

## What's the Message – Lesson 38

Today we study the Book of Deuteronomy and the last sermons of Moses.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Today we pray that as we take this brief look at the Book of Deuteronomy, the Lord will open your hearts to hear His grace. As Martin Luther wrote about this book, (it) . . . “really contains nothing else than faith toward God and love toward one’s neighbor, for all God’s laws come to that. Moses guards against everything that might destroy faith in God; and . . . he guards against everything that hinders love.” May this be true in our lives also. Amen.

Last time we learned about the blessing that Balaam was led by God to give the people of Israel as they approached the Promised Land, and the seduction of the Moabite women to get the Israelites to participate in their worship of the pagan fertility god, Baal.

We saw that the danger of this pagan worship was far worse than a large army of fighting men before them, and would last throughout their entire stay in the Promised Land. It would endanger their very existence. Now, we add to this mix the fact that Moses has reached the end of his career as the leader of the people, and that a transfer of leadership must occur. So he does his best to prepare the Children of Israel for the challenges that lay ahead.

The Book of Deuteronomy is basically a review of what had happened historically in the previous books, primarily Exodus and Numbers . . . events that happened to the parents and grandparents of the generation that Moses was now speaking to . . . there in the high plains opposite Jericho, shortly after the conquest of Sihon and Og. The history is repeated, but most importantly, it is interpreted and its significance explained to that new generation. Emphasis is placed upon the covenant God made with Abraham as the starting point and central theme of everything.

Examples of the interpretations of Moses abound, such as the explanations in chapters 2 and 3 of their recent victories, and how the Children of Israel should now proceed in confidence that the Lord was with them. Several widely remembered verses appear, such as these from chapter 4:

*You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandment of the Lord your God . . . and . . . know therefore this day, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.*

Then comes the very pillar of Jewish monotheism, the *Shema*, in chapter 6: *Hear, O Israel. The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

Well, Teacher, I would say those verses from chapter 6 pretty much cover all the bases, so to speak. But is there here a message for us today?

Yes, absolutely. But it is very important that we remember the environment in which the Israelites were now entering. All the nations around them were paganistic, with a pantheon of gods. Here was the only monotheistic theology in all the world. They would stand alone in every respect, or fall with a resounding thud. So Moses repeats the necessity of selection and separation, and the importance of being faithful to God.

In chapter 7 Moses explains: *For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.* Then he goes on to explain that it is not because the Israelites are so strong and powerful, or because of anything that they had previously done to deserve His mercy, it was because of His love for them that God was causing these good things to happen. Therefore, they should respond to the steadfast love of God and His promises

with loyalty and steadfast keeping of His commandments, and not be ensnared to follow after the false gods of the people they are to dispossess.

The rest of the chapters of Deuteronomy continue this same theme of contrast between following God and turning away from Him to serve false gods; a warning that contrasts obedience and disobedience, with all its consequences. In chapter 10 we see the familiar verse: *And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord . . . for your good.*

The final sermon of Moses reaches this high point in chapter 30, verse 19: *I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice, and cleaving to Him; for that means life . . .* It is a lesson that is just as meaningful and applicable to us today as it was to the Israelites of old.

Next time we shall begin our study of the Book of Joshua.