

## **Words Moses Spoke**

HN 28/11/04 pm

Reading: Deuteronomy 1:1-18, 17:14:20, I Peter 2

Study: Deuteronomy 1:1-5

Psalms: 11:1-4, 11:5-10, 19:7-11, 19:12-14

Can you remember a time in your life when you were facing an enormous change – you were at the threshold – a great change lay ahead of you. Maybe it was moving to a new town to live, or starting a new job, or a new school. Maybe it was leaving home or starting out in marriage. You would meet new people, be making new friends. You would be leaving familiar surroundings, familiar faces and familiar ways of doing things. Change can be traumatic allowing the enemy to take advantage and attack your soul.

Moving to India to live was an enormous and traumatic change for us. We encountered new foods, new people, new modes of travel, new religions – in fact there was not much that was the same. I remember my first train journey vividly – especially when I was offered a cold but spicy vegetable pattie for breakfast. My prayer of thanks was very sincere – ‘Lord may this not make me sick!’

We had to learn how to live in this new place. How would we live among people who worshipped idols? What if they demanded we give money for them to make an idol? How would we answer the official who asked for a bribe to sign some papers? This was a time when we had to draw near to God. We had to remind ourselves of his commands. This was a time when we needed people praying for us.

Israel was on the threshold of entering the promised/sworn land. Delivered from slavery in Egypt, they had wandered in the wilderness for the past forty years. They would soon be facing the challenges of life in the land that ‘the Lord you God will give you’. A new land, new people, new religions, new foods awaited them. And they would also have a new leader because Moses would *not cross over the Jordan*.

It was not the physical battles of war that concerned Moses but the spiritual battles, war against their souls. Moses did not train them in warfare for the battle would be the Lords. Dear friends wrote the apostle Peter, almost 1500 years later, dear friends of the dispersion, *I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires which war against the soul*.

### **Background and Current situation**

The book of Deuteronomy is the final book of the Pentateuch – the five books Moses. Clearly the book is written by Moses, although the record of his own death may have been added by Joshua. Liberal theologians have tried hard over the past two centuries to

convince us that it was not written by Moses but in a much later period, possibly from the time of Josiah. But their scholarly efforts proved unsuccessful.

The Hebrew title is *debarim*, ‘The Words’, taken from the opening words of the book. The Jews also called it ‘repetition of the law’ based on 17:18 where we read *he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book from the one before the priests and Levites*. When this title was translated, albeit incorrectly, into Greek (the LXX), it became ‘the second law’ or ‘deuteronomium’. From this we get the English title Deuteronomy.

This book is one of the four most quoted Old Testament books by New Testament writers (along with Genesis, Psalms and Isaiah). There are over 80 references from Deuteronomy found in the New Testament. ‘Its influence on the domestic and personal religion of all ages has not been surpassed by any other book in the Bible’.

Moses both spoke and wrote these words as Israel was encamped on the plains of Moab *beyond the Jordan*. This place reference is familiar to us from Gen 50 – Joseph and his brothers stopped to mourn their father Jacob at a place *beyond the Jordan*. The Canaanites watched this mourning over 400 years before this day. Moses of course led Israel out of the Egypt and at Mt. Sinai God spoke to him and gave the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20).

Already two Amorite kings had been destroyed on the way to this place. Under the leadership of Moses, Sihon and Og were killed according to the purposes of God and by his power. The people obeyed the word of God and destroyed everything that was theirs. This was but the beginning of his judgment on the Amorites and possession of the land for Israel. Remember the Lord told Abraham *the sin of the Amorites is not yet complete* (Genesis 15:16). The time had now come for judgment.

The location of the places mentioned in 1:1 is uncertain – though they were probably on the plains of Moab. The significance of the reference about traveling from Horeb (Mt. Sinai) to Kadesh Barneais likewise not clear – unless there is a contrast between the 11 days normally taken and the forty years it took Israel as punishment for disobeying God at Kadesh.

Kadesh brought back unpleasant memories to the Israelites. It was there that their fathers refused to go up and take possession of the land as the Lord commanded. They will be reminded of this later in this chapter. Victory over the two Amorite kings in this Transjordan region was a more pleasant memory and indeed more vivid to this new generation. This then was the historical and geographical context of Moses speaking to *all Israel* or the *children of Israel*.

### **Covenant renewal**

What did he speak? Moses spoke *according to all that the Lord had given him as commandments*. He spoke *explaining or expounding the law*. Deuteronomy then is an exposition of the commandments. After a brief historical review the commandments are

restated and then explained to a new generation about to enter a new environment. Obedience would bring blessings and disobedience curse under the terms of this covenant made by God with his chosen people. There are parallels with ancient Hittite treaties in the structure of this covenant.

This transition from wilderness to Canaan would make Israel vulnerable. How would they react to the idolatry of the inhabitants? How would they depend on the Lord when they had abundant harvests? How would they interact with other peoples – they had been largely insulated in Goshen and in the desert?

Reminding them of the past and of the covenant God made with them was the best way to prepare the people for what lay ahead *the land the Lord swore to your fathers – to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*

This book then is not just a repetition of the law given at Sinai but a number of sermons or exhortations given by Moses on the eve of the entry into the land and his departure into glory. It is given to a new generation of the people of God. Certainly it is based upon the law given at Sinai – we find the Decalogue reiterated (with slight changes) – but it is applied to their particular situation.

There is emphasis given to the spiritual principle of the law and its fulfilment – ‘with a further development of the ecclesiastical, judicial, political, and civil organization, which was intended as a permanent foundation for life and well being of the people of God in the land of Canaan’.

The people needed to know how to live and worship as the people of God in this new land. They had been given the law; they had the benefit of the great man of God, Moses, leading them these past 40 years. Moses instructed them once again on the plains of Moab, explaining the law as it related to every aspect of life in the new land. Love the Lord your God and serve him, walk in the fear of the Lord your God and keep his commands- this was the essence of his message (10:12).

### **Conclusion**

God’s relationship with Israel was based upon the covenant he made with them at Sinai. They were his people, saved for the purpose that they might glorify him and make him known to all the nations. *You are a holy people to the Lord your God, the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth (7:6).* God had a vested interest in Israel. They were his chosen people. He had called them for a purpose.

Are we any different? What do we read in I Peter 2:9 – *you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people that you may declare his praises.* These words are almost the same as those we have just read from Deuteronomy are they not. Our God is the same God. His grace and mercy is the same as it was to Israel –

calling us and keeping us as his children. Moses was the mediator of the covenant with Israel. We have Jesus Christ as our mediator.

Are you living as one chosen by God – a special child of God? Remember *you are not your own, you were bought with a price* (1 Corinthians 6:20). Therefore glorify God in your body and honour him in all that you say and do. Moses exhorted the children of Israel as to how they must live in the land the Lord their God was giving them.

And remember especially when facing changes in your life or some traumatic time to be prepared for Satan's attack. *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.* Love the Lord your God and obey his commands. His commands are not burdensome they are for your good, that all may go well with you in the new situation you will face.

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*