

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 3 - Chapters 1 and 2

The last time we met I established a principle for the over-all context of Deuteronomy that I'm going to remind you of from time-to-time: it is that Deuteronomy should be looked at as more of a sermon from Moses than as a direct oracle from the mouth of the Lord.

Moses' sermon is much like the bulk of the Bible (and very much like the New Testament) whereby what Moses speaks is divinely inspired however divine inspiration is a co-operative work between man and God, while God's oracles are direct communications (usually in the form of instructions) from God to man.

Therefore while the words Moses spoke are completely trustworthy and true, we must also see them in an ever-so-slightly different light than in the first 4 books of Torah whereby we had so much of the verbiage in the form of, **"and the Lord said"** thus and so. I think it would be fair to say that an important principle when considering the Word of God is that the weight carried by God's direct oracles (that is, the instruction that followed "and the Lord said") are greater than the personal words or thoughts of any man (whether that man is Moses, King David, or the Apostle Paul) who, if he is not merely repeating God's words, is essentially "sermonizing".

To this point in Deuteronomy chapter 1 we have listened in as Moses began recounting the history of Israel's wilderness journey; and we're informed that the date of this sermon is 39 years and 11 months since the day Pharaoh released Israel from his grip.

Verse 19 begins Moses' reminder to the people of Israel (this is the 2nd generation of the Exodus crowd) just why it was that they had been wandering as Bedouins in the desert regions of the Arabian and Sinai Peninsulas rather than being permanently settled. And he explains that about 38 years ago upon Israel reaching Kadesh-Barnea (on the southern edge of the Land of Canaan), Moses commanded that the people should go forth and begin their conquering of the Canaanites but, the leaders balked and asked Moses to send some scouts on ahead to evaluate the land and come back and report. Please note that this is new information. In the Numbers 13 account of the conquering of Canaan there is no mention of Moses telling the people to begin the Holy War for Canaan. In fact in many ways, the Numbers account makes Moses compliant if not complicit in the decision NOT to go into the Promised Land and take it.

So here we find out that the reason the scouts were sent is because the people (meaning the leaders and elders who were representative of the people) demanded that instead of just moving forward without reservation (as they should have) a dozen leading men were sent to check things out first.

Now I will tell you that I have read some commentary that makes it seem as though Moses is kind of embellishing the story of the scouts (perhaps rewriting history a bit) to put his own actions into a more favorable light. And that Moses was essentially saying “it’s not my fault and I tried to do the right thing”, but that he succumbed to the will of the people by hesitating. I suspect there is some truth to this as Moses was but a mild man, reluctant in his current role, and not a forceful leader. And I don’t think there was any inaccuracy to what Moses is saying here; it’s just that as men we tend to remember the parts of events that are more favorable to us and we tend to bend what we were thinking at the time to what actually happened.

I have no doubt that Moses exhorted the people to have no fear and to march upon Canaan; but he also found himself in a quandary when the leaders that he depended on insisted on caution. Leadership is a tricky thing; people have to buy into what you’re doing on the one hand, yet on the other hand what good is leadership if one but stands at the head of the group and simply conducts it to whatever and wherever it wants to go? This was Moses’ dilemma and one that many of us can identify with.

I want you to notice something in verse 20 that is not particularly unique in the Torah but rather it is an excellent example of a principle that usually goes over our heads. It says there, “you have come to the hill country of the Amorites **which the Lord God is giving to us**”. The principle is summed up in the tense of the word “giving”.

The biblical Hebrew language does not use past, present and future tenses as does English (although modern spoken Hebrew has adopted the use of such tenses). That is, in English something happened before (past), or is happening now (present), or will happen later (future). Rather the biblical Hebrew language uses what is called perfect and imperfect tenses. The perfect is roughly equivalent to past and present and the imperfect roughly equivalent to the future; but that rough equivalency is VERY rough. Here’s the issue and I’ll take only a moment to generalize; our modern day past, present and future tenses are about WHEN an action is taking place. It makes the context of the statement set in TIME (did it occur in the past, is it happening now, will it happen at a later time?). That is NOT what is going on in Biblical Hebrew. And I stress the term BIBLICAL Hebrew because (again) Modern Hebrew DOES use past, present and future tenses.

In Biblical Hebrew the tenses of the scriptures denote the state of the action. Is the action completed or is it ongoing? The idea of WHEN in time an action is happening is inferred by the context of the overall statement, not directly by the verb tenses.

So in the statement of verse 20 that says that the Lord “is giving” the Hill Country of the Amorites to Israel, the idea is that this is an ongoing process. The “giving” of the land has already begun but is not yet completed. Some translations of the Bible say, “**will** give to us”, others say, “**gives** to us”; others still say, “**is about to** give to us”. The problem is that these translations are setting the event of the giving of the Land of Canaan to the Hebrews in time; and these versions want to say it is EITHER happening now (present), or is going to happen later, but soon (future). This is incorrect and we see this same issue repeated throughout the Bible. Here in Deuteronomy what is being expressed is that the Hebrews are simply somewhere within a long process of possessing the Land of Canaan and exactly where along the timeline the process currently is, is not implied. This problem with misunderstanding Hebrew tenses has created all kinds of issues in trying to understand prophecies (prophecies, by our definition, are almost always **future** to our way of thinking).

Because past, present and future are so imbedded in our Western languages I usually try to explain the Biblical prophecies by saying that they happened in the past (like the return from exile of the Hebrews) but many of these same prophecies will also happen again in the future. But technically it’s not a past or a future matter: it’s that there is a prophetic process and it is ongoing and someday it will be brought to its fullest completion.

Moses recounts that the 12 scouts returned with some samples of the fruits of the Land of Canaan along with the report that “It is a good land...”. But, the people refused to go up and take the land as the Lord God had commanded they do because another part of the report was that the task would be difficult and dangerous. The inhabitants were big, they were numerous, and there were many walled cities. The people responded, “Yehoveh must hate us” and so refused to go and take the land.

Let me remind you that the term “the people” is almost always a reference to the leadership. This was a TRIBAL society, the people didn’t vote; even so the leadership was thought of as being representative of the people. If the leadership of the tribe of Judah decided something, in the Bible it would say “the people of Judah” decided thus and so. This is important to grasp because what is happening here is that Moses is blaming the leadership counsel for this action of rebellion that proved so costly in terms of life and time.

Moses says he did his best to convince the leadership counsel to put aside their fears and instead to trust and obey God; he reminded them that the fire-cloud they followed by day and night was proof that Yehoveh was with them and that He had already gone ahead of them and secured the victory. But despite the extraordinarily powerful evidence of God’s love for His people and His ability to do whatever He says He will do, the leadership dug in their heels. And as a result the Lord declared that not one of this evil generation would enter into the land He has set apart for His people. The evil generation was defined earlier as men aged 20 years and older at the time of this incident.

Every time I recall this incident of the 12 scouts I cannot help but have some fear and trepidation vibrate through my body. Here was a society in which (particularly at this point in the journey) the tribal leaders decided autocratically what would occur. The general population had little choice but to follow or pack up and leave; however the leaders also knew their decisions had to be generally popular and acceptable or they wouldn't survive as leaders very long. Yet the Lord held the general population accountable for the actions and decisions and rebellion of their leadership (although He assigned somewhat MORE accountability to the leadership). How much more must Yehoveh hold each of us accountable for the decisions of our leadership in a democratic nation in which we directly CHOOSE those who lead us, and have a process to remove those who lead us poorly. As much as we would like to we cannot completely separate ourselves from our secular government leadership OR from our church or synagogue leadership. And neither can the leadership separate itself from the actions of those they govern. Moses did NOT enter the Promised Land; and he states on numerous occasions that it was on account of the people that he was barred. In other words, as the leader he was ultimately responsible for the actions of the people.

Our salvation in Yeshua is certainly on an individual -by- individual basis; but our earthly fates are often bound up together as a group. And the principle that we see in the Bible is that after the Lord's first major division of humans into Hebrews and gentiles, the next division of people in God's eyes was as nations of people. Nations hold a corporate responsibility before Yehoveh. Entire nations will be judged together as a single group based on the decisions of its leadership and overall actions of the people. That several individuals are opposed to some rebellious or ungodly action does NOT exempt them from suffering the NATIONAL judgment that the Lord may (and Revelation indicates He will) inflict. So it behooves us to fight tirelessly in our families and communities to uphold the Lord's Name and His commands for the sake of our nation.

Moses next tells this new generation of Hebrews what eventually happened after their refusal to go into the Promised Land; the leadership acknowledged that they were wrong. The leadership said we certainly do NOT want to be detoured back into the Wilderness and we certainly don't want to be permanently barred from ever entering the Promised Land. And, on the surface this certainly sounds like contrite hearts full of repentance for their rebellion, when they say, "**....NOW we will go up and fight just as Yehoveh commanded us**". Then the Lord says something that ought to shake us all up: "Do NOT go up and do NOT fight, since I am NOT in your midst...."

But so anxious to regain merit in the Lord's eyes, and all the more anxious to avoid God's pronouncement of judgment upon them, the people again ignored the Lord and tried to take the Promised Land on their own without His leadership or permission. The results were predictable and disastrous. **Not** taking the land when commanded was rebellion; but **taking** the same land (only hours and days later) when commanded NOT to was also rebellion. The timing belongs to the Lord just as much as the deed.

Follow this sequence because this pattern is no different in the New Testament, and certainly no different in our modern era: 1) the Lord commands Israel to take the Promised Land. 2) The people become afraid and hesitate. 3) The people decide that they're going to stop and evaluate whether they agree with God on this matter or not. 4) They choose to disagree. 5) God calls this disagreement rebellion and pronounces judgment. 6) The people, upon hearing the judgment repent and say, "OK, we've changed our minds; we'll do what you say". 7) God says, no, the time has passed and my offer is revoked. My judgment stands and the door is closed for you to enter.

Can you see where I'm going with this? Etch this God-principle in your minds and hearts for our lives depend on it: **it is not always possible to recoup an opportunity lost by failure of faith.** We Christians love to say: "well, if God closes a door, he'll open a window". While that certainly sounds nice I say, not necessarily. The close-a-door open-a- window philosophy is what these Israelites were counting on and the Lord said, "no". There comes a time in the life of an UN-Believer that the offer of salvation is rescinded. I don't know when that is exactly; certainly at death, but at what point before death no man knows.

But for the Believer we can sit on the sidelines for so long, follow our own ways for so long, that when the consequences of our rebellion finally become apparent to us we determine to go back and try to recoup those things that our lack of faith caused us to dismiss. And considerably more often than not those specific opportunities are permanently lost and never to be recovered (at least not by us). Probably thousands of poems and epitaphs have been written over the centuries describing how the past cannot be regained. Oh, I'm not saying that God won't recognize our repentance and allow us joy and maybe in His time some other opportunity to serve Him. But who among us that has reached an advanced age does not look back at lost opportunity and mourns it to some degree or another. And we mourn it not because our lives are necessarily ruined or without hope (because they're not), but because much pain and needless suffering (often involving innocent parties) was the result. Or perhaps we see a great blessing that we turned down and others took advantage. Our lives could have been so much MORE fruitful for the Kingdom of God if only we had trusted and obeyed.

Israel could have been enjoying God's rest in God's land in a matter of months after leaving Egypt; instead, due to lack of faith only the offspring of those who left Egypt would be permitted that rest. And no amount of repentance would change that reality, not even for Moses himself.

Let's move on to chapter 2.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 2 all

The results of the rebellion of the 1st generation are the subject of the first words of chapter 2. They were literally required to march in the opposite direction from the Promised Land; they headed south, towards the Gulf of Aqaba. What a dismal journey that must have been; soundly defeated by the Amorites, under the sentence of death for all who were aged 20 and older, and now relegated to living in a bleak desert for an indeterminate period of time.

Chapter 2 is in contrast to chapter 1. The 1st generation rebelled but now the 2nd generation is being obedient. The 1st generation was sent southward but now the 2nd generation is ordered to march northward. The 1st generation was to enter the Promised Land from the Southwest but now the 2nd generation is to enter the Promised Land from the Southeast. The 1st generation was told that they had stayed at Mt. Horeb long enough but now the 2nd generation is told that they had been skirting the Promised Land long enough. The 1st generation knew they would die in the desert but now the 2nd generation knew they would live in God's set apart land.

Next we get a series of instructions about certain people that the Lord wants Israel to avoid. This avoidance is not about a fear within Israel nor a worry that they might be defeated: rather it is that the territories inhabited by these people were NOT to be part of the Promised Land, and the ancestry of the people involved (at least the people who currently occupied each territory) was related to Abraham in some way. As I mentioned in our last lesson this coming Holy War was not about conquering the world, or gaining as much wealth and treasure as was possible, nor was it an attempt to force the worship of Yehoveh (conversion) on the various inhabitants. This was but the taking of a specific piece of land that the Lord declares as HIS (not Israel's); this was not to be the creation of a Hebrew empire.

The first nation with which Israel is to avoid conflict is that of Edom. Edom is another name for Esau, Jacob's twin brother. So there was a very close kinship between Esau and Israel (Israel was just an alternate name for Jacob). Now the command from the Lord to Israel is to "be careful" with Seir (yet another name for the nation of Edom); the "be careful" does not mean to be wary or afraid. The Lord explains that the Edomites will be very alarmed and afraid of Israel. What is NOT said was well understood in ancient times; that when a people you FEARED came too near, you went out in battle to try and bruise them to show that perhaps a treaty would be better (a treaty allowing the current king to remain in his post) rather than an attempt at conquering them outright. The idea is that Moses and the leaders of Israel need to do everything possible to make it clear to Edom that they have no intention of either taking their territory, nor even taking food or water from them. Therefore Israel skirted the land of Edom and continued northward towards the Arabah that was in the region of Moab.

The Moabites, too, had a kinship with Israel (although not as close one as they had with the descendants of Esau). The Moabites were the descendants of Lot, who was Abraham's nephew. And for the sake of the Patriarch Abraham who loved Lot, the Lord had set apart land

for Lot's descendants and Yehoveh makes it clear that this land is NOT for Israel. Therefore they are to avoid conflict with Moab.

Starting in verse 10 we get some interesting footnotes worth spending a few moments to examine. We're told that people called the Emim formerly inhabited Moab; and these Emim are counted as Rephaim. Sometimes we forget that a few centuries after the Tower of Babel incident with Nimrod (which took place about 300 years after the Great Flood), the world was sufficiently populated that if a group of people migrated into a new land, chances are they either had to take that land from its previous owners, or they settled there and perhaps grew into numbers that eventually dominated that area.

When the descendants of Lot moved into the area of Moab (and others of his descendants into the area of Ammon), these were already occupied territories. They didn't move undiscovered or into entirely unpopulated areas. The people who lived in Moab, first, were the Emim and only later did Lot's descendants become the ruling people of that territory.

Now this is not the first time we've encountered the term Rephaim. And here we're told that the Emim were to be counted as Rephaim. Well the Rephaim are the post-flood version of the Nephilim, a race of evil giants that existed before the Great Flood. There is precious little in the Bible about just what these Nephilim were, as the verses are a bit ambiguous. Some see the Nephilim as an intermixing of the line of Seth with the line of Cain (Seth being the line of good from Adam and Eve, Cain being the line of evil from Adam and Eve). Others say that the Nephilim were a product of fallen angels who had sex with human women; and the sons who were products of this illicit mixing were powerful, fierce, unusually large and evil men.

These men, these Nephilim, married other women and over long periods of time their dominance spread. How their existence bridged the flood is another mystery. In other words, if all humanity except Noah's family was wiped out in the Flood, how did the Rephaim reappear AFTER the flood? Did the fallen angels re-propagate in Noah's descendants? One line of thought is that the MEMORY of the Nephilim caused any unusually tall people to be labeled as Nephilim (and eventually the name evolved to Rephaim). So it's not unlike us today seeing a 7-foot tall basketball player and calling him a "giant". We don't really mean "giant", like in mythology; we just mean that they are at the outer boundaries of human height.

What adds to the mystery of the Rephaim though is Egyptian records from around the time of Moses that reports the finding of burial chambers that contained the human remains of men who were over 9 feet tall. The Egyptians didn't have a "giant" legend that we're aware of so it's hard to assign mythology to their records of this. Further, WHERE they found these remains were in the former Kingdom of Og, which is said to have come from the Rephaim. I don't have an answer to all this, but it is fascinating, is it not? And it cannot be so easily dismissed as fairy tale.

Verse 12 then explains that the area that Edom (here called Seir) and his descendants occupied were previously populated by a people called the Horites; but at some point the descendants of Esau dispossessed them. And let's not overlook that the REASON the descendants of Esau were ABLE to dispossess the Horites is because the Lord gave that land to Esau as an inheritance! So there is actually a precedent to Yehoveh assigning land to nations of people (non-Hebrews), NOT just to Israel, and the Lord insisting that because He made a divine assignment of territory to certain folks it was to remain so. Let's tuck that away in our memory banks as we go forward and realize that the Lord is the Lord of all, not just of Israel.

Verse 14 confirms that the time from the great rebellion of Israel's leadership (the 12 spies incident) until the time Israel crossed the border to enter Moab was 38 years. And it was during this 38 years that the 1st generation of the Exodus died out (which was a prerequisite for their children entering the Promised Land).

After passing through Moab, Israel would next encounter Ammon. And the same instruction is given regarding Ammon as for Moab and Edom; don't harass them because Ammon represents descendants of Abraham by means of Lot. And we're told that living among the Ammonites are some Rephaim (some of these evil giants), the knowledge of which I'm sure made it easier for Israel to just avoid fighting with these people.

Verse 20 tells us that the people whom the Ammonites displaced were called the Zamzummim. This word is interesting: in a dynamic translation it means, "the people whose speech sounds like buzzing (of bees)". That's pretty spooky on the surface, but it just means that their manner of speech (to the Hebrew ear) was odd and must have been a rather high-pitched vocalization.

Then there are these people mentioned who are called the Avvim; a people who first occupied an area we currently call Gaza (an area that would eventually be occupied by the Philistines).

After all this genealogy and history (which I find fascinating), the order is given to Israel to "CHARGE!" Let the Holy War of the taking of Canaan begin. The first words of verse 24 are essentially a war cry: "Up!" or "Arise!" A few words later it says, "Begin the occupation". So far in Deuteronomy we've read about the various people Israel is NOT to go to war with; now we get a list of the people they ARE to fight against and of course it begins with the Amorites. Why do I say, "of course"? Because chapter 2 is a contrast of chapter 1; and chapter 1 ends with the people of Israel starting an unauthorized holy war (an un-holy war if you would) with these Amorites and getting soundly thumped. Now in chapter 2, the call is to attack the Amorites in a true Holy War and therefore victory is not only assured, but from a spiritual point of view the war is long over.

Lesson 3 - Deuteronomy 1 & 2

We'll finish up chapter 2 next week.