into the Promise Land.

And here he speaks openly of his failures because he wants God's people to know why this transition is happening. This is the first reason: Moses wants them to know God is still in control. The future blessing in the Promised Land is not something in doubt because the leader is dying.

As the author of Hebrews made clear early, the Promised Land that awaits New Covenant believers isn't earthly borders, but eternal salvation. And that rest doesn't rely on any man, instead it relies on one man.

In the forty years of wilderness wandering, Moses was provoked by the sin of the people and he himself sinned and lost access to the Promised Land. But over a thousand years later, Jesus the greater Moses would be tested for 40 days in the wilderness by Satan himself and he would remain faithful. It is because Jesus was faithful in our place that we can trust God's faithfulness even when we are in scary places.

We will lose so many things in our life, but so long as we have Jesus we do not need to fear losing life in the Promise Land.

The second reason I think Moses includes this prayer is because he wants us to see the wonder of this God. Moses says, I'm not going to make it, but you will get this wonderful privilege of the land.

Look back at Moses prayer: **Deuteronomy 3:23-24**.

What god is like our God? Moses knows that the people are going to hear other nations say to them: “Your God can’t possibly save you.” They are going to hear the prostitutes of Ba’al say, “Your God cannot satisfy you like we can.”

But Moses says, God’s past performance says it all: who can do things like our God?

The best days for a believer are ahead in that wild unknown of life. Because even in the dark, God proves himself faithful. And as we respond to his faithfulness with obedience, we will only come to know him more beautifully and wonderfully.

You see Moses knew that there would be challenges in the land, but he still wanted to go in. Why? Because the testing of our faith only amazes us with the beautiful faithfulness of our God. And that’s what life is all about.

So for you today: Look at what God did for Esau and for Lot. Look at what he did for Israel. How the Anakim fled, walls fell, Kings became captive. Look at what God did for you in Jesus, will he not also continue to give you all things? Will he not continue to be faithful even when life is hard?

I want you to hear the faithfulness of God in closing in **Romans 8:32-34**.