

Moses in the Land

There are many passages in Numbers and Deuteronomy that I could refer to, but I have chosen some words from Deuteronomy 8 that Jesus quoted when He was being tempted. In verses 1-3, Moses tells the people:

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the LORD promised on oath to your fathers. Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

You may recall that when Satan came to Jesus in the desert Jesus then spoke to the devil these words that had been spoken by Moses. In Matthew 4, we read beginning in verse 1:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Moses had stressed how important it was to pay attention to the Word of God. Therefore, Jesus repeated it. You will find repetitions of this because that Word was so important. That Word was life. As manna was for the physical body, so the Word was all-important. The Word was Jesus' instrument against the devil in the time of temptation.

We will be looking at the last part of Numbers and Deuteronomy this morning, but first let us pray.

Lord, our God, as we turn to Your Word again, grant us an ever-increasing understanding of it so that we may be able to teach it, to preach it, and to live it. Thank You for this Word. Thank You for Your Spirit, who illumines, enlightens and guides us in our thinking and learning and in our sending forth the message in Word and in deed. Bless us together for Jesus' sake, Amen.

We begin by referring to Moses in the land, but those initial stages of possessing the land are recorded in Numbers 20 and following. The first thing I want to point out is that the text makes reference to a few of these people that were—if I may I put it this way—somewhat protected because they were covenantally related. First, there was Edom. When we turn to Deuteronomy 2, we read that God told Moses that the people were not to attack Edom because Edom was related to Israel. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau the brother of Jacob. Thus, the promise of a land applied to Edom.

The king of Arad attacked the people of Israel, as we read in Numbers 21:1. Arad was a Canaanite city. Some think that the Amalekites might have been related to the city of Arad. If you go to southern Judea right now or southern Palestine, you can find the ruins of the city of Arad right across the hilltop and it has apparently not been rebuilt since it was destroyed by the Israelites.

One thing I have never been able to understand is why, after they destroyed Arad, the Israelites did not continue straight up north. In a way, they had made a breakthrough right there, because Arad was one of the great strongholds about 50 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. Arad was a big fortress barrier

for anyone coming up from the south. Israel destroyed it but instead of continuing in that direction, they then had to turn east and then had to deal with Moab. In Deuteronomy 2:4-5, we read that they were not permitted to take the land if Esau: “You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you, but be very careful. Do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land.” In Deuteronomy 2:9, we read, “Then the LORD said to me, ‘Do not harass the Moabites or provoke them to war, for I will not give you any part of their land. I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession.’”

The Israelites wiped out Arad, but God commanded them not to touch Edom. Edom was a brother to Jacob. He was their distant relative. God commanded the people not to touch Moab. The Moabites were born from an incestuous relationship, but that land was theirs because God gave it to Lot. You read about this back in Genesis 13, where Lot was separated from Abraham and that decision was made. Moses said that was the sovereign Lord, the king of creation, a covenanting God who declared that Abraham’s relative had a right to the land.

This makes me increasingly think of how people who are in some way related to the specific covenantal people still come under the blessing and responsibility of the covenant. In a sense, Noah is the second Adam, in that he and his three sons become the ancestors of the whole human race. The mediatorial line runs straight to Jacob through Abraham and Isaac. Esau and Ishmael are not directly in the mediatorial line, but they are covenantally related. Those who are in the direct covenant line represent those who are true believers. There is another group of people, however: those who have been born within covenant-keeping homes, but have not responded yet. Today many people are born in believing homes, but do not themselves believe. For example, I have a nephew who rejects everything. He has 25 cousins. Every one of them accepts the truth as taught in the Scriptures, as taught and lived out by their parents, but this one nephew is a rebel. He comes out of the same setting. He has been born within this same framework, but you cannot say that he is a born-again man. His life and his words surely testify to the fact that he is not. So it is quite possible for covenant-breakers to come out of covenant-keeping homes. In addition to Esau and Ishmael, the Moabites and the Ammonites were also privileged people because they were descended from Lot. These people were related to the covenant, although they were not directly within it. Many people are totally outside; they are brought in through evangelism, God willing. But we have a modern-day equivalent of those who are born within this kind of covenant relationship: there are many who receive the sign of baptism, but their parents do not believe.

There are also many people who are baptized as adults who later turn away. I have baptized some adults and within three years, they were the worst apostates. The sign of baptism then becomes a greater curse to them. Think about these different relationships. Arad, the Canaanite city, was destroyed, while people who were distantly related to Abraham were protected. It is true that the Ammonites and Moabites were not allowed to come into the tabernacle for three or four generations later on because they would not allow Israel to pass through, but at the same time they could not be punished. Edom carried on its hatred for the Lord; we know that Satan used Edom because Herod was an Edomite. Who was it who tried to kill the baby Jesus? It was Herod, an Edomite. Amos refers to that hatred in Amos 1, talking about how Edom consistently pursued his brother with the sword and how he hated him, but God protected him. Edom was able to live and was recognized as a nation until the very end of the Old Testament era. This demonstrates the amazing common grace of God, but at the same time, those who have received many blessings and have not believed will receive greater condemnation.

Sihon and Og are representatives of the Canaanites also. They could have remained living in peace had they not treated Israel defiantly. Remember Genesis 12:1-3 where God says that he will curse those who curse Abram or hold him in light esteem. Moses sent messengers out to Sihon king of the Amorites in

Numbers 21, saying, “Let us just pass through the eastern side and we will not claim it.” Instead, Sihon and Og rose up in defiant anger. Moses wiped them out with his desert army and their land became part of the Promised Land. If these people had not taken the wrong attitude toward Israel, they could have maintained their national existence. They could have maintained possession of their land, but the curse came upon them as God had said in Genesis 12.

Next we come to Balak and Balaam. We could well spend quite a bit of time here. Balak is an opponent of God’s covenant people, but he is a Moabite. He is a distant relative. Balaam is a magician. In Numbers 22:7, it says that Balak sent along a divination fee. Balaam was a so-called prophet, but he nevertheless used divination as a means for his prophecy and he charged a fee for this. The thing that is truly amazing here is how God’s sovereignty is such a dominant factor. God controls these magicians. The angel of the Lord comes into the scene and He defies Balaam, the magician; then He says “You may go, but you are going to be used by Us, the Triune God. You will only speak the words that We put in your mouth.” Balaam may well have said, “Well, I am going to turn around if I cannot earn my fee with Balak.” Nevertheless, after that, he is under divine command, under divine compulsion, under divine mandate. He has to go. God’s sovereignty leads the magician there and uses him. The thing that amazes me as I read Numbers 22-24 is how Balaam expressed covenantal factors—elements of the covenant that God had promised to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, and to the people of Israel through Moses. Balaam takes up these concepts and repeats them as part of the blessing. Look at the five prophecies that he has to give. “How can I curse those whom God has not cursed?” (Numbers 23:8). God has not cursed Israel. God has said, as Balaam says in verse 10, “Who can count the dust of Jacob or number even a fourth part of Israel?” Balaam knew that Israel was to become as numerous as the dust of the earth, the sand of the seashore, the stars of the sky. Balaam knew that and he repeated it and he preached it to Balak. By God’s providence, Balaam pronounced this as a blessing on Israel.

Let us go on to the next blessing. Numbers 23:19 says that God does not lie. In verse 20, Balaam says, “I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it.” There he emphasizes that God has blessed Israel and God will sovereignly continue to bless His people, to bestow all His riches and all of His goodness upon them. “I cannot change it,” he says.

The third blessing is that Israel will be a beautiful people. In Numbers 24:5, Balaam proclaims, “How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! Like valleys, they spread out, like gardens beside a river.” We find in this prophecy the combination of Israel being multiplied and being fruitful and filling the earth, and then Balaam calls that beautiful. It is beautiful to see how God has increased His people; he connects it with those covenantal, creational blessings. See what he says in verse 6 and following: “Like gardens besides the river, like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the waters, water will flow.... Their king will be greater than Agag; their kingdom will be exalted. God brought them out of Egypt; they have the strength of an ox.” Balaam knew God’s covenantal promises and deeds, and God does not lie. He has made these people beautiful just as He said He would. He has made them prosperous. He keeps His Word. Balaam cannot change this.

In Numbers 24:17, we have the fourth blessing. “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.” Who before had spoken of a scepter? Jacob in his blessings to Judah had said that a ruler would come forth from him. Now Balaam, looking at Israel spread out beneath that mountain, says, “I see him, but not now. I behold him, but he is not close.” There within Israel, Balaam was given a vision of the mediator, the true Israel, the true seed. He is there, not personally yet, but He is represented there. Here we have a unique prophecy of the scepter that is to come. He is not there yet, but look closely—He is coming out of them. He is already represented there. A prophesy of the Lord Jesus Christ comes out of the false prophet’s mouth. The sovereign God through

His Word and Spirit overrules a divining magician, and the truth is proclaimed. It is amazing how God, the sovereign king of the cosmos, protects His people. He keeps His covenant and He makes the heathen proclaim it. It is amazing and wonderful.

Balaam had a fifth message and that was the message of Amalek. In Numbers 24:20, we read: "Amalek was first among the first of the nations, but he will come to ruin at last." Balaam comes with a message of destruction not for Moab, not for Edom, not for Ammon, but for the Amalekites who first fought them and for the Kenites who did not come through, and for Asshur and Eber. Balaam tells Balak that these nations will be destroyed. They will not survive. Israel, God's people, are the apple of His eye, and thus Balaam concludes and he goes home.

Chapter 25 of Numbers tells us that Moab seduced Israel. There is nothing like using nice young ladies to throw strong young men off balance. We read about this in Numbers 31, and Peter refers to it also, that Balaam advised the Moabites, "Look, I cannot curse them, but you can get them. Give them your girls. Those men will fall for the girls." Thus Israel was seduced into breaking not only the seventh commandment, but the regulation God had set forth in Deuteronomy 7, where it was so specifically stated, "You shall not intermarry with the people of the land." There was no forbidding of marrying across national boundaries, but the person who was of a different nation had to come within the community first. Once he or she was part of the covenant community, marriage was permitted.

Judgment came on Midian, because Balaam was a Midianite. Because of the false prophet representing that nation, the whole nation came under judgment. The text shows a certain community self-idolatry there, and Midian was severely punished. We will see the Midianites again later, in the days of Gideon.

We must move on. Moses knows he is getting older, and Numbers 27 tells us that a second census was taken. They found out that they were just as numerous after 40 years in the desert as they had been before they went through the desert. God had kept them. Provision is made for the women who had no brothers to claim an inheritance, and after all this Moses comes to the LORD and says, verse 15, "May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd." Moses knew from his own experience the necessity of good leadership, and he knew that his days were numbered. He had been told that he was not going to enter the promised land because he had struck the rock, so he said, "God, take care of Your people. Give them a leader." Then Joshua was appointed.

In Deuteronomy 31:1, just before Moses went off to die, He commended Joshua to the people and said, "Here is your God-appointed leader. He is going to take my place." This is after Numbers 27, where God said to Moses,

"Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the LORD. At his command he and the entire community of Israelites will go out, and at his command, they will come in." Moses did as the Lord commanded him.

Moses laid his hands on him. They commissioned him. Joshua was ordained; he was ready to take Moses' place, as Deuteronomy 31 tells us.

In Numbers 28 through 30, there is the question of whether we have different sources and if this record is a compilation of different documents, because there is so much repetition of feasts and vows and so forth. I simply say to you that as circumstances changed and the children of Israel were living in

different situations, they were repeatedly given the same instruction. The reason for this is, as I said at the beginning of the hour, they had to live by the Word of God and only the Word of God, and so it was repeated. You will not find any major discrepancies, if indeed you find any, between the different accounts in Numbers or Exodus or Leviticus.

Numbers 34 to 36 tell us that all the tribes were given an idea as to what their inheritance would be. They had become numerous—more than two million strong. God had kept His promise of the seed becoming numerous. God had kept His promise that they would become a political unit. God had kept His promise that He would be with them, Emmanuel. The heart of the covenant—that relation with all of its love, life, blessings—these had all been fulfilled. Now comes another promise, the land. God says, “You will be given your place where you can really live as My married bride, carrying out My will, being a blessing to all the nations.”

As we move on to the Book of Deuteronomy, Israel has received part of its inheritance. Two and a half tribes will stay on the east side of the Jordan, but the men will have to go over. Before they go across the river, before Moses leaves them and Joshua takes over, we have the covenant reconfirmed. I think it is very important that every one of you keep in mind that Deuteronomy is one of the most crucial books of the entire Old Testament, especially when you start reading critical liberal writers. For example, Von Rad believes that the first few verses of Deuteronomy 26 is the first part of the written canon. He believes that when a man comes and brings his sacrifice and says, “A wandering Aramean was my father,” that is the beginning of the recording of Israelite religion. Thus Deuteronomy is a very important book. However, at the same time these critical scholars will say that the book was not put together until the days of Josiah in the 6th century. They believe that the material existed, but it had not been collected.

Critical scholars also insist that the books of Joshua through 2 Chronicles and even the post-exilic material (they would call it the *other* post-exilic material because they believe 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles are post-exilic), were all written or rewritten or edited by someone who was under the influence of the writer of Deuteronomy. They call this “Deuteronomistic theology,” and they believe it was written in the days of Jeremiah. Many people say that Jeremiah may have even written or had a strong influence on the writing of Deuteronomy, because there is such a close relationship between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy. They would say that instead of *finding* a book in the days of Josiah, they *wrote* a book in the days of Josiah. Then they would say that all the material from Joshua through 2 Chronicles was rewritten by a theological mind who had first come up with Deuteronomy. That is basically the critical reconstruction of that whole section of history from Joshua to 2 Chronicles.

I want to tell you that there is no doubt that Joshua through 2 Chronicles and even Ezra and Nehemiah reflect Deuteronomy. They do so because Israel was constantly reminded of what God had repeated through Moses and they were held accountable for what God had done at Sinai and on the banks of the Jordan and on the plains of Moab. The critics see a relationship, but they do not want to see this as revelation. However, the book of Deuteronomy is revelation that is repeated for Israel, a covenant that is reconfirmed, a covenant that they had to live out and bring to full expression. As Israel lives out their history, they fall far short of being the covenantal people that God had made them to be. Remember that the covenant with Abraham (which reflects the Adamic, Noahic covenant) was repeated with Isaac and Jacob. Jacob made reference to the great things that were going to come through his sons in Genesis 49. God remembered His covenant when the children of Israel were in Egypt. God formalized the covenant at Sinai in Exodus 19 to 24. When the people worshipped the golden calf, the covenant was reconfirmed. Again and again and again these people have been reminded, and now in Deuteronomy Moses puts it all together after they have already had a good taste of one of the major promises concerning the land. As I said before, they have experienced these other promises of the seed, of God blessing them, of God

making them famous, and of God being the God who would always be with them. Now that all those have been realized, Moses wraps it up for the people: go and live covenantally.

In the next few lectures, we will deal with how well the Israelites succeeded in living covenantally in the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. They did not succeed very well, but this was not God's fault at all. Moses had stated everything very clearly for the people. So Deuteronomy is important. If Exodus is the book of the gospel of redemption, Deuteronomy is the book of living redemption and how the people were to live it. This book has tremendous messages for us today. When Jesus was tempted, He quoted Deuteronomy. You will find any number of direct or indirect references to Deuteronomy in the New Testament. There is no doubt that this book—which is made up of three addresses and the blessing in the song and then the postlude of Moses dying—is given in the form of a sermon. This book has a sermonic form. It is not a theological treatise first of all. It is a sermon, a three-part sermon with a blessing and a song at the end. Moses preached. He preached from the heart. He laid the truth before these people, and as he did this, he reminded them that they were a covenant people.

Deuteronomy is cast into a unique covenantal framework. This framework is not identical to the Hittites' treaties. It is very similar, but you can find differences. The Hittites had a strong covenantal situation between suzerains and vassals from about 2000 to 1400 B.C. The Assyrians had a covenantal arrangement also between a suzerain and a vassal; you will find that in documents dating from about 1000 to 800 or 700 B.C. Critics have argued whether Deuteronomy reflects the Assyrian forms. If so, they say that Deuteronomy could not have been written until the time of Jeremiah. Others would say that Deuteronomy reflect the Hittite suzerainty covenant, which would place the book at about 1400 B.C., in line with the biblical testimony.

The question I would like to raise is, "Do these covenants form the background for the biblical form, or are those covenants a reflection of God's basic covenant which these people have adapted and put to use in their own way?" I think that the whole nature of life is covenantal. A basic element of human life is that relationship between God and man with its blessings and stipulations and responsibilities. The covenantal idea is the heart of creating, it is the very heart of redemption. It is life. These people were living naturally without the influence of critical scholarship, but they recognized the covenantal nature of life. Life is covenantal. God made it that way, and the Hittites and the Assyrians reflected that because they were created to be the image of God. They reflected that which was natural in life. I have to go to the Bible to find the heart of covenant. I cannot go to the Hittites or to the Assyrians. I need to look at what God said to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and Moses and the book of Deuteronomy. That is where I find the basic elements of covenant. Let us discuss them now.

First of all there is the "historical résumé"—the character of God. I wanted to draw your attention to two phrases. The first sounds almost murderous, but the Bible says that God is a consuming fire, a devouring fire, a burning fire. But then it goes on to say that God is a jealous God. If you turn to Exodus 34:14, when the children of Israel had been worshipping the golden calf, God had come and showed Himself to be a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in loving-kindness, forgiving iniquity and showing love unto the third and fourth generation, but never clearing the wicked. Just a few verses later, Moses has to tell the people, "God is a jealous God. His name is jealous." In the New Testament, you read that God's name is love. In the Old Testament, God's name is Jealous.

Jealousy is not the same as envy. Envy is wicked, but if I am a good husband, then if any of you guys would try to touch my wife, I would let you know how big my fist is. I would rise up in jealousy, defend the object of my love, and execute my love for her by defending her. Jealousy is love claiming its own. Jealousy is love in action, taking, holding, and defending. God is jealous. That is one thing that we have

to remember about the character of God. In the desert God proved His love. He claimed the people, He defended them, but at the same time, He had to clean the community out to sanctify it and so the fire came and destroyed those who complained. They had to be put in the desert for 38 years when they refused to accept God's promises for the land. Afterwards Moses, in the first four chapters of Deuteronomy, reveals some of the main things that God had done. Covenant always had that historical résumé in which the character of the Lord was set forth.

Then come the stipulations, particularly in chapter 5 through 16. There are some absolutely beautiful passages in Deuteronomy that talk about what God expects. How does he expect a family man to deal with his children? To walk and talk with them and to have the Word of God in his heart and then to share it with his children. There are many guidelines for proper living, but there are also so many promises there. When I look in various passages, I am amazed at how, in spite of God's anger, He repeatedly said, "I love you. I love you because I chose you and I chose you because I love you and this love will never, ever end." Chapters 5 through 11 contain these repeated commands to love and obey. "Love the LORD your God," Deuteronomy 10:1. He goes on to say that this is not because they are better than any of the other nations, but it is because God loved them and chose them. Those are the promises of that continuing love and how God is going to continue to work out that love by blessing them and upholding them.

Before I go on to the next point, we must also read chapters 17 and 18. There God promises the three definite covenantal offices which will function within their community. There is the promise of the priest to continue in the last part of chapter 17. There is the promise of the king. In chapter 18, there is the promise of the prophetic office. Moses had functioned as a priest, as a king, as a prophet, and these offices were going to be worked out. They were going to become realities in the midst of Israel.

In one of the next few lectures, we will deal with Samuel's problem about the king, but the promise is there in Numbers 17. Take note of the curses and blessings of chapters 27 and 28, part of the third address. Those curses are rather terrifying, but it is amazing how many of them were carried out during the time of the exile. There were initial demonstrations of the curse, but God's judgment kept coming upon these people as they were not responding faithfully and obediently to the covenant.

Turn to Deuteronomy 29:1: "These are the terms of the covenant the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in Moab, in addition to the covenant he had made with them at Horeb. Moses summoned all of Israel and said to them, 'Your eyes have seen all that the LORD did....'" Picking up in verse 9, "Carefully follow the terms of the covenant so that you may prosper in everything you do." Verse 10, "All of you are standing today in the presence of the LORD." Verse 12, "You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the LORD your God, a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath to confirm you this day as his people." He is confirming what He had already done. He is establishing more firmly what was already established. We do not hear of the children of Israel making any type of response. They accepted God's covenant. Then comes the last and final part of any covenant ritual: Moses wrote. Deuteronomy 31:9 says, "So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel." Then Moses commanded them to read the law.

According to Meredith Kline, what really settled Old Testament types of covenant-making was when they were written and sealed. We know about the treaties of the Hittites and the Assyrians because they were written down. Once a covenant was written and sealed, it could not be changed. It could be rewritten, but it always had to be rewritten in keeping with the initial original covenant. A covenant was inviolable once it was written. Moses wrote and he read, saying, "This stands. God's covenant stands.

The sovereign of heaven and earth, your Emmanuel, has spoken. Hear His Word. Obey it.” Jesus did when He was on earth, and He gives us the great example and He gives us the teaching, “As God has spoken, listen and do.”