

## **Present Truth in Deuteronomy**

### **Moses' History Lesson**

Lesson #2 for October 9, 2021

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 1-3; Exodus 32:29-32; Numbers 14; Ephesians 3:10; Genesis 15:1-16; John 14:9.

1. Deuteronomy begins with these words: "These *are* the words which Moses spoke." (Deuteronomy 1:1, *NKJV*\*)<sup>§</sup> The wording is a bit different in some other translations. This book recounts the history of the children of Israel from the time they were at the foot of Mount Sinai until the time that they were ready to enter the land of Canaan. But, Deuteronomy is really a history of the partnership between Moses and God. The real issue was about Jesus Christ who led the children of Israel through all those difficulties.
2. Moses realized how important it was for the children of Israel to recognize all that the Lord had done for them in the past. This is a theme which is a precursor to all of Scripture. This is the theme which is still true of us.

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*\* 196.2 (1915).<sup>†</sup> [Notice that she **was not** talking about the times when we have departed from God's leadership!]<sup>‡</sup>

3. It is important for us to recognize that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible shortly after the very first alphabet was invented, probably in the mines in the Sinai desert. Prior to that time, written materials were in hieroglyphics in Egypt or in cuneiform in the Mesopotamian valley. Writing with an alphabet was a much more precise and detailed way of recording history than the previous methods. Nevertheless, **the vocabulary and alphabet that Moses was able to use were quite limited.**
4. Undoubtedly, Moses learned how to write using an alphabet while serving as a prince in Egypt. While in the land of Midian, we read this about him:

The long years spent amid desert solitudes were not lost. Not only was Moses gaining a preparation for the great work before him, but during this time, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, **he wrote the book of Genesis and also the book of Job**, which would be read with the deepest interest by the people of God until the close of time.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,\* February 19, 1880, par. 14; *SDABC*,\* vol. 3, 1140.3.<sup>†</sup> [On what did Moses write? Did he carry those scrolls with him back to Egypt?]<sup>‡</sup>

5. **What should we learn about Moses and about God from the story of the golden calf as recorded in Exodus 32:29-32?**

**Exodus 32:29-32:** <sup>29</sup>Moses said to the Levites, "Today you have consecrated yourselves as priests in the service of the LORD by killing your sons and brothers, so the LORD has given you his blessing."

<sup>30</sup> The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a terrible sin. But now I will again go up the mountain to the LORD; perhaps I can obtain forgiveness for your sin." <sup>31</sup>Moses then returned to the LORD and said, "These people have committed a terrible sin. They have made a god out of

gold and worshipped it. <sup>32</sup>Please forgive their sin; but if you won't, then remove my name from the book in which you have written the names of your people."—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Exodus 32:29-32). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].<sup>‡</sup>

6. Where did Moses learn about some “book” that God keeps in heaven? Was God talking to Moses during those 40 years that he herded sheep? What does this tell us about the character of Moses? Why would Moses make such a statement and request to God? What did Moses know about the character of God at that point in time? Remember that he had already written the book of Job. Did Moses really think that by offering to have his name removed from the books of heaven, he could somehow atone for the sins of the people? Or, is it even possible that Moses thought that if all the children of Israel were lost and not able to go to heaven, he would not want to go to heaven alone—without them?
7. There is a hint that Moses was suggesting to God that he should bear the sins of the people. Was this an early expression of *substitution*? We often talk about how Jesus bore in Himself the full brunt and penalty of our sins. Is that what Moses was trying to do?
8. What actually happens when Jesus “bears” our sins? Do we understand the seriousness of sin?
9. Look at Deuteronomy 1:1-6.

**Deuteronomy 1:1-6:** <sup>1</sup> In this book are the words that Moses spoke to the people of Israel when they were in the wilderness east of the River Jordan. They were in the Jordan Valley near Suph, between the town of Paran on one side and the towns of Tophel, Laban, Hazereth, and Dizahab on the other. <sup>2</sup>**(It takes eleven days to travel from Mount Sinai to Kadesh Barnea by way of the hill country of Edom.)** <sup>3</sup>On the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year after they had left Egypt, Moses told the people everything the LORD had commanded him to tell them. <sup>4</sup>This was after the LORD had defeated King Sihon of the Amorites, who ruled in the town of Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who ruled in the towns of Ashtaroth and Edrei. <sup>5</sup>It was while the people were east of the Jordan in the territory of Moab that Moses began to explain God's laws and teachings. [Had Moses not explained God's laws prior to that time?]

He said, <sup>6</sup> “When we were at Mount Sinai, the LORD our God said to us, ‘You have stayed long enough at this mountain.’”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*††</sup>

10. After that disastrous story of what happened at Kadesh Barnea with the spies, Moses was told that the Israelites would **wander in the wilderness for 40 years—one year for each day that the spies were in the land. (See Numbers 14:34.)** That is exactly what happened. Forty years later, Moses reported that they were ready to cross the Jordan.

**Nehemiah 9:21:** “Through forty years in the desert

you provided all that they needed;

their clothing never wore out,

and their feet were not swollen with pain.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup> [However, all the Israelite adults except Caleb and Joshua died in the wilderness!]<sup>‡</sup>

11. What does this tell us about God’s ability to predict the future? The prophecies of Daniel 9:24-27; Daniel 8:14; and Revelation 12 are amazing pieces of the Bible. Seventh-day Adventists have worked out the historical details showing the exact fulfillment of those prophecies. No other group that I know of has done so. To those who carefully study the historical details of these prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, it is clear that God was able to predict not only what humans would do in the future, but also how He would respond and what the results would be. Does it give us more courage and trust in God when we know that He has been—and is—fully aware of the future far in advance? Or, is that scary?
12. Under the guidance of God, Moses recognized the necessity for organization. Following the suggestions of his father-in-law while they were still at the foot of Mount Sinai, Moses organized the people into groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. This made things a lot smoother and allowed Moses time to do other things which he needed to do.

**Deuteronomy 1:12-17:** <sup>12</sup> “But how can I alone bear the heavy responsibility for settling your disputes? <sup>13</sup>Choose some wise, understanding, and experienced men from each tribe, and I will put them in charge of you.’ <sup>14</sup>And you agreed that this was a good thing to do. <sup>15</sup>So I took the wise and experienced leaders you chose from your tribes, and I placed them in charge of you. Some were responsible for a thousand people, some for a hundred, some for fifty, and some for ten. I also appointed other officials throughout the tribes. [See Exodus 18:13-26.]

<sup>16</sup> “At that time I instructed them, ‘Listen to the disputes that come up among your people. Judge every dispute fairly, whether it concerns only your own people or involves foreigners who live among you. <sup>17</sup>Show no partiality in your decisions; judge everyone on the same basis, no matter who they are.

**Do not be afraid of anyone, for the decisions you make come from God.** If any case is too difficult for you, bring it to me, and I will decide it.”—*Good News Bible*. \*††

13. Even when wandering through the desert as a large group, they needed to be organized. Does this tell us anything about our need for organization today? Think of Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 12.
14. Sometimes today, people complain about the church organization. They disdain “organized” religion. Would they rather have disorganized religion? God always wants everything to be done decently and in order. (See 1 Corinthians 14:40.)
15. God’s original plan for Israel was for them to successfully travel to Canaan after that time at the foot of Mount Sinai—without any further delays. It should have taken about two weeks from Sinai to the borders of Canaan. (See Deuteronomy 1:2.) But, then they had the unfortunate experience with the spies and the rebellion at Kadesh Barnea. The book of Deuteronomy really is a review of everything that happened after that.
16. Why did they send those spies into the land? When writing the book of Numbers at the beginning of the 40 years, Moses seemed to suggest that everything that happened was under the direct guidance of God. There was no talking about the Devil. What did the people of Palestine think when the 12 Israelite spies went walking through their land? Did the spies stay together? Or, did they divide up in their spying?

**Numbers 13:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>**The LORD said to Moses,** <sup>2</sup> “Choose one of the leaders from each of the twelve tribes and send them as spies to explore the land of

Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites.”—*Good News Bible*.\*†

17. Whose idea was it that they should send spies into the land?

**Deuteronomy 1:22-23:** <sup>22</sup> “But you [the people] came to me and said, ‘Let’s send men ahead of us to spy out the land, so that they can tell us the best route to take and what kind of cities are there.’

<sup>23</sup> “That seemed a good thing to do, so I selected twelve men, one from each tribe.”—*Good News Bible*.\*† [Had Moses consulted the LORD about sending the spies?]<sup>‡</sup>

18. The story of what happened is recorded in Numbers 13 and 14. When the 12 spies came back, they were carrying powerful evidence of the fertility of the land. Unfortunately, 10 of the spies were afraid that God would not be able to help them and that Israel would be defeated. Therefore, they brought back a true report (See Deuteronomy 9:1-2.) that there were giants and that the nations were more powerful than Israel. **Only Caleb and Joshua said: “We have no need to fear if we follow the Lord’s guidance. The Lord will fight for us.”**

19. As a result of that terrible experience at Kadesh Barnea, the children of Israel turned back into the wilderness and wandered for 40 years.

20. Something else quite remarkable happened at the beginning of those 40 years.

**Numbers 14:11-20:** <sup>11</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “How much longer will these people reject me? How much longer will they refuse to trust in me, even though I have performed so many miracles among them? <sup>12</sup>**I will send an epidemic and destroy them, but I will make you the father of a nation that is larger and more powerful than they are!**”

<sup>13</sup> But Moses said to the LORD, “You brought these people out of Egypt by your power. When the Egyptians hear what you have done to your people, <sup>14</sup>they will tell it to the people who live in this land. These people have already heard that you, LORD, are with us, that you are plainly seen when your cloud stops over us, and that you go before us in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. <sup>15</sup>**Now if you kill all your people, the nations who have heard of your fame will say <sup>16</sup>that you killed your people in the wilderness because you were not able to bring them into the land you promised to give them.** <sup>17</sup>So now LORD, I pray, show us your power and do what you promised when you said, <sup>18</sup>‘I, the LORD, am not easily angered, and I show great love and faithfulness and forgive sin and rebellion. Yet I will not fail to punish children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation for the sins of their parents.’ <sup>19</sup>And now, **LORD, according to the greatness of your unchanging love, forgive, I pray, the sin of these people, just as you have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt.**”

<sup>20</sup> The LORD answered, “I will forgive them, as you have asked.”—*Good News Bible*.\*† [Was God interacting with Moses in order for the universe to see what kind of person Moses was before He, God, chose to take Moses to heaven?]<sup>‡</sup>

21. This is a very important point in the history of God’s relationship with human beings. God was planning to take the children of Israel into the land of Canaan at the crossroads of

three continents so that they could be witnesses to all who would pass. Moses was such a friend of God that he essentially asked God: “**What will the Egyptians think if You allow Your people to be destroyed out here and make a great nation of me?**” Think how many people would jump at the opportunity to have an entire nation named after them. But, **Moses essentially said: “No, God; the important thing is your reputation.”** Down through history, God’s people are supposed to be His representatives. How often have we done that correctly? Would that still be true of us in our day?

**Ephesians 3:9-10:** <sup>9</sup>And of making all people see how God’s secret plan is to be put into effect. God, who is the Creator of all things, kept his secret hidden through all the past ages, <sup>10</sup>in order that at the present time, **by means of the church, the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>  
[Compare Ephesians 1:7-10 and Colossians 1:19-20.]<sup>†</sup>

22. **Could it really be true that angelic rulers and powers will learn something about God from us?** Think about how God relates to them versus how God has to relate to us rebels. How God has had to relate to us as sinners is a new revelation to them. God’s love is displayed in amazing detail.

23. One of the real challenging issues in this whole story is what God did about the destruction of all those people in the land of Canaan—and even those who died in Egypt.

**Deuteronomy 2:33-34:** <sup>33</sup> “But the LORD our God put him in our power, and we killed him, his sons, and all his men. <sup>34</sup>At the same time we captured and destroyed every town, and **put everyone to death, men, women, and children. We left no survivors.**”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

24. **Was it really God’s plan to “leave no survivors”?** Some people try to get around this situation by just suggesting that the stories are not true. But, those of us who believe in the inspiration of all of Scripture cannot accept that. So, what do we know about this whole issue? In Genesis 15:1-16, God had promised Abraham that this area would eventually be given to his descendants. There is no question about the fact that the people who were destroyed were very sinful and brutal; they offered their children as sacrifices to their pagan gods. Think of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Many of these nations were just as evil. **We need to be honest and remember that a lot more children (and adults) died in the flood than were killed by the Israelites!**

25. So, what should we do with this part of the story? For those who would like a much more detailed explanation of all of this, **see the handout on [www.theox.org](http://www.theox.org) in the Teacher’s Guides section on Exodus: Was God Fair to the Egyptians and the Canaanites? - [www.theox.org/images/uploads/bot/KHart\\_BTGA\\_PDF\\_Law\\_Exod\\_Was\\_God\\_Fair\\_to\\_Egypt\\_Canaan\\_01.pdf](http://www.theox.org/images/uploads/bot/KHart_BTGA_PDF_Law_Exod_Was_God_Fair_to_Egypt_Canaan_01.pdf)**

26. As Bible-believing Christians, we are certain that Jesus Christ was the One who led the children of Israel through all of those experiences.

**1 Corinthians 10:1-4:** <sup>1</sup>I want you to remember, my brothers and sisters, what happened to our ancestors who followed Moses. They were all under the protection of the cloud, and all passed safely through the Red Sea. <sup>2</sup>In the cloud and in the sea they were all baptized as followers of Moses. <sup>3</sup>All ate the same spiritual bread <sup>4</sup>and drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from the spiritual rock that went with them; and **that rock was Christ himself.**—*Good*

*News Bible.\*†*

**Luke 24:44:** Then he [Jesus] said to them, “These are the very things I told you about while I was still with you: **everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and the Psalms** [That includes all of what we call the Old Testament.] **had to come true.**”—*Good News Bible.\*††*

**John 5:39:** [Jesus said:] “You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. **And these very Scriptures** [i.e., the Old Testament] **speak about me!**”—*Good News Bible.\*††*

27. One biblical scholar has chosen to explain this problem in the following words:

“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). . . . [Contrast God’s original plan as spelled out in Exodus 23:20-33 as quoted below.]

“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.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** 24].<sup>†§</sup> [Brackets and the content in brackets as well as parentheses and the content in parenthesis in the section above are in the Bible Study Guide except the reference to Exodus 23:20-33].<sup>‡</sup>

28. It is important for us to remember that every person who has ever lived, including all those who died in Egypt and in Canaan, will, one day, have their cases brought up before the tribunal court in heaven. **God will treat them fairly**—just as He will treat us fairly—in the judgment. **If they are savable—safe to live next door to for the rest of eternity—they will be admitted to heaven; but, if they are not savable, they will cease to exist.**

29. We believe that we will be given a thousand years—called *the millennium*—to review all of these questions. And we can be sure that when it is all over, we will agree that God has done everything He could have done to save as many people as possible. It is important for us to recognize that there are certain important themes running through the book of Deuteronomy: (1) God asks us to remember the events of our past that He believes will give us hope; (2) He fights for us; (3) He fulfills His words; and (4) He does it all with grace and justice.
30. The book of Deuteronomy is historically organized around three major events: (1) **God’s covenant with the people at Mount Sinai**; (Deuteronomy 1:6-18) (2) **The people’s rebellion at Kadesh Barnea**; (Deuteronomy 1:19-46) and (3) **The conquest of Gilead against the kings, Sihon and Og**. (Deuteronomy 2:1-3:29) Having reviewed these events, it is important for us to go back and look at Exodus 23:20-33. God’s original plan for the “conquest” of the land of Canaan was much simpler and better. Remember, of course, that God’s original plan was for all of us to be living in the Garden of Eden. But, God’s original plan for the conquest of Canaan was as follows:

**Exodus 23:20-33:**<sup>20</sup> “I will send an angel ahead of you to protect you as you travel and to bring you to the place which I have prepared.<sup>21</sup> Pay attention to him and obey him. Do not rebel against him, for I have sent him, and he will not pardon such rebellion.<sup>22</sup> But if you obey him and do everything I command, **I will fight against all your enemies.**<sup>23</sup> My angel will go ahead of you and take you into the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and **I will destroy them.**<sup>24</sup> Do not bow down to their gods or worship them, and **do not adopt their religious practices. Destroy their gods and break down their sacred stone pillars.**<sup>25</sup> If you worship me, the LORD your God, I will bless you with food and water and take away all your illnesses.<sup>26</sup> In your land no woman will have a miscarriage or be without children. I will give you long lives. [God had a very simple plan!]

<sup>27</sup> **“I will make the people who oppose you afraid of me; I will bring confusion among the people against whom you fight, and I will make all your enemies turn and run from you.**<sup>28</sup> **I will throw your enemies into a panic; I will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites as you advance.**<sup>29</sup> **I will not drive them out within one year; if I did, the land would become deserted, and the wild animals would be too many for you.**<sup>30</sup> **Instead, I will drive them out little by little, until there are enough of you to take possession of the land.**<sup>31</sup> **I will make the borders of your land extend from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Mediterranean Sea and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give you power over the inhabitants of the land, and you will drive them out as you advance.**<sup>32</sup> **Do not make any agreement with them or with their gods.**<sup>33</sup> **Do not let those people live in your country; if you do, they will make you sin against me. If you worship their gods, it will be a fatal trap for you.”**—*Good News Bible*.\*†‡

31. So, why didn’t the Israelites accept this plan that obviously had the endorsement of God Himself? They wanted to “do it themselves” like a small child who does not want any help. **They wanted the nations around to look upon them as the conquerors instead of**

**crediting God with the victories.** How sad! God did not plan for the children of Israel to fight their way into the land.

**Deuteronomy 1:30:** “The LORD your God will lead you, and he will fight for you, just as you saw him do in Egypt.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

**Exodus 14:14:** [Moses told the people:] “The LORD will fight for you, and there is no need for you to do anything.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*‡</sup>

32. It is important to note that God did not tell the children of Israel to indiscriminately destroy those people who were in their way. **He told them to leave alone the peoples of Edom, Moab, and Ammon—their “relatives,” the descendants of Esau and Lot.** Israel was not to disturb them. Would you agree with the following summary of what happened in those 40 years and the following conquest of Canaan?

33. The Bible does give us some clues about principles that were involved.

- **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.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*<sup>\* 28-29.†§</sup>

34. Are we willing to trust God to lead us forward through some very difficult times in the future?

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