

LOOKING BACK - AND AHEAD
Deut. 4:1-6

Intro: (Express appreciation for all of the cards, notes, and expressions of love at this Christmas season, as well as during the year. The past year--the busiest, but also the happiest. Thank God for people who want to hear the Word of God. The joy of working together with everyone in the Church. Welcome to the new ones who have been added to the CB family since last Christmas. Welcome also to those who have come to the Lord during the past year.)

There are always lessons to be learned as we look back over a year, or over a longer period of time. This is one of the advantages of studying history--especially the sacred history which we have in the Word of God.

But let us use the Word in a personal way this morning. When Moses brought the children of Israel to the border of the promised land, he gave them four messages which are recorded in one book of the Bible: Deuteronomy. In it, we have four messages. They were all given to prepare the people to enter the land. BUT IN DOING SO, MUCH TIME IS SPENT IN REVIEWING THE 40 YEARS OF THEIR JOURNEY FROM EGYPT TO THE LAND GOD WAS GIVING TO THEM.

On the basis of the past, he exhorts them and warns them concerning the future.

I would like for you to think back over your own life during this past year. I am concerned primarily about your relationship with the Lord during that time.

What blessings have you experienced?

What testings have you had? To what extent did you trust the Lord during those testings?

How would you like 1969 to be different?

These can be very heartsearching questions, questions which we might prefer to answer in silence. BUT LET US THINK ABOUT THESE THINGS THIS MORNING. This is what Moses was asking the children of Israel to do. I am thinking primarily about the first message: chapters 1-4.

I. MOSES MENTIONS SOME NAMES WHICH FIGURE PROMINENTLY IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY.

There are three. One is a place; the other two are kings. They are Kadesh-barnea; Sihon, king of Heshbon; Og, king of Bashan!

Do you remember the significance of these names? Let me encourage you to re-read Num. 13, 14, and 21 to refresh your memory.

The facts are these:

A. Kadesh-barnea recalled a twofold defeat.

1. First, it was at Kadesh-barnea that God told them to go into the land, but they refused.

Why did they refuse?

Because they had more respect for the enemy they could see than they did for the God they could not see. They chose to walk by sight, not by faith.

They saw more people,

--bigger people (they felt like grasshoppers
in the sight of these giants),
--walls that seemed to reach to heaven!

Now, to be sure, a person who does not recognize circumstances is a fool, but the Lord knew about all of these circumstances before He told the people to go up into the land.

From Ex. 13 on the Lord had spoken about bringing His people into the land, and it had been promised from Abraham's time on to the present.

But they refused to believe the promise of God!

Then a most amazing thing happened. This is the second defeat at Kadesh-barnea.

2. They tried to conquer the land anyway after God had announced His judgment against them.

What happened?

They were completely routed by the Canaanites and by the Amalekites.

To this very day the name Kadesh-barnea reminds the Israelites of the humiliating circumstances they experienced there. How they must have wished that they could have reversed their first decision not to obey God, **BUT THAT WAS IMPOSSIBLE!**

But Moses here makes mention of two other names, the names of kings:

B. Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan.

What do they mean in the memory of the Israelites?

They remind them of victory--much lesser victories than they could have had at Kadesh-barnea, but victories nevertheless!

Who can explain the difference between these two? Why is it that we can trust God for what might be considered the insignificant events in our lives, while we have the greatest difficulty in trusting Him for the major issues?

This all had to do with Israel's side. What about God's part in their past history?

II. WHAT MOSES HAS TO SAY ABOUT GOD.

As they face entry into Canaan, Moses reminds them of how he had spoken to them at Kadesh-barnea about God's dealings with them since they had left Egypt.

Read Deut. 1:29-31.

There are three things:

- A. The Lord goes before you (vv. 30, 33).
- B. The Lord fights for you (v. 30).
- C. The Lord bears you, i.e., sees that you get to your destination (v. 31).

In all of the forty years there had not been one instance of failure on God's part! AND THERE NEVER WILL BE! We may have our victories, and our defeats, but God's faithfulness will never be in doubt.

Both of these have to do with the past. WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE? What should be our concern for 1969? How can we profit from what Moses had to say to the children of Israel?

There are two things which he emphasized.

III. MOSES' INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE FUTURE.

- A. THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORD OF GOD. Cf. Deut. 4:1, 2.

Let me ask you this morning, "Are you satisfied with the place that you have given to the Word of God in your life during 1968?"

Have you spent a good part of this year rebuking yourself for not reading the Word, and yet somehow you haven't gotten beyond that place?

Or, have you selected or rejected things in the Word like a person would if he were actually deleting things from the Word? How responsive have you been to the truth?

This must come first with all of us in 1969. AND I HOPE THAT AMONG OTHER THINGS YOU ARE PLANNING TO READ THE WORD THROUGH THIS YEAR--reading it to yourself.

But, notice Moses' second word.

B. THEIR CONCERN ABOUT THEMSELVES.

It is possible for a person to become self-centered even in spiritual things, but there is something refreshing about a person who is primarily concerned about the godliness of his own life.

Do you know a common sin of pastors? It is that they are so busy ministering to the spiritual needs of others that they neglect their own souls.

Moses knew this problem (Ex. 18), and is probably speaking from his own experience here.

Read Deut. 4:9, 15, 23; 2:4.

In each instance the expression means, watch yourself, observe what you are doing, protect yourself, hedge yourself about (with the Word of God).

It is like Paul told Timothy: "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned . . ." (2 Tim. 3:14).

Concl: The whole point of this passage lies in the destination Where was the Lord taking them? Not just to Canaan, but to REST. Cf. Deut. 3:20; Josh. 1:13, 15.

It meant, not just getting into the land, but getting into the land and there living in daily obedience to God's Word. Nothing is of greater importance. Obedience to the Word of God is the key to every blessing that God desires to pour out upon us, His children.