

**“Are we there yet?  
Deutonomy 34:1-12  
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For the last couple months, we’ve been working our way through the story of the Exodus, Moses leading the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt to the promised land. We started with the crossing of the Red Sea, the miraculous deliverance of God’s people from the Egyptian army, as God pushed back the waters and made a safe path for the people. We heard about God leading them with a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night, giving them water when they were thirsty, sending flocks of quail for meat and providing manna, bread in the wilderness, each and every morning, giving them the law to guide and bless their new lives.

And despite all these blessings, all these signs of God’s love and providence for his people, the journey wasn’t going all that smoothly. Every step of the way, the people kept complaining, insisting that Moses was out to get them, that he’d led them into the wilderness to die from starvation or thirst. They kept rebelling against God’s guidance, trying to go their own way instead of the path God had prepared for them. By the time they were ready to leave Mount Sinai and travel the rest of the way to the promised land, their entire journey so far from Egypt had only taken them a few months – their journey had just barely started, and yet again and again on that journey the people had complained and rebelled over and over again, against Moses and against God.

And now we move ahead, from the book of Exodus to the end of the book of Deuteronomy, and we see that they are still travelling. The journey from Egypt to the Promised Land is still going on. They’re almost there – the Promised Land

is literally within sight – but they’ve still got a little ways to go before they arrive. And it’s only taken them ... let’s just check ... FORTY YEARS!!! They have been on this journey for FORTY YEARS – four decades!! Almost 15,000 days!! Forty years of travelling through desert and wilderness, sand and rock and rock and sand, forty years of manna and quail for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

And if the first few months are any indication, forty years of whining and complaining to Moses every step of the way. Moses, Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Come ONNNNNN MOSES what is taking so LOOOOOOONG. If you go to Google Maps, you can check the approximate route they would’ve taken, and according to Google’s estimates, it should only take you about 200 hours of walking to get from Cairo to the far side of the Jordan river by way of Mount Sinai. Which means that even if you only walked for two hours a day, it should only take you about 100 days – four months, tops, to make it all the way from slavery to the promised land.

I know that this is a big group of people – almost a million men, women and children, babies, the elderly, lots of livestock, all carrying all their earthly belongings with them, but still, doing this journey in forty years means they’re travelling at a pace of 68 metres a day – that’s 3 metres an hour. For reference, a snail moves at 47 metres an hour. A snail that left Egypt the same day as Moses would’ve made it to the Promised Land 16 times faster.

So what took them so long? Why did God decide to lead these people on such a long, slow journey through the wilderness? If God can split the Red Sea in half and deliver meat and bread for a million people every day, surely those people can get moving at a slightly faster pace than a snail. We look back on this story after it’s finished, after hearing about all the other amazing things that

God's people will accomplish in the rest of the Bible, and we want them to get started already, not waste multiple decades milling about in the desert gathering manna, but what we tend to forget is that at this point, they really aren't much of a people at all. They were one family when they first came to Egypt, all children of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, but that was centuries ago, and for most of that time they'd been slaves.

They all shared a common heritage, and a common experience of suffering and slavery, but that's about it. The Egyptians hadn't given them lots of free time to get to know one another, to spend family time together as a people – their masters wanted them weak and divided and isolated from each other, and that means that when they first left Egypt, they didn't really know each other, they didn't really trust each other, and they had all sorts of reasons to each split up and go their own way as soon as they reached the promised land. And not only did they not really know each other, they didn't really know God. The God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for hundreds of years God had been in the background of their lives, stories passed on from grandparents to grandchildren, but not someone they had actually met, not someone they had actually experienced in their lives.

And now all of a sudden they were free, they were on their way to the promised land, but if God took them straight there and left them to their own devices, it would've been a disaster. This ragtag group of former slaves, poor and disorganized and distrustful of everyone around them, they wouldn't have stood a chance. What the people needed was time, time to become a people, time to get to know each other, and to get to know their God, so that they could learn to follow, so that they could learn to trust, so that they could learn to love, love the

Lord their God with all their heart, and all their soul, and all their mind, and to love their neighbours as they loved themselves. That's what the people of Israel needed, and that's what God gave them. God gave them time in the wilderness, time where God and the people were alone together, forced to rely only on each another and on God for their survival, each and every day.

Their ultimate destination was still there for them, waiting for them, but before they made it there, the journey was part of the gift – for forty years God gave the people time to practice love, practice loving God and loving neighbour over and over and over again, so that they could start living as if they were already in the promised land. The promise of the promised land wasn't just fertile fields and pretty landscapes, it was the promise of freedom, the promise of justice and prosperity for all the people of Israel, and they could start living those kind of promised lives all the way through the wilderness, right up to the edge of the promised land.

Now, this still doesn't mean they got it entirely right. Even after forty years of wandering, forty years of practicing, forty years of God forming and shaping them in the wilderness, they still didn't have it perfect, loving God and neighbour every single day the way God wanted them to. Even after all those years, the people of Israel still struggled to figure out how to be God's people, how to follow the law, how to love God and love each other the way they were meant to love. But to be honest, we aren't much better at it ourselves. We have been the church for two thousand years, following Jesus Christ as his adopted family, and we still find it so hard to love God and love each other the way know we should. We struggle to build loving relationships with the people closest to us – our families, children and parents, our partners, our friends, our church – let alone loving the

strangers around us, or loving our enemies. We all know that love is the right choice to make – we all know that we ought to put others first, to set aside our own desires to serve and bless the people in the world around us, and we know that if we all just did this, this world would be so much better, there would be peace and justice for everyone, everyone would have the resources they need to survive and to thrive. If everyone loved God and loved their neighbour we would arrive at the promised land at last, but instead we're still making our way through the wilderness, trying and failing to be the people that we know we're supposed to be, wondering why things are so hard, why it's so hard to love our partners and raise our children and be the church the way we know we should. We want to know - how long is this going to take for us to arrive at the promised land, at the kingdom of heaven. Are we there yet? Why is this so hard? Why is this taking so long? We get so caught up in trying to get things perfect, to get to the kingdom, get to the promised land, get to our destination that we miss the point that God is trying to tell us – the journey is part of the gift. The journey is part of God's gift to us.

Every day that we get to spend travelling alongside Jesus Christ is a gift. Every day we get to move a little closer towards who we are meant to be, practicing loving God and loving our neighbours as we work our way towards the promised land, each day is a gift. So often we want to rush ahead to where all the problems are solved, all our troubles have disappeared, but God wants to use the trouble we're in, the mess of this broken world, to build us up as the people we are meant to be, to shape us as God's children, to bring us step by step, moment by moment, day by day closer and closer to the promised land, to the kingdom of heaven we were created to live in. We need to spend time in the wilderness so

that we can practice love, each and every day. And we will still get it wrong, but every day God keeps guiding us, keeps supplying our needs, keeps showing us with every word and action who we are meant to be, showing us the promised lives in store for us and helping us to live those lives here and now, here in the wilderness today. It is a gift to be in the wilderness together, following God towards the promised land. We have God's promise that we are headed for the kingdom, that every single day we are moving closer and closer to the world made right, the world where Jesus Christ is king and his justice and grace and love are all around us, and now we have the opportunity to live like that world is just around the corner, just over the horizon, just beyond our sight, and let our lives be shaped by the kingdom of God in all that we say and do. The troubles we find ourselves in, the wilderness we pass through, they may be longer than we think they should be, the journey may go slower than we want it to, but we know it leads to the kingdom, we know it leads to the promised land.

And that promised land starts here, right now, right in the middle of the wilderness, our promised lives begin today, with how we act in the midst of our trouble, how we share what we have with our brothers and sisters, how we glorify God in all that we say and do. We don't have to be perfect – we just need to keep moving, keep practicing love, keep taking one more step closer and closer towards the kingdom of God, each and every day. Here today, here in the wilderness, with every step we take, may we share love. With every step, may we love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, with every step, may we love our neighbours as we love ourselves. With every step we take, may the kingdom of God grow in us, so that when people look at us, they will see the promised land. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen!