

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Preface	7
Introduction	11
Outline	20
1. Lessons from History (1:1—4:49)	23
2. The Love Relationship (5:1—11:32)	34
3. Instructions in Practical Living for a God-related People (12:1—26:19)	50
4. Alternatives for a God-related People (27:1—30:20)	82
5. The Transition from Moses to Joshua (31:1—34:12)	104
Notes	124
Bibliography	126

# 1

## LESSONS FROM HISTORY

(1:1—4:49)

### INTRODUCTION (1:1-5)

MOSES IS SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFIED as the speaker in the opening words of the book of Deuteronomy. The geographical location is the land of Moab, east of the river Jordan. The date for this address by Moses is the eleventh month of the fortieth year after the exodus.

The location is significantly important. The Israelites are on the verge of entering the land of promise. They are encamped on the Plains of Moab on the eastern edge of the Jordan valley, northeast of the Dead Sea. This location is designated as "beyond the Jordan" which is better translated as "Transjordan." Since such phrases are used six times in Deuteronomy (1:1, 5; 4:41, 46, 47, 49) to refer to the east side of the river and three times (3:20, 25; 11:30) to the west side it seems to have no bearing on the location of the author of Deuteronomy. Whereas the Israelites had long before reached a point of entrance after an eleven-day journey from Horeb, now nearly forty years

later they are once more poised for occupying the promised land. This long period of wilderness wandering had a vital bearing on what Moses said to the Israelites anticipating the occupation of Canaan.

In retrospect, the focal point is Horeb and not the land of Egypt. It was at Horeb that the covenant between Israel and God was established. What had transpired since this relationship between Israel and God had been ratified at Mount Sinai was vitally important. It was this period of time, when Israel should have been experiencing the benefits of this relationship, that Moses examined in depth as he addressed the Israelites. Significant also is the fact that under Moses' leadership they already had defeated Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of Jordan, and occupied their territory.

Moses was the speaker. It was Moses who was the mediator through whom God made His great revelation to Israel. Through Moses' leadership the mighty acts of God had been manifested in releasing the Israelites from the clutches of Egyptian enslavers (Ex 1-19). Through Moses were given the tablets of stone which were engraved with the terms of the covenant, the instructions for building the tabernacle as a worship center, the organization of the priesthood and levitical service, the instructions for bringing their sacrifices, and guidance for observing the feasts and seasons, and the organization of the camp of Israel (Ex 20-40, Lev 1-27; Num 1-10). It was Moses who had led them on the eleven-day journey in anticipation of entering the promised land. It was Moses who patiently provided leadership during the thirty-eight years of wandering and marking time while the generation that came out of Egypt died in the wilderness. It was Moses who finally led this new generation to the Plains of Moab in victory over the two kings east of Jordan. It was Moses who

actually apportioned the land east of Jordan to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and part of Manasseh.

The opening statement, "These are the words," is significant in the light of recent studies of ancient documents. According to Meredith Kline this is an introductory formula used during the second millennium B.C.<sup>1</sup> This seems to have been the normal way in which to introduce a written agreement made between a king and his subject in Mosaic times. Moses, through his training in Egypt, very likely had personal knowledge of treaty patterns prevailing throughout the Fertile Crescent at that time.

#### THE WILDERNESS JOURNEY (1:6—3:29)

Moses begins with a review of the journey from Mount Horeb to Transjordan. Although the distance from Horeb to Paran from where they should have entered Canaan was only an eleven-day journey, the Israelites had actually spent over thirty-eight years in wilderness wanderings. Now when they were once more on the verge of entering Canaan, Moses solemnly confronts them with a review of the past. With a definite purpose he selects certain events for their consideration.

#### THE KADESH CRISIS (1:6-46)

Moses does not review what happened at Horeb. Much of what God revealed to Moses at Horeb is recorded in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. He begins with the explicit command by God to enter and possess the land of Canaan which God had promised to the Hebrew patriarchs, 1:8. Repeatedly, Moses refers to this covenant promise (Gen 22:16-18) to give them the land of Canaan (cf. Deu 1:35; 4:31; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:8, 12; 8:1, 18; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 13:17; 19:8; 26:3, 15; 28:11; 29:13; 30:20; 31:7, 20-23; 34:4).

Officers and judges had been appointed at Horeb as sug-

gested by Jethro (Ex 18:17-22). In Egypt they had worked as slaves under taskmasters. As a nation of free men, the officers were responsible with captains as subordinates to insure justice for all. The Israelites as well as the strangers were to be treated with equal fairness. Even though justice issued from God, these judges were charged with making decisions. Consequently, men of wisdom and repute were selected for this responsibility of executing judgment.

Humanitarianism was a distinctive characteristic of the Mosaic law. In contrast to the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi and the conditions in Egypt as experienced by the Israelites, this provision offered aid to all who might be subject to oppression or exploitation. Among God-fearing people, the justice and righteousness of God should permeate the relationships of members of society.

"Go up, take possession" (1:21) had been the advice of Moses when they arrived at Kadesh-barnea after their eleven-day journey from Horeb. The Hebrew word *yārash* occurs over fifty times in Deuteronomy, and means "take possession of," "to subdue," or "dispossess," and generally applies to property or land. The Israelites were to claim and possess what God had promised. They were admonished not to be afraid or discouraged.

Moses assented to their request to send spies. The result of hearing the majority report was discouragement, rebellion, and finally God's judgment. Consequently that generation did not enter Canaan but was doomed to die in the wilderness.

Did the Israelites at Kadesh-barnea have a reasonable basis to believe that they could overpower the Canaanites and possess the land? Moses reminded them (1:30-31) that God had cared for them as a father cares for his son.

God had guided them in visible manifestation of fire by night and cloud by day. On the basis of this experience since they left Egypt the Israelites should have believed God. Proper fear or reverence for God at this time should have been exemplified by their trusting God to enable them to possess the land of Canaan. Even though this was reasonable on the basis of their experiences, they failed to move forward to conquer the land.

God's people today who claim to believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour have a reasonable basis to trust God in facing the difficulties of life. The individual who has been turned "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" and has received "forgiveness of sins" (Ac 26:18) has experienced a transformation effected by supernatural power. It is this divine source that is available to every God-fearing person as he encounters situations which seem impossible from the natural perspective. Today's Christian may fail to advance in God's plan for him, even as that generation of Israelites failed through rebellion and discouragement to possess Canaan.

Moses speaks freely of the wrath of God as well as the love of God throughout Deuteronomy. The attribute of divine wrath is also explicitly mentioned by Jesus (Jn 3:36) and by Paul (Ro 1:18). The rebellious spirit of that generation was subjected to the wrath of "a jealous God" (Ex 20:5), lest the nation be entirely ruined.

Joshua and Caleb were excluded from this judgment since they "wholly followed the Lord" (1:36; cf. Num 14:24; Jos 14:8-9). In a minority report they advised that with God's help the Israelites could occupy the land (Num 13:30; 14:6-9). They were assured of entrance into Canaan.

Disobedience had dire consequences even for Moses,

who not only was their leader but also prophet and mediator in God's revelation to Israel. Through his disobedience—even though it was caused by the rebellious attitude of the Israelites—Moses was denied entrance into Canaan and the leadership was transferred to Joshua. Moses was primarily accountable to God and then to the people. God does not overlook disobedience even by those who are used in His service.

The rebellious Israelites at Kadesh made an abortive attempt to enter Canaan (1:41-46). Willingness to go after their first rebellion did not atone for their sin. Their attempt to conquer the Canaanites in their own strength made them keenly aware of the reality of divine judgment. For that generation there was no escape from death in the wilderness during the next thirty-eight years (cf. Num 15-19).

The sovereignty of God over the nations is apparent in the boundaries determined for various nations. Although this friendliness shown to the Moabites and Ammonites is characteristic of patriarchal and Mosaic cultures, the Israelites were given explicit instructions to continue to spare these nations. Although David later conquered the Edomites, he did not dispossess them (2 Sa 8:14).

The advance against the Amorites was also an explicit command of God (3:2). Furthermore, the Israelites were assured of success in this holy war. The Amorites had degraded into such idolatry that their time for judgment had ripened (cf. Gen 15:16). Although generation after generation had been exposed to the opportunities to turn to God, the cup of iniquity had at last been filled to the point of divine judgment. The Israelites under the command of God executed this judgment as indicated in the next chapter.

## ISRAEL'S RELATIVES (2:1-23)

Once again the Israelites had been commanded to move on. Being refused passage through Edomite territory they were compelled to circuit to the south and then northward to Transjordan (2:8; cf. Num 20:20). Although Edom blocked Israel's passage through Seir because they were afraid of them, the Israelites were instructed not to harm them. They were not to take Edomite territory, since this land had been given to Esau's descendants for their inheritance (cf. Gen 36). Actually, the Edomites were assured of a relatively favored position in the congregation of Israel (Deu 23:7-8).

Next en route were the Moabites (2:9-18). As descendants of Lot, the Moabites were also a privileged people whom the Israelites were divinely forbidden to dispossess. The territory south of the Arnon River and east of the Dead Sea down to the Zered River was allotted to the Moabites by Yahweh, the Great King of Israel.

Marching along the Zered and then north to the Arnon, the Israelites also made contact with the Ammonites who were located east and north of the Moabites. The Ammonites too were descendants of Lot, whose territorial rights were to be respected by Israel (2:19-23).

## CONQUEST AND DIVISION (2:24—3:29)

Moses continues his historical survey, pointing out that under his leadership they had actually defeated two Amorite kings and occupied their territory. The Amorites had extended from Canaan east across the Jordan and had taken possession of this territory, which apparently had not been included in the land of promise. When the Israelites made peace overtures to Sihon, the Amorite king of Heshbon, and were refused, they conquered his cities and subdued the land north to the Jabbok (2:24-37).



Next they advanced northward to defeat Og, the King of Bashan, and occupied his territory extending Israel's possession on the east of Jordan northward to Mount Hermon (3:1-17). This newly conquered land had been assigned to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, (Num 32), with the provision that their men would aid the rest of the nation of Israel in the conquest of the promised land west of the Jordan.

Moses pointed out to Joshua a reasonable basis for his faith in believing that the Israelites would conquer the rest of Palestine (3:21). Since God had manifested His power in successfully conquering and occupying the eastern bank of Jordan, they had reason to believe that God would do the same as they crossed the Jordan. Although Moses himself was only permitted to view the promised land from Pisgah's height, he was told to charge and publicly encourage Joshua to assume the leadership (3:28).

#### THE RIGHT WAY (4:1-49)

Lessons were to be learned from the mistakes of the previous generation as well as from divine guidance. Moses stresses the uniqueness of God's revelation to them and their responsibility.

#### WISDOM IN PRACTICE (4:1-8)

Moses issues a call for obedience. "Statutes" (permanent rules of conduct prescribed by proper authority, usually in written form for guiding the individual and society) and "judgments" or ordinances (judicial decisions which serve as future precedents for the guidance of judges) are repeatedly emphasized by Moses as crucially significant. Life itself, as well as occupation and possession of the land, are dependent on obedience to these rules and regulations.

Consider the emphasis here that this is the word of God. Consequently they are not to add to or take away from these divine commands. Jesus struck a similar chord in His teaching (cf. Mt 5:17-19; 15:6). Note also the final warning in the book of Revelation (22:18-19). Although circumstances required modification of some Mosaic enactments in subsequent development, no change in basic principle should be given consideration.

This law that Moses set before the Israelites was to be observed "in the land whither ye go to possess it" (4:5). It would serve as a guide in their manner of life for coming generations as God's covenant people. The ceremonial and judicial regulations were of a temporal nature and were terminated with the fuller revelation in the coming of Jesus (cf. Heb 9:1-15).

Unique in the history of mankind is this revelation of God through Moses. The eternal principles of holiness, justice, and truth issued not from man but from God, and therefore the Israelites would be known as wise people if they lived in accordance with this revelation. The basic principles given in this law were consequently not only for the Israelites but also for all people who reflect a vital relationship with God. Note the frequent use Jesus and the New Testament writers make of Deuteronomy (cf. Mt 4:4, 7, 10; Ro 13:9; and others).

#### THE FEAR OF GOD (4:9-31)

The basic lesson for Israel to learn at Horeb was to fear and reverence God. They had heard God's voice but they had seen no form nor likeness of God, only an appearance of fire (4:11, 15, 24). Consequently, they could not make a likeness of this God in any manner. What they had seen of God by way of manifestation through fire, and what they had heard—this they were to teach their chil-

dren. This reverence and respect for God who is a consuming fire was to be conveyed to the succeeding generations.

Any attempt to make a material representation of God was forbidden. Worship of idols or of nature would precipitate God's wrath in subjecting them to exile. There they would indeed serve and worship idols which were the work or product of man's hands. They should never forget the fact that God who had revealed Himself through voice and fire at Horeb had redeemed them from Egyptian slavery. This God they should always revere and respect. Likewise, they should make this God—along with proper respect and reverence for Him—known to their children.

Israel had entered into a contractual agreement with God at Horeb. This covenant (4:13) is mentioned twenty-six times in subsequent passages in Deuteronomy. God extended His grace to Israel in entering into a vital relationship with them, and the Israelites ratified this agreement (Ex 24:1-8). As was customary in Mosaic times two copies of this covenant were provided on two tablets of stone. The law given at Sinai is properly a suzerainty treaty rather than a legal code, and Deuteronomy is a covenant-renewal document. Consequently it has some modification or modernizations of the code given originally. This was customary in the renewal of such treaties.

#### THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD (4:32-40)

Israel's God and Israel's relationship with God were unique. No one had ever heard the voice of God and seen the fiery manifestation of God and lived. Israel had been redeemed and had been the recipient of God's revelation, in which they heard a voice from heaven and had seen a manifestation of fire on earth (4:36). Why had God re-

vealed Himself? Because God loved the patriarchs and chose to redeem Israel.

This God who is unequalled and manifested Himself in an unprecedented revelation to Israel in redemptive power, is to be given careful respect and reverence through obedience. This response of obedience will prolong life and blessings for the Israelites and their children.

#### THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MOSES' PROCLAMATION (4:41-49)

In connection with this address to his people, Moses cites the fact that three cities east of the Jordan River had been designated as cities of refuge as part of the inheritance God had provided. Likewise, the summary of the Transjordanian conquest provides a conclusion to the historical prologue and an introduction to the emphasis of their covenant relationship in the following address.

The time and place are carefully stated for this second discourse by Moses, which begins with 5:1 and ends with 26:19. The basic commandments are given and elaborated in chapters 5-11 and the detailed delineations in 12-26. Throughout, Moses adds warnings and admonitions concerning the relationship that had been established and was to be maintained between the two contracting parties, God and the Israelites. Chapters 5-26 constitute the stipulations when the book of Deuteronomy is viewed as a covenant-renewal similar to ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties.