

Moses' History Lesson



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deuteronomy 1–3, Exod. 32:29–32, Numbers 14, Eph. 3:10, Gen. 15:1–16, John 14:9.*

Memory Text: And they “all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:3, 4, *NKJV*).

These are the words which Moses spoke” (*Deut. 1:1, NKJV*). Thus begins the book of Deuteronomy. And though, yes, Moses and the presence of Moses dominate the book, from these opening words to his death in the land of Moab (*Deut. 34:5*), Deuteronomy (as the whole Bible) is really about the Lord Jesus. For He is the One who created us (*Genesis 1, Genesis 2, John 1:1–3*), sustains us (*Col. 1:15–17, Heb. 1:3*) and redeems us (*Isa. 41:14, Titus 2:14*). And, in a looser sense of those words, Deuteronomy reveals how the Lord continued to create, sustain, and redeem His people at this crucial time in salvation history.

Basically, just as the children of Israel are finally to enter Canaan, Moses gives them a history lesson, a theme that is repeated all through the Bible: *remember what the Lord has done for you in the past*.

This admonition should mean something to us, we who are on the borders of a better Promised Land: “In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, . . . I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, p. 196.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 9.

The Ministry of Moses

All through the Bible, the presence of Moses is felt. And though he's not mentioned until Exodus 2:2, he had written the book of Genesis, God's authoritative and foundational story of who we are, how we got here, why things are as bad as they are and, yet, why we can hope anyway. Creation, the Fall, the promise of Redemption, the Flood, Abraham, the gospel—all have their roots in Genesis, and its author was the prophet Moses. It's hard to gauge adequately the influence that this one man, hardly flawless, was nevertheless able to exert for God because he loved the Lord and wanted to serve Him.

Read Exodus 32:29–32, which records the conversation between the Lord and Moses after the terrible sin of the golden calf. What insight does this story give us about the character of Moses and why, despite whatever flaws he had, the Lord was able to use him in such a mighty way?

Even though Moses had nothing to do with the sin, he sought to intercede for this sinful people, even being willing to lose his own soul on their behalf. Fascinatingly enough, in Exodus 32:32, when Moses asks God to “forgive their sin,” the verb actually means “to bear.” Thus, Moses—understanding the gravity of sin and what it took to atone for it—asked God indeed to “bear” their sin. And that is because this is the only way, ultimately, that their sin, any sin, could be forgiven.

Thus, here we have, early in the Bible, a powerful expression of substitution, in which God Himself, in the person of Jesus, will bear in Himself the full brunt and penalty of our sin—God's preordained way of salvation for humanity while remaining true to the principles of His government and law.

Indeed, many centuries later Peter would write about Jesus: “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (*1 Pet. 2:24, NKJV*).

Meanwhile, what we see in this story of Moses and his reaction to their sin is Moses in the role of intercessor on behalf of a fallen, sinful people, a precursor to what Jesus also will do for us (*see Heb. 7:25*).

Willing to lose his own soul for his people? Think more about the implications of those words. What can we learn from them for ourselves about what it means truly to love others?

Fulfilled Prophecy

Despite some of the error that modern science tries to promulgate as truth (such as that our universe by itself arose from “absolutely nothing” or that all life on earth arose by chance from simple chemicals), science has nonetheless given us some astonishing insights into God’s creative power. The harmony, the balance, the precision of many aspects of the natural world, even in its fallen state, continue to astound those who study them.

And if God can be so precise with physical things, He certainly will be precise with spiritual things, as well. Hence, in the opening verses of Deuteronomy, we can see more of God’s incredible precision.

Read Deuteronomy 1:1–6. What is the prophetic significance of the fact that Deuteronomy 1:3 talks about the “fortieth year”?

After the fiasco, when Moses sent spies from Kadesh Barnea to check out the land, and the people rejected the call to take the land—what happened? They were told that they would not enter into the Promised Land as they had hoped. And for how long would they wait before entering? “ ‘According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection’ ’ ” (*Num. 14:34, NKJV*).

Hence, Deuteronomy takes up the story of God’s people in the fortieth year, exactly as God had told them. In other words, God’s prophetic Word is as trustworthy as God Himself, and what we see here in the opening verses of Deuteronomy is more evidence of that trustworthiness; that is, God will do what He says and will do it *when* He says that He will do it.

Of course, this isn’t the only prophetic time period that was fulfilled as God had said. Looking back from our vantage point today, we can find in Daniel 9:24–27, for instance, the time period for Jesus, fulfilled just as the Lord had said. We can see that the “time and times and half a time” (*Dan. 7:25, NKJV; see also Rev. 12:6, 14; Rev. 13:5*) has been fulfilled in history, as well as in the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14.

And besides the precise time elements, the prophecies of Daniel 2, 7, and 8, which so precisely and accurately predicted world history, have given us overwhelming evidence of God’s foreknowledge, control, and trustworthiness.

We can see that the Lord faithfully fulfilled these past prophecies just as predicted. Why should this give us confidence that we can trust Him on the things He said would come that are yet in the future?

A Thousand Times More Numerous

After the long trek in the wilderness, Moses, speaking for the Lord (he was a prophet, though, indeed, more than a prophet), said: “See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give to them and their descendants after them” (*Deut. 1:8, NKJV*).

Notice, however, what comes next.

Read Deuteronomy 1:9–11. What is the significance of these words, especially in light of the fact that, in a real sense, they were being punished by God for the rebellion at Kadesh Barnea?

Here we see another example of the graciousness of God. Even amid the wilderness wanderings, they were blessed: “ ‘Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness. . . . They lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell’ ” (*Neh. 9:21, NKJV*).

And Moses, again showing his love for his people, asked God to multiply them a thousand more times than God already had done!

Read Deuteronomy 1:12–17. As a direct result of God’s blessing upon the people, what happened, and what steps did Moses take to deal with the situation?

Thus, even when the Lord was so powerfully present among them, there was the need for organization, for structure, for a system of accountability. Israel was a *qahal*, an organized assembly (see *Deut. 31:30*), a precursor to the New Testament *ekklesia*, Greek for “church” (see *Matt. 16:18*). And though working in a different context, Paul was never far from his Jewish roots, and in 1 Corinthians 12 we see him clearly delineating the need for qualified people to assume various roles for the proper functioning of the body, just as we see here in Deuteronomy and the *qahal* in the wilderness. The church today, as the *qahal* back then, needs to be a unified body with people fulfilling various roles according to their gifts.

Though we sometimes hear people rail against “organized” religion (what would they prefer, “disorganized” religion instead?), the Word of God, especially the New Testament, acknowledges no other kind but an organized one.

Kadesh Barnea

A specter has been haunting the early parts of the book of Deuteronomy, the specter of Kadesh Barnea. This unfortunate story, as we have seen, set the immediate background for the book of Deuteronomy, and it's worth taking a closer look at it.

Read Numbers 14. How did the people react to the report of the spies, and what were the results of their reaction? (See also Deut. 1:20–46.)

We can derive many important lessons from this story, but one important lesson, which will appear again in the book, can be found in Numbers 14, as well.

Read Numbers 14:11–20. Though we see Moses again in the role of intercessor, what is significant about his line of reasoning with the Lord regarding why the Lord should not destroy them?

Think about what Moses was saying to God. *If You do this, look at how You will appear in the eyes of the Egyptians and the other nations in the area.* This point is important because, ultimately, everything that God had wanted to do with Israel wasn't just for the sake of Israel; it also was for humanity as a whole. The nation of Israel was to be a light to the world, a witness to the ancients about the love and power and salvation found in the true God and not in the worthless idols that these people had worshiped.

However, as Moses said, *If You wipe this people out, then what?* The nations will say: "Because the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness" (*Num. 14:16, NKJV*).

In other words, what we see here is a theme found all through the Bible: the idea that God is to be glorified in His people—that the glory and goodness and love and power of God are to be revealed in His church, through what He does through His people. Of course, His people don't always make it easy for Him to do this, but ultimately God will be glorified through His people's actions on earth.

Read Ephesians 3:10. What is Paul saying here, and how does this happen? How is the "manifold wisdom" of God made manifest to the cosmos? What role, if any, do we have as individuals in bringing this about?

The Iniquity of the Amorite

In Deuteronomy 2 and 3, Moses continues to recount Israelite history and how, with God’s blessing, they routed their enemies; when they were faithful, God gave them the victory, even over “giants” (*Deut. 2:11, 20; Deut. 3:13*).

Of course, this brings up the difficult topic, which we must at least touch on, regarding the destruction of these people. Though the children of Israel would often speak peace first to a nation (*Deut. 20:10, 11*), yet if the people didn’t accept that offer, sometimes the Israelites would go in and destroy them, including women and children. “ ‘And the LORD our God delivered him over to us; so we defeated him, his sons, and all his people. We took all his cities at that time, and we utterly destroyed the men, women, and little ones of every city; we left none remaining’ ” (*Deut. 2:33, 34, NKJV*).

Some try to get around this simply by saying that these stories are not true. However, because we believe that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (*2 Tim. 3:16, NKJV*), that’s not a viable option for Seventh-day Adventists. Thus, we are left with a difficult question regarding these incidents.

Read Genesis 15:1–16. What did God say to Abram in Genesis 15:16, and how does it shed some light on this difficult topic?

There’s no question that many of these pagan nations were exceedingly brutal and cruel people who justifiably could have faced the wrath and punishment of God long before then. That’s true, and even if God waited patiently for them to change their ways, and they didn’t change—this still doesn’t alter the hard reality about the killing of everyone, including children. (Of course, probably many more children were killed in the Flood than were killed by the Israelites.)

The fact is that, for now, given the limited information we have about the full context of the events, we just need to accept this hard reality and trust in the goodness of God, which has been revealed in so many other ways. Faith isn’t just about loving God on a beautiful day in a pretty forest full of wonderful sights and sounds. It’s also about trusting in Him despite what we don’t fully understand.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–4 and John 14:9. How do these verses, and many others like them, help us learn to trust in the love, justice, and goodness of God, even when we see things that seem hard to square with this understanding of God?

Further Thought: Here's how one scholar seeks to answer the hard questions about what the Israelites did to some of these nations:

“As Creator of all things and all human beings and as sovereign over all, God can do anything [He] wants with anyone and be right in doing so. . . .

“The ways of God are a mystery. Since we will never completely understand [Him], we might as well relax with the questions in our minds. Isaiah 55:8–9 offers some consolation.

“According to the biblical picture of the Canaanites, these peoples were extremely wicked, and their annihilation represented God's judgment for their sin. The destruction of the Canaanites was neither the first nor the last time God would do this. The differences between the Canaanites' fate and the fate of humanity (except for Noah's family) as described in Genesis 6–9 involve scale and agency. . . .

“God never intended for the Israelites to make the policy of *herem* [the total destruction] as a general policy toward outsiders. Deuteronomy 7:1 expressly identifies and thereby delimits the target peoples. The Israelites were not to follow these policies against Aramaeans or Edomites or Egyptians, or anyone else (cf. Deut. 20:10–18). . . .

“The Canaanites suffered a fate that ultimately all sinners will face: the judgment of God. . . .

“God's elimination of the Canaanites was a necessary step in the history of salvation. . . .

“Although the Canaanites as a whole were targets of God's judgment, they had at least forty years of advance warning (see Rahab's confession in Josh. 2:8–11).”—Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), pp. 98, 99.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about our understanding of the millennium, in which we will have a thousand years to have all our questions answered. How can this understanding help us to learn to trust in God despite whatever hard questions we have now?
- 2 What are some of the ways that God led you in the past that can help you learn to trust Him for the future? Why is it important not to forget how God has worked in our lives?
- 3 In class, go over the question at the end of Sunday's study, about Moses' willingness to lose his own soul for the sake of his people. Is that a right attitude to have? What, if anything, is worth losing one's soul over, especially considering what it cost to redeem it?

My Mother's Heritage

By PARK YEON-SOOK

My mother turned to me as she was dying from gallbladder cancer.

"You must go to church," she said.

Mother had taken me to church every Sabbath since I was a young girl, but I had stopped attending as I got busy with my shop in Hanam, a suburb of South Korea's capital, Seoul. Mother's words troubled me as I struggled both to work and raise my son, daughter, and three nephews. I realized that I could not succeed on my own, and I returned to Jesus.

As my love for Jesus grew, He gave me a heart to care for needy neighbors. A relative introduced me to Hong Soon-mi. A year after we met, Soon-mi's husband was diagnosed with bone-marrow cancer. When I learned that he couldn't afford surgery, I set up a donation box on the street outside my shop. Many people ridiculed me, saying, "Why are you raising money for someone who isn't a relative?" But I kept the donation box in place.

On Soon-mi's birthday, I presented her with a 45-pound (20-kilogram) bag of rice. "Take this gift from my shop," I said. She later told me that her whole family cried when they saw the gift.

Soon-mi didn't come to church right away. But she read the Adventist magazines that I gave her and learned that Seventh-day Adventists love Jesus and people. I put Soon-mi in charge of my shop and provided her with a salary and daily necessities, such as fruit and rice, for about two years. After that, I made her the manager of a small restaurant that I ran. A year after beginning to manage the restaurant, she asked, "Why don't you invite me to church?"

"Why?" I said. "You know that you are welcome."

"Then I'll go," she said.

After six years of friendship, Soon-mi visited West Hanam Seventh-day Adventist Church for the first time. Three years later, she became a deaconess, and later her husband and son were baptized.

When I first opened my shop, I was the only Adventist in the neighborhood. Now seven merchants are Adventist. The church has a good reputation in the area. I thank my mother for giving me a heritage of faith, and I give all glory to God for using Adventist merchants like me for good.



This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors but every church member." Learn more at IWillGo2020.org. This quarter, your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will support two mission projects in South Korea. Read more about SOON-MI last week.

Key Texts: *1 Corinthians 10:3, 4; Deuteronomy 1:30*

Study Focus: *Deuteronomy 1–3, Exod. 32:29–32, Numbers 14, Eph. 3:10, Gen. 15:1–16, John 14:9.*

Part I: Overview

According to the covenant structure of the book, Moses’ speech begins with a “preamble” (*Deut. 1:1–5*), which has two functions. First, it signals the nature of the content of the book, as signified by the phrase “these are the words” (*Deut. 1:1, NKJV*). These “words” refer not only to the words of Moses as a prophet and as the leader of Israel, but also to the “words” of God, His commandments (*compare Num. 36:13*), which Moses will later explain (*Deut. 1:5*), and to God’s action through the events of the history of salvation. Second, it situates the place and the time of Moses’ last testimony to his people: “on this side of the Jordan” (*Deut. 1:1, NKJV*), the Transjordan, facing the Promised Land (*Num. 36:13*); and “in the fortieth year” (*Deut. 1:3*), the last year of Israel’s journey in the wilderness.

Lesson Themes:

Following the “preamble” comes a historical prologue that reviews the historical events from which Moses draws lessons for his people. The themes of these lessons are the following:

- Remember and hope.
- God fights for you.
- God fulfills His words.
- Grace and justice

Part II: Commentary

Moses’ historical review covers the three main events of the journey of the Israelites: God’s covenant with His people in Horeb (*Deut. 1:6–18*), the rebellion of the people at the oasis in Kadesh Barnea (*Deut. 1:19–46*), and finally, the conquest of Gilead (*Deut. 2:1–3:29*).

God Makes a Covenant in Horeb (*Deut. 1:6–18*).

Horeb is the place of the manifestation of God. Horeb and Sinai refer to the same place, the mountain where God revealed Himself to Israel and made a covenant with the people and gave them His law (*Exod. 3:1*). Moses emphasizes the close, personal bond between Israel and God, who is called “the LORD our God” (*Deut. 1:6*), a title that is often

used in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses reminds his people of God's call to move: “ ‘ “you have dwelt long enough at this mountain” ’ ” (*Deut. 1:6, NKJV*). As important as this great moment of worship was, God deemed that it was time to take action. The God of Israel is not the God of the monasteries. He is not the God of just prayers and meditation; He also is the God who urges His people to go and possess the land promised to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (*Deut. 1:8; compare Gen. 12:7*). This is why God is called “the LORD God of your fathers” (*Deut. 1:11*). This event is, thus, presented as the fulfillment of God's Word. This idea is reinforced by Moses' reference to the nature of the people, who have now multiplied a thousand times and become “as the stars of heaven” (*Deut. 1:10*), a wonder that also is the result of God's promise (*compare Gen. 15:5; Gen. 22:17*). This task required of the people not only the hard duty to prepare for war but also the need to organize themselves as a nation; they must provide themselves with wise (*Deut. 1:13*) and just judges (*Deut. 1:16*).

Discussion and Thought Questions: Why is God called the “God of your fathers”? How important is the remembrance of the fathers in our religion today? Does this title imply a religion that focuses only on the past? If not, why not?

The People's Rebellion at Kadesh Barnea (*Deut. 1:19–46*)

Moses describes this region as the place “ ‘ “which the LORD our God is giving us” ’ ” (*Deut. 1:20, NKJV*). Note the use of a participle that emphasizes the actuality and certainty of God's gift. Moses reminds Israel that in spite of God's encouragement (*Deut. 1:20, 21*) and the assurance that God would fight for them as He did in Egypt (*Deut. 1:30; compare Exod. 14:14*), the people doubted and were afraid and refused to take risks (*Deut. 1:32*). The people made two mistakes. First, when they sent spies to assess the power of the inhabitants and saw that the natives of the land were strong giants, they got scared and refused to go in. Second, when Israel understood that God was upset because of their lack of faith, they decided to go by themselves and fight presumptuously against the enemy without God's support. As a result, not only did they miss this opportunity to enter the land immediately, thereby suffering great loss, but God also “ ‘took an oath’ ” that they would wander through the wilderness for 40 years (*Deut. 1:34, NKJV; compare Deut. 2:14*). The same phrase “took an oath” is used to refer to the oath that God swore to their fathers. The date of the “fortieth year” (*Deut. 1:3*) is, ironically, another reminder of God's fulfillment of His Word. Moses uses all of these events to remind Israel of God's promise and to warn his people before crossing the Jordan that they must learn a lesson from the past in order that

they might secure their future.

Discussion and Thought Questions: What lesson of faith is contained in Moses' repeated words that God “ ‘ “will fight for you” ’ ” (*Deut. 1:30, NKJV; compare Exod. 14:14*)? How do these words account for the method of conquest God had in mind for His people? Why did the Israelites fail when they went to fight by themselves?

The Conquest of Gilead (*Deut. 2:1–3:29*)

After having spent a long time in Kadesh Barnea, the Israelites, the people of Israel, turned again northward in the direction of the Promised Land, but they did not immediately conquer the land. It is interesting that they first had to pass through peoples and lands not included in God's promise to them, such as Edom, Moab, and Ammon, and therefore they did not confront them. In traveling for 40 years “through this great wilderness,” they experienced how much God protected them and cared for them (*Deut. 2:7*). It is only at the end of the “rebellious generation” that Israel began the possession of the land. One by one, the Canaanite enemies were defeated and dispossessed of their land. Then the Israelites took possession of the land, and the allocation was organized.

The Problem of the Conquest

The biblical narrative on the conquest of the land focuses essentially on the victories, without directly dealing with the sensitive and complex ethical problems that are associated with that process. The biblical text provides, however, a number of clues and principles to help address this problem:

- *God gives.* God is the Owner and Giver of the land. This principle is affirmed several times (*Deut. 1:8, 20, 25, 35*). So, not all the land has been given to the Israelites. God has given some parts of the land to Edom, as the descendants of Esau (*Deut. 2:5*), and to Moab and Ammon, as the descendants of Lot (*Deut. 2:9, 19*).
- *God takes.* God did not give the land to the rebellious generation of Israelites, who wandered through the wilderness for 40 years. Note that even Moses was not able to enjoy the land because he also failed to trust the Lord (*Deut. 3:27*). God took away the land from the Amorites because they had reached the fullness of their iniquity (*Gen. 15:16*). The prevention of the Israelites from entering the land, and their death in the wilderness, is to be understood as the result of God's judgment, as is the destruction or expulsion of the Canaanites from the land.
- *God fights.* This principle, which is repeated again to Joshua (*Deut. 3:22*), suggests that God was, in fact, the intended Author

of this operation of judgment. Note that judgment, which implies the eradication of evil, also is an act of grace in behalf of God’s people.

Eschatological Perspective

Note Ellen White’s eschatological and Messianic application of Abraham’s prophetic vision of the conquest of the Promised Land in Genesis 15:16–18: “The voice of God was heard, bidding him [Abraham] not to expect immediate possession of the Promised Land, and pointing forward to the sufferings of his posterity before their establishment in Canaan. The plan of redemption was here opened to him, in the death of Christ, the great sacrifice, and His coming in glory. *Abraham saw also the earth restored to its Eden beauty, to be given him for an everlasting possession, as the final and complete fulfillment of the promise.*”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 137. (Emphasis supplied.)

Discussion and Thought Questions: Why was it necessary in God’s broader plan of salvation that the Israelites possess the land of Canaan? Why is the land of Canaan described in terms reminiscent of the Garden of Eden? Why does the ideal holiness require the total eradication of evil?

Part III: Life Application

A wise man said, “Most of my worries never happened.” Why is this reflection particularly true for the Christian? Suppose you are struggling with a difficult project, and you are worried about it. How does the promise that “God will fight for you” help you to confront your worries? Why does faith in the Lord, in fact, relieve your stress and facilitate your achievement?

Notes
