

For You and All Nations

HN 6/02/05 p

Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-14, Revelation 22

Study Text: Deuteronomy 4:1-8

Palms : 147:1-5, 147:12-15, 19-20, 19:7-11, 19:12-14

After a brief historical sketch in his introduction, Moses gets down to the business of explaining the law to the people. These are the people that he led out of Egypt and through the wilderness for 40 years. They were the chosen people of God who were now poised to enter in and possess the land the Lord promised to their fathers. How would they live in this new nation? That was the question that Moses was addressing. How shall they live?

It is no simple task forming a new nation and establishing laws for the people to live by – just look at Iraq. Without strong leadership and laws for the people to live by, anarchy can quickly take hold. They have managed to hold elections and now have the task of writing a constitution and establishing laws. A society in which everyone does what is right in his own eyes will soon crumble.

Moses was leading a new nation. In Moses they had a great leader. They had laws also by which they were to live. But now they were about to enter into the land that was to be their possession. Moses called them together to explain the law, to explain to them how they were to live in the land. *Now, O Israel, listen.* They were not to be like other nations. They were a special people, a holy nation.

The Lord chose these people. He set his love upon them. He called upon them to love him and obey his decrees and laws, that all may go well with them in the land. They were to live as the people of God in God's land. They would be a nation like no other. Other nations would look to them and to their God that was *so near to them*. They had a God like no other, a God who heard their cry and a God who spoke to them.

If they listened and obeyed the commands of God then they would live, they would enjoy life in the land and they would bring glory to God in all the earth.

Commands not to be changed

But first there is a proviso – they must not add to nor take from *the word which I command you...the commandments of the Lord your God* (4:2). This law was divine law. It was given by God. It was not the prerogative of man to change it. It was the law for all people for all time.

The nations around knew no such law. Their law was established by the king. What the king said was law. The king might change his mind and make a different decree. When a new king came the laws might well be changed. We see this today in some countries.

It is hard for some people coming to live in Australia to accept that the laws are fixed and apply to everyone. Knowing someone who knows someone does not help when you break the law. And bribes do not work.

But even here we have come to accept that the law should be what the majority wants. Just listen to the debate about abortion – or the lack thereof. If women want an abortion they should be allowed to have it they say. You are not supposed to ask is it right to murder an unborn child.

The laws of men seldom protect the weak in society. The laws of men are not always just; they do not always protect or promote human life – though we are getting more and more laws to protect animal life. The laws of men can easily be changed – if the king so desires or the ‘majority’ so desires.

But this is not so with the law of God. It must not be added to or taken from. His law is absolute. God knew that the people would try to change his commands. Sinful man does want to be told ‘obey this law’. He will say ‘this law is not good, this law limits my freedom, and this law does not allow me to live as I want’.

Yes, from the time of Adam until today, people have sought to change the commands of God. *Did God really say?* The Pharisees added hundreds of detailed prohibitions to the law of God. They were the legalists of the first century. Today legalists still add to the law of God.

The Sadducees on the other hand, subtracted from the law things they found unacceptable. They rejected anything supernatural, the teaching of the resurrection, angels and spirits. They were the destructive rationalists of their day. Still today we have the rationalists seeking to remove anything supernatural from the Bible.

These are the words of God. Tamper with them at your peril. This was the warning Moses gave Israel. And we find the same warning at the close of Scripture – *if anyone adds to these things God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life* (Revelation 22:18).

Live in the land

Read the directions! I bought a gadget the other day but could not get it to work. I took it back to the shop to get my money back. What is wrong with it the man asked? I don't know I said because there are no directions telling me how to use it. I expected the manufacturer to supply directions on how to use the machine – but there were none.

Thankfully our Maker, who is God the Lord, has given us directions on how to live. Thankfully we are not just a mass of cells that can be cultured in a test tube; we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God. God breathed into us the breath of life. And having made us he has given us rules by which we must live in this world that he also created.

The Israelites had already experienced the consequences of failing to live by the commands of God. *Your eyes have seen what Lord did at Baal Peor (4:3)* – it was something that happened not long before and not far away. What happened there? Following the advice of Balaam, women from Moab came and invited Israelites to the sacrifices of their gods (Numbers 25). Along with the idolatry, the men committed adultery with these pagan women.

The Lord's jealous anger was aroused and he destroyed thousands of his people – all the men who worshipped Baal of Peor. This was a stark reminder and a warning to them of what will happen when they disobey the commands of God in the land they were about to possess. *The Lord your God is a jealous God (6:15)*.

But those *who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, everyone one of you*. Which way to live? The Lord made it very clear what was the way of life. Observe the decrees and law that God has given and you will live.

To 'live' here means more than just 'be alive' – it includes enjoying to the full God's blessing and favour. To live means peace with God, peace with one another and peace with neighbours. It meant God's blessing, his favour, on the land, on their person, on their family, and on their relationships.

A light to the nations

Be careful to observe the commands of God, *for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations (4:6)*. Surrounding nations would look to Israel and say – what a wise and understanding people these are. They would ask – how come? How come these people have such wisdom and understanding? How is it that they know how to live?

And the answer-it is because of their law and because of their god. What other nation has their god so near to them as to give them his law. What other nation has a god who hears when the people call to him.

Already other nations feared Israel. They had heard about the crossing of the Red Sea, about Mt Sinai and about the defeat of Sihon and Og. Let this holy nation be renowned not only for the works of their God, but for their way of living, their wisdom and understanding, their devotion to God, their pure and simple worship of God.

This nation Israel had a missionary task. They were to be as a beacon, a light shining into the darkness that engulfed the nations around them. Other nations would be attracted to

them, like moths to a light, when they saw their wisdom and the way they live. They would come and ask – tell us about your great and wonderful God for we want to worship him also.

Remember how Naaman came to the land of Israel seeking a blessing from God. He took soil back with him that he might worship the God of Israel. Remember how the queen of Sheba came to Solomon seeking his wisdom.

Stop and consider what a blessed person you are because you have the commands of the Lord your God. Do you realise how blessed you are in having your makers instructions on how to live. You live among people stumbling along in the dark, looking to the creation, looking to themselves, looking to scientists, sports people and superstars wanting to know how to live. They look everywhere but to their Creator.

If you will walk in obedience to the commands of God – and you can do so because he has given you his Holy Spirit – if you will heed his word you, people will notice and sooner or later they will ask. How come you have such peace, how come you have such hope, where do you get such wisdom (I Corinthians 6:5)?

What is the chief end of man? Mans chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. This is what Moses was telling Israel.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon