

Day 41 Num 20.1- 21.35 then 33.1- 49

Little is told in the ensuing story about the wanderings of Israel in the desert over the forty years of their journeying. They raised their children, children whom they knew would outlive them, and would see the land they had forfeited. But in that was hope, and purpose for them to go on.

20.1 Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh.

20.2ff The account which follows is either an amplification of the story told in Exodus 17, or it is a sequel to that event. The people complain that they do not have water.

20.6 Moses and Aaron take their accustomed position in such events, and literally 'fall on their faces' before the Lord (Heb וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל-פְּנֵי הָיְהוָה *vayyippelu al-peneyhem*)

The Lord appears and gives very precise instructions to Moses; he is to take the staff, gather the assembly and speak to the rock to give out water.

20.10 Moses momentarily forgets, or has misunderstood the instruction God has given him. He prefaces his action with a momentary outburst against the Israelites, and then lifts the staff and strikes twice on the rock with it. Water comes out, everyone drinks, job done.

20.12 But the Lord is angry; Moses has done something off his own bat, he has drawn the attention to the staff, not to the Lord. The Lord says to Moses it is an issue of lack of trust that made him strike the rock, rather than speak to it. For this, neither Moses nor Aaron will make it into Canaan.

They name the place *Meribah*, struggle, as in Exodus 17.7, which could be to remind them of where this happened once before.

It is so sobering to us, when we so often presume we know what God wants without consulting Him, that God cannot work with presumption. Even Moses' tiny (to us) default on God's commands has dire consequences. This seems harsh, but Moses was the man who communed 'mouth-to-mouth' with God, and knew His voice intimately, more intimately than any man or woman in history until Jesus Christ Himself.

For him to act presumptuously has caused the people not to trust God's ability to do it without man's agency. They saw the staff, they didn't see God's power do it.

20.14ff There is no comment on this at all; we move to the appeal of Moses to the king of Edom to allow Israel safe conduct through their lands. Edom, after all, is a distantly related nation, Edom having been Esau, the brother of Jacob-Israel.

20.18 Whether it is revenge for their forefather's loss at the hands of his younger brother, Israel, or out of fear of aggression, the Edomites refuse the request and threaten them with an army, forcing them to detour.

20.22 At Mount Hor, Aaron dies, his priestly robes being transferred to his son, Eleazar, as high priest in his stead.

21.1 A Canaanite chieftain, Arad, and his army attack the Israelites and capture them. In retaliation, the Lord gives over the Canaanites to Israel, and they are annihilated.

This, to us terrible, judgment on the natives of the land is called in Hebrew *Chormah* (Heb חֶרֶם from חָרַם *cherem* a word meaning destruction or forfeiture.) Although we struggle with the apparent barbarity of this, it has to be noted and professed that this obliteration always involves a supernatural act of God as a sign of the source of it. Israel could not have achieved this military result without God's empowerment.

21.4 More complaining from the people about life in the desert with just manna. As a result, venomous snakes attack, killing many until Moses puts the bronze image of a snake on a pole, and lifts it up; whoever looks at the snake is made well.

This is a very strange event, given the prohibition on idols in Exodus 20, unless the prohibition is not a total forbidding of all representations of creatures. If it were, God would be commanding Moses to break His Law. However, this would tend to affirm the interpretation of the image-ban as being those objects expressly intended for worship.

Jesus will later refer to this incident as a parable of his own crucifixion on the cross. (John 3.14) The snake on a pole has since become a sign of physicians and doctors, although this is also connected to a Greek myth of Caduceus, where it is two snakes on a pole.

21.10 The Israelites are moving further north and to the east of the Dead Sea in their travels, coming to the borders of Moab.

21.16 God gathers the people and gives them water from the well, *Be'er* in Hebrew. This causes them to sing a song of praise about the well – except they put the result down to the work of the princes and the chieftains, not to the Lord!

21.21 Moving further north, they defeat the Amorites under their king, Sihon. They take his capital, Heshbon, to the east of the Jordan – they are on the frontiers of Canaan here.

21.27 The people sing a victory song, but again, no mention of the Lord! In fact they say, 'we have overthrown them.'

21.31 They continue north and encounter and defeat the Bashanites under their king Og, occupying the land as a result.

33.1 There follows in this chapter a journal of the travels of the Israelites in their forty years in the wilderness.

33.4 The Lord had brought judgment on the gods of the Egyptians through His intervention to free Israel.

33.38 After a long account of the travels, we read that Aaron died at the age of one hundred and twenty three.

33.49 The chapter has the people of Israel at last in sight of their new homeland, looking from the east across to Jericho on the plain on the other side.

Day 42 Num. 22.1 – 24.25

21.1 ff These chapters form the account of the resistance to Israel attempted by Balak, King of Moab, the land to the east of the Dead Sea. His name in the Semitic language of the region is akin to the Hebrew word *balaq* (Heb בִּלְקָ) meaning ‘terminator’ or ‘annihilator’. Perhaps therefore he has a reputation to maintain!

22.4 He sees what the Israelites have done to the Amorites and is terrified, so he wants to employ a prophet to curse Israel. Balaam (Heb בִּלְעָם *Bil'am* meaning ‘no people’ or ‘foreigner’) was known as a seer (v.6) He came from Pethor, probably Pitru, (36° 39’, 38° 4’) an Assyrian town on the River Euphrates, today near Jarrablus in Syria, a few miles south of the ancient capital of Carchemish. The reason for sending so far to find a prophet may well have been to get one who would prophesy in the name of the Israelite’s God, Adonai (YHWH) since the Moabites seem to have been Ba’al worshippers. Perhaps they thought it best to get a curse done in the name of Adonai, rather than Ba’al!

22.7 The messengers of Moab and neighbouring Midian go together to see Balaam. He hosts them, and in the night, Balaam has a conversation with God. We need not be surprised that Balaam is a prophet of God, since the region would have had worshippers from the days of Terah and Abraham in the Mesopotamian region. It is definitely the Lord that Balaam is seeking, for in v.8 he uses his name *Adonai (YHWH)*.

22.13 God tells Balaam that he cannot curse Israel, because they are blessed. Balaam therefore sends the Moabites and Midianites away with the message of Balaam’s refusal.

22.15 Balak sends more senior leaders north to Balaam, offering good pay for his coming and cursing Israel. Balaam replies with a powerful response;

Even if Balak offers me all the wealth of his house, silver and gold, I cannot cross the mouth of the Lord my God to do anything, great or small.

22.19 However, Balaam listens again for the Lord that night, and this time the Lord gives him permission to go with them, but he is to do only what the Lord tells him to do.

22.21ff The next part of the story is startling and puzzling. On the journey south, Balaam travels on his donkey, the common mode of transport in the Middle East. But God is angry with him. *But didn’t God just tell him to go with them???* Nonetheless, God is letting Balaam know just how displeased He is with the request of the Moabites.

22.21 The angel of the Lord blocks the way; the donkey sees Him (Balaam manifestly doesn’t) and bolts. Balaam beats her (notice we know the gender of Balaam’s ass!) to get her back on course.

22.24 This time the ass is forced by the angel against a wall in an alley between two vineyards, and crushes Balaam's foot! She get another whacking.

22.26 The third time, the angel blocks the way completely and the beast lays down under him, this time getting a beating with a stick.

22.28 Now follows one of the strangest moments in Scripture, when the Lord gives the donkey human speech, and she complains of this ill treatment, and Balaam has a conversation with her! He admits that she doesn't usually behave like this.

22.31 Finally, Balaam sees the angel of the Lord and he hits the deck in awe. The messenger admonishes him for his treatment of the poor animal (worth noting how God sees cruelty to animals!) and explains that the donkey had no choice, because her way was blocked by the angel, who is opposing Balaam, because he is taking a very hazardous path.

22.33 If the donkey had not bolted, Balaam might well be dead now!

22.34 Balaam offers to go back if God is opposed to the trip. However, the angel tells him to go on, but binds him to speak only what He hears from God. The import of this strange event on the road is to put fear into Balaam in the light of what will be a very persuasive Balak when he arrives in Moab.

22.36 When the party is near Moab's border, Balak goes out to meet him, and complains that he has not been quick enough coming! Balaam emphasizes that he will only say what God is saying. They go and sacrifice and have a meal together.

22.41 Next day, Balak takes Balaam up the Ba'al Heights. (Heb בָּמֹת בְּעֵל *Bamot Ba'al*) These are high places, beloved of the worshippers of the pagan fertility gods such as Ba'al, to whom we are introduced here.

Ba'al is a Hebrew word which means master or husband. In the system of gods of the Canaanites, Ba'al was the consort of Asherah. This false god was later to become a great snare to Israel.

23.1ff Intricate sacrifice is offered on seven altars, and the Lord in response gives Balaam a word.

23.8 The word says that Balaam cannot curse what God has not cursed, and cannot defy what God has not defied. He goes further and says that Israel, as a priest-nation on the earth, will not be reckoned in the same way as the rest of the nations. (Perhaps in the same way as Levi is not counted among the tribes of Israel, belonging to the Lord.)

23.10 Balaam even blesses the memory of Jacob, and says he hopes to end up like him!

23.11 'What are you playing at?' asks Balak, 'I told you to curse, not bless my enemies!' But Balaam says again that he can say only what God gives him.

23.13 ‘Right’ says Balak, ‘Then let’s try something else. Never mind the heights of Ba’al – let’s go where you can see them.’ They go to Zophim, Hebrew for *watchers*, east of the Jordan, where Israel has camped. From there Balaam can see the tents of Israel, with the Tabernacle at the centre of it. Another seven sacrifices are offered on seven altars, another word is sought.

23.18 Balaam prophesies again – the Hebrew says, he raised his *mashal* (Heb מִשְׁלָּה *meshalo*) that is, his word of perception, his decisive word; this is the same word used in Hebrew of the book of Proverbs (Heb *meshalim*). It turns out to be even more blessing on Israel, prophesying their strength in the region, and that God would bless them, not curse them.

23.21 God says a powerful thing through Balaam – He says he has not recognised any sin in Israel. We know that Israel had pushed God to the edge so many times, but what God is saying is that He is not having respect to sin among them. (The Hebrew word here is from a root *nabhat* (Heb נָבַט) meaning to have regard or to scan. God is the God of forgiveness, and here He declares them not guilty in His sight.

23.25 Balak is at an end of himself – ‘Look, don’t even curse them – stop what you’re doing.’ Balaam repeats that he can only do what the Lord tells him!

23.27 Balak won’t give up. He wants another try, in case God or Balaam will say something different. So they go to Mount Peor, a mountain east of Jordan, connected with the worship of Ba’al again (The cult of Ba’al-Peor is about to cause great harm to Israel in Numbers 25.) Another seven altars, another seven sacrifices.

24.1 It seems that perhaps Baalam had been using the ancient arts of divination and augury up until now as part of his rituals. Now he doesn’t bother, since he has the message loud and clear. He looks towards the desert, where the whole camp of Israel is visible, and gives it all he has got!

24.2 As he looks on the tents, God’s Spirit comes upon him, and he prophesies.

24.4 He describes his state as being trance-like but with his eyes open – he is given an open vision as he looks at Israel, from the Most High God (Heb אֱלֹהֵי שָׁדַי *Shaddai*). And he blesses them, describing their ordered camp as *doing good* (Heb טוֹבֵי *tovu*) – the word is a verb form here; it is doing Balaam good to look on the camp where God dwells. He describes the people in glowing terms, and their strength as greater than the Canaanites.

24.10 Balak is so incandescent he starts pummeling his hands together in fury.

24.12 But Balaam just reminds Balak what he said at the beginning of all this, that he could not say anything other than God gave him. And for good measure, he then goes on to prophesy the conquest of Moab by Israel, and the fall of Amalek through a ‘Star and a Sceptre from Jacob.’ (v17)– this could be a reference to the later Kingdom of David.

24.22 He also prophesies the exile of the Kenites, transported away by Assyria, and the attacks on Assyria by ships from Cyprus.

24.25 Having done what he was to do, and having been obedient to the Lord, Balaam returns to Pethor.

Day 43 Num 25. 1- 18 then 31.1- 54

There is a suggestion in Numbers 31.16 that before his departure, Balaam, although he may not curse Israel, gives Moab and Midian counsel in how they might defeat the Israelites. He after all knows the Lord, and knows the fearsome jealousy of God which he has himself seen on the road to Moab from Syria.

It seems he has therefore suggested a more insidious method of undermining Israel, one which has led to the downfall of nations through history. Compromise the faith and morality of Israel, and they will rot from within.

It is one of the most terrible unlearned lessons of the human story that low morality corrupts a whole nation, and that idolatry results in sure judgment.

25.1 The fertility cult of Ba'al had at its heart the genital sexual act, which it was believed fertilized the earth and guaranteed the harvest. Thus, in having sex with the Moabite women, who may have been prostitutes dedicated to the pagan cult (a common practice in ancient fertility rites) the men of Israel are worshipping the false idols including Ba'al, specifically in his image of the Ba'al of Peor.

25.4, 5 The Lord's judgment is swift and summary – the leaders of this rebellion are to be executed, and from v.8, we find that a plague breaks out again in the camp.

25.6 In an act of despicable desecration, an Israelite man brings a Moabite woman into his tent for sex, in the camp of God's people, at the very moment that Israel is grieving before God for the terrible darkness that has come upon them.

25.7,8 Phinehas (Heb פִּינְחָס *Pinchas*) Aaron's grandson, a priest is so insensed that he takes a spear and, by implication, drives it through the pair of them while *in delicto flagrante*, in the midst of their fornication. The Lord then stops the plague, but not before it has killed 24,000 Israelites.

Again, our human empathy questions such vast and terrible destruction; is it necessary? How cruel could God be to do this to a people He says He loves? But this only betrays our lack of understanding of the terrible curse of the darkness and its toxin which was bent on destroying the plan of salvation God had through Israel. We can only echo with Abraham in Gen 18.25 as we stand before this carnage, 'Will the judge of the whole earth not do justly?'

25.10 Phinehas (*Pinchas*) with his just assessment of the situation has deflected God's further anger from Israel. For this, and the covering of Israel's sin God confirms to him and his descendants a permanent priesthood.

- 25.14 We are given the names of the guilty pair as Zimri and Cozbi. God now calls for the forfeiture of the whole Midianite people as reprisal for their treachery.
- 31.1 God calls for vengeance for the terrible consequences on Israel of the mission of Midian to undermine them. An army of twelve thousand with Phinehas in charge of the items from the Tabernacle to go with them.
- 31.7 In the ensuing battle, five kings of Midian are killed and also Balaam, the prophet who advised the Midianites to use the women to snare the Israelite men. When they return to the camp with the spoils, having wiped out Midian's nations and villages, they present to Moses and Aaron the women and children they have spared.
- 31.15 Moses is angry that they have spared the very women who led the Israelite men into sin with them. These are to be killed, along with all the boys, but the maidens are to be spared.
- 31.19ff The men who have been involved in battle and killing are ceremonially unclean for seven days, and are to wash. The metal booty is to be cleansed by fire, and all else by water.
- 31.25ff There follows a list of the division of the spoils of war, part of which is to be a tribute to the Lord.
- 31.49 Miraculously, no Israelite has been lost in the battle, and therefore an offering is given from every one of them to the Lord, an enormous horde of 16,750 shekels of gold.

Day 44 Num 26. 1- 65

- 26.1 Following the plague which has wiped out so many, God commands Moses and Eleazar the High Priest to take a second census, to see how many of Israel there are now, on the threshold of entry into the promised land. It is a census for the purpose of assessing the male military capability of the nation.
- 26.5ff The count follows, with some tribes being fewer in number than at the first census, and others having grown.

The overall outcome of the count is (tribes which have grown are in bold type, those smaller in ordinary type.)

Reuben 43,730	Issachar 64,300	Benjamin 45,600
Simeon 22,200	Zebulun 60,500	Dan 64,400
Gad 40,500	Ephraim 32,500	Asher 53,400
Judah 76,500	Manasseh 52,700	Naphtali 45,400

Total number of men of military age; 601,730, compared with 603,550 forty years before.

This is a sobering assessment of the progress of Israel. Having gone into Egypt as a clan of seventy people, then burgeoning during their stay in Israel to around 600,000 of an

army, in this generation there has been little growth. Obviously there have been losses with the plagues and judgments, and perhaps also the desert life, which is not conducive to family life, has meant a lower birthrate.

26.9 We are reminded of the fate of some of the Reubenites who were swallowed up in the ground after the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. We note, however, that God did not wipe out Korah's descendants.

26.52 The name-count is important from the point of view that it will be used in the size of land allocated to each tribe in the settlement of Canaan, the larger the tribe, the larger the area. However, the actual geographical location is required to be decided purely by the casting of lots, so that no one tribe seems favoured with their position.

26.57 The Levites are numbered separately, as before, and include those a month old or more. They total 23,000, as opposed to 22,000 in the previous count.

26.59 We are told here for the first time the name of the mother and father of Moses, Aaron and Miriam – Amram and Jochebed. We are also reminded that Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu were consumed after their disobedience.

26.63ff A very sad note comes at the end of the chapter. Of those counted at the second census of Israel, the only names which had been included in the previous census were Caleb and Joshua, the two faithful scouts of Israel. Everyone else had succumbed to God's judgment and died in the wilderness, with Moses about to follow them.

Day 45 Num 27.15 – 23, Num 32.1 – 42, Deut 4.41-43, Num 33.50– 56, Deut. 25.17-19, Num. 34.1 – 35.8

27.15ff Moses recognises that the nation will need a leader to replace him, since he will not be entering the land with them.

Moses addresses the Lord as *The Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh* (Heb יהוה יהוה הרוחות לכל־בָּשָׂר Adonai (YHWH) ha-ruchot le-khol basar) This is an unusual form of address. Moses also uses a phrase for the first time which is echoed in the words of Jesus in Matthew 9, when he sees the people in the state Moses does not want them to be in – sheep without a shepherd (Heb אֲשֶׁר אֵין־לָהֶם רֹעֶה ka-tson asher eyn lahem ro'eh)

Joshua is therefore commissioned as Moses' successor, by the laying on of hands, a sign of the passing on of anointing. He is a man of the Spirit, as Moses has been, one who delights in being in God's presence.

32.1ff Now that the nation is at last preparing to enter the land, thoughts are turning to its allocation, once conquest is achieved.

However, the tribes of Reuben and Gad want to settle in the conquered lands east of the Jordan, because of its fine pastureland.

32.6 Moses is angry with them, fearing that they are just trying to escape the battle ahead. He accuses them of doing the same thing their fathers did in refusing God. He calls them 'a brood of sinners', literally, the 'offspring of sinful men'.

32.16 The Reubenites and Gadites then come up with a plan to prove their courage alongside their brothers. They will leave their stock and families east of Jordan and will cross over at the head of the Israelite armies, to lead them into battle. They also will not lay claim to any land west of the Jordan. Moses agrees to this plan, but warns them against not fulfilling the commitment.

32.18 The agreement is made known to the rest of Israel.

32.33 As well as the tribes of Reuben and Gad, the tribe of Manasseh, Joseph's son will also take a share in the lands of Gilead.

Deut 4.41 As would be established west of the Jordan, three cities of refuge or sanctuary were to be established for the protection of fugitives pending trial, to avoid revenge-killing, one for each of the three tribes.

Num 33.50 The Lord's instructions are very clear to Israel. They are to drive out the Canaanites, and remove all traces of their pagan religion. If they do not (v 55) the pagan idols will ensnare them, and be a source of trouble to them.

Deut 25.17ff God commands the annihilation of the Amalekite people. Once again, we balk at the violence in this command. Yet it is God's command because of their attacks on Israel on the journey to Canaan.

Num. 34.1ff God prescribes the boundaries of the land they possess; the desert to the south, as far as the Dead Sea and across to the Wadi of Egypt, the Mediterranean to the west, the northern frontier from Mount Hor to the sea, and the eastern edge from Galilee south to the Dead Sea.

34.13 The land is to be given by lot to the remaining nine and a half tribes west of the Jordan, since Reuben, Gad and Manasseh have opted to settle west of Jordan.

34.16ff. Eleazar son of Aaron, the high priest, and Joshua are to arbitrate the distribution of the land. A council of representatives from each of the tribes is also appointed to assist them. This conciliar approach is to be noted; it is not democracy, but it is representative.

35.1 The Levite priesthood has no land apportioned to them, but they are given a number of cities scattered around Israel where they can settle, with adjoining pastureland to raise livestock. Six of the cities are to be cities of sanctuary, and they are to have another forty-two in addition, totaling forty-eight cities. The allocation is not just four cities from each tribe, but the tribes with bigger lands are to give more towns, and those with less, less towns, making it proportionate.

It is worth saying at this point, that as western 21st century Christians, we struggle to reconcile this view of God with our view of the loving, gracious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This seems like a warlike, vengeful deity. This led the first century Gnostic

theologian, Marcion, to affirm that the God of the Old Testament was not the God of the New Testament, rejecting the Old Testament as unfit for Christians to study.

Yet that is to place ourselves in the position of perfectly ethical judges. We must hold on rather to the fact that this is an unfolding narrative. God is constantly taken aback by the darkness man is capable of, which is why He is so angry and frustrated with them. God sees these terrible military actions as essential to the unfolding plan; whether we then can say that they are successful is another matter, since Israel once again does not obey, and leaves the Canaanites in place, putting themselves on the road to moral compromise and eventual exile.

The ultimate step by God will be to come Himself, in the man Jesus Christ, and live our lives with us, and to rise from the dead, and to change the whole way we understand Him. But the stage we are at with Israel in these chapters is not yet at that place. The outcome is as yet unknown. But God is also on a journey of learning with His people, a journey we are still on with Him.

Day 46 Deut.1.1- 4.40

The name Deuteronomy comes from two Greek words, δευτέρος *deuteros* meaning second, and νόμος *nomos*, law. This was the name given to this book in the Greek translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew known as the Septuagint. This is because the book contains a revision of the law of Moses for the new generation of Israelites which is about to enter the promised land.

In Hebrew, the book is called *Debharim* (Heb דְּבָרִים the plural of דָּבָר *dabhar* meaning word. This is because in Hebrew the book opens with ‘these are the words of Moses’. It is the review of Moses of all of the story of Israel to date, and a rehearsing of the law given to Israel, making ready the people for the entry into and conquest of Canaan.

1.1 We are given the location of this memoir by Moses; it is given in the Arabah desert, east of the Jordan. The time is given as the first day of Shebhat, the eleventh month, in the fortieth year of their wanderings. (Shebhat is around January or February of our calendar.)

1.5 ff Moses begins with the account of the breaking camp at Horeb following the covenant, and the appointment of magistrates for the people who would carry the burden with Moses for the resolution of disputes.

1.19ff He goes on to recount the expedition of the twelve scouts into Canaan, but Moses says that although the report back was good, there was also discouragement from the

ten. In his account, because of this the people rebelled at Kadesh from going into the land. (v.26)

1.34 Despite Moses' urging to go in, they refused and the Lord then forbade their entry into the promised land. Moreover, Moses himself was barred from entering the land, Joshua being appointed to lead the people instead. The people were then sent back into the desert.

1.41 Moses tells of the abortive attack on the Amorites, despite God's word that they would be defeated. The Lord is described as turning a deaf ear to their weeping, because of their disobedience.

2.1ff After many years in the desert they turn north again, towards the land of promise once more. There is little still told of those four decades in the wilderness. They pass by Esau/Edom without touching their territory.

2.8ff The people are to pass by Moab also. We recall that Moab was the son by incestuous relationship of Lot and his daughter.

2.10 Moses refers to the Anakim and the Emim, tall races who put fear into the peoples around them, so that saw them as giants.

2.14 By the time thirty-eight years have passed, all the fighting men have died who had been numbered in the first count.

2.16 The death of the last of these men is the signal for the people to move north past the Moabites, as told in v.8, but the Lord also leads them past the Ammonites, who are descendants of Ben-Ammi, also descendants of Lot and his incestuous daughters.(see Gen 19.37) They are considered kin close enough to spare.

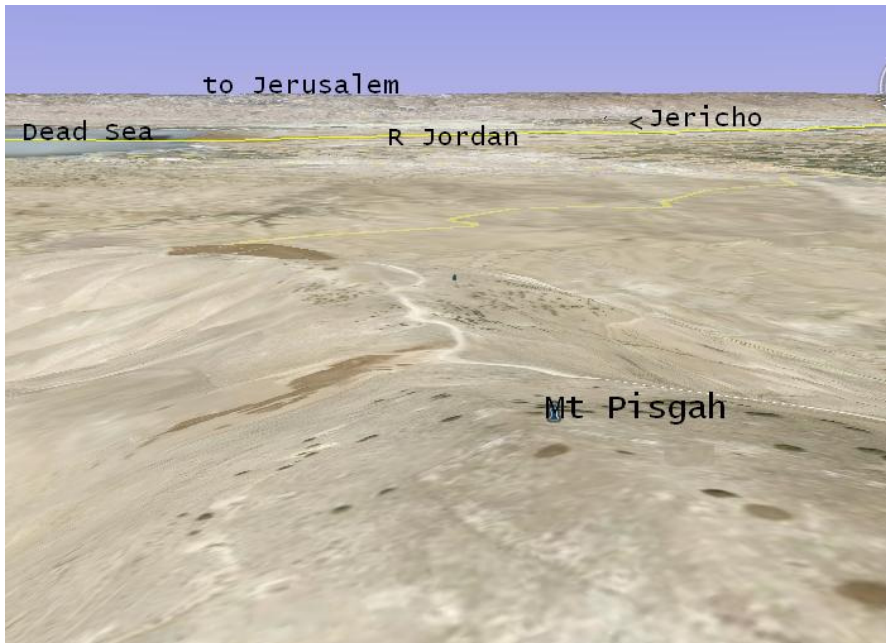
2.24 Moses' story turns to the defeat of Sihon and his subjects the Amorites,

3.1ff followed by the lands of Og of Bashan. There is a curious memento of Og mentioned, his bed, thirteen feet by six wide, kept at Rabbah. (v.11) He is seen as one of the last of the 'giants', the tall peoples.

3.12 The allocation of the lands taken from Sihon and Og, to be given to the tribes of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh is mentioned here, east of the Jordan, as well as the agreement that those tribes would go first in the entry into Canaan as proof of their good faith in settling in Trans-Jordan.

3.23ff Here is the sadness of Moses made known; he has pleaded with God to let him go across and see the promised land, but because of his part in the stubbornness of Israel, God will only allow him to go to Mount Pisgah to look across the Jordan valley to the new land. (31deg46' N 35deg 43' E) This is quite near to Mount Nebo, where Moses finally dies. From the slopes of Pisgah, he would have seen the northern end of the Dead Sea, with the Jordan flowing down into it, and in the distance the city of Jericho, with its palms and fertile lands, against a background of the hills of the Judean wilderness, leading up to Jerusalem in the far distance.

(A vivid impression of this can be seen by looking on a programme such as Google Earth, where the map can be tilted to give a view toward the horizon.)



3.28 Joshua is commissioned in Moses' stead to lead the people.

4.1ff Moses, having told the story thus far is about to impress on the people the terms and conditions of being God's own people on the earth. He reminds them of the terrible sin of Ba'al Peor, and the plague which followed the idolatrous intercourse with the false gods.

4.6 By walking in these ways, the nation of Israel will become renowned for wisdom and understanding among the nations. Even today this is true; the Jewish people are the most prolifically prosperous, wise and ingenious of the nations, their faith inspiring the major faiths and philosophies of the earth, their impact far outweighing their numbers in terms of population.

4.7,8 God impresses on them their closeness to the Lord and His purposes as uniquely blessed by Him.

4.9ff Moses urges them not to forget, and to pass on the tremendous revelations of Horeb-Sinai, where God spoke (although they refused to hear Him out of fear). They are warned against making any kind of representation of God for worship, since He cannot be captured in a form.

4.20ff The Lord has been their rescuer from 'the furnace' – this is why He commands their loyalty and obligation.

4.21, 22. There is a wistful refrain through this account; Moses knows he will not share in the benefits of the promise, and it pains him.

4.24 They are reminded that the Lord God is a jealous God, a consuming fire.

(Heb אֵל קָנָא אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֵשׁ אֹכְלָהּ הוּא אֵל קָנָא *Ki Adonai (YHWH) Eloheykha esh okhelah hoo El kannah* – literally, for Lord your God fire of devouring he, God of jealousy.)

4.25ff The Lord is aware of the people's propensity to stray; this has already been evidenced through the Ba'al Peor trauma. He promises them that if they replace Him with the worship of false idols, they will forfeit His land. Yet, even in that exiled state, God will hear their cry if they call on Him in a heartfelt way, for He is *El Rachum*, a God of compassion, and faithful to His covenant made with an oath.

4.32ff This is a powerful statement about the call upon Israel as a nation. Moses says, more or less, 'Go on and search history and geography, you won't find any other nation to whom God has audibly communicated, or with whom God has walked, forming them into His people through His grace and signs.' Moses says there is one purpose in this, for them to know that Adonai (YHWH) is the only true God. This is the purpose and destiny they have as a nation.

The remembrance of this call, into which we are grafted by faith in the Messiah of Israel, Jesus Christ, will guard us from ever thinking that any other path or practice is equal or preferable to the grace and gift of God upon His people. As believers in Jesus, we have been included in this chosen race and its blessings. Through faith in Jesus, we are sons and daughters of Abraham, and part of the covenant. (see Romans 4.16)

Day 47 Deut 4.44 – 5.5a, then 5.22 – 8.20

Moses now speaks to the new generation a second time; he points constantly to the Lord as the source of the wellbeing of Israel, and urges them to remain in His paths.

4.44 The location of this message is still at Beth Peor, on the east of the Jordan, in the territory of the subdued kings Sihon and Og, preparing them for their entry into the land.

5.1ff Moses reminds them of the covenant (Heb בְּרִית *Berit*) which God has concluded with them as a people. Although God has covenanted with their forefathers, they are not just included in that heading, but God has bothered to establish His covenant with them as a nation.

5.22 Moses reminds them of the giving of the Law, and of the stones on which God wrote as a sign.

5.23ff Moses reminds them that they could have had a direct relationship with God as a people, but the elders and leaders were afraid, and asked Moses to be the intermediary for them with God, (v27) since they had seen the power of God in judgment on the Egyptians.

5.29 There is an expression here of God's yearning spoken to Moses, of His desire for the wellbeing of Israel, even though they will not hear Him.

6.4 This is the great ‘Shema’ , Hear, O Israel, which is one of the most prayed prayers among Jewish people.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

(Above is read from right to left)

Shema Yisra'el Adonai (YHWH) Eloheynu Adonai (YHWH) echad

Hear Israel the Lord our God the Lord one

וְאַהַבְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

(Above is read from right to left)

Ve' ahavta et Adonai(YHWH) Eloheykha

And you will love the Lord your God

בְּכָל־לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדְךָ

(Above is read from right to left)

Bekhol levov-kha u-vekhoh naphshekha, u-vekhoh me'odekha

In all your heart and in all your soul and in all your strength

The command is not to worship, but to love. God is not demanding His people's awe but their hearts' affection.

This is the commandment which all Jews use to sum up the others.

6.5 The Lord's words and promises are to be the lifestyle of His people. They are to teach them to their children, meditate on them, bind them on hands and heads and write them on their doorframes.

This command led to the practice of binding small boxes to the hands and head containing Scriptures, known as phylacteries. Orthodox Jews spend a good deal of time and ritual doing this daily.

Also, Jewish homes have a small box nailed to the doorframe at the main entrance, again containing Scripture. This is called a *mezuzah*, the Hebrew word used here in Deuteronomy for 'doorpost'.

6.10 The Lord knows that when people become comfortable, they forget their dependency on Him. They are to keep Him in sight, and to foreswear all other idols.

6.20 The duty of passing on the story of deliverance and redemption through the generations is laid on parents.

7.1ff.. They are not to make any covenants with the seven nations (Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites) they are dispossessing, nor to intermarry with them. All remnants of them and their idols are to be removed.

7.6ff Israel is reminded that she is holy – *qadosh* (Heb קָדוֹשׁ) that is, she is sole property of the Lord, inaccessible to all other claims or rivals for her devotion. Israel is His treasure.

7.7,8 They are not chosen because of any quality in them, but out of the sheer grace of God. They were rescued from slavery by the God whose nature is favour, compassion, forgiveness and *chesed* , covenant-obligation.

7.12ff Blessings of fruitfulness and health will be visited on them if they keep following the Lord.

7.16ff They are to completely destroy all those whom the Lord delivers into their hands.

7.25ff However precious the gold their idols are made of , they are to be destroyed.

8.2 The experience of the desert years has not been without fruit. It has taught Israel total dependence on God for everything, reducing them out of their self-reliance and rebellion.

8.3 He has taught them that truth Jesus later quotes to the devil, that ‘man does not live on bread alone’ – that is, bread which he makes himself. They have literally lived from heavenly provision.

8.4 For forty years, their clothes and shoes have miraculously lasted.

8.5 The Lord has been training them and raising them as a Father with a son, and the outcome will be fruitfulness in the new land.

8.11ff A second time, God warns them not to grow complacent with riches when they begin to see the land yield its wealth. It is the Lord who has given them the ability to produce, as the confirmation of His covenant to them.

There is so much in these exhortations of Moses which speak to us as latter-day children of Abraham. In times of such excess and plenty, we have so often done what Israel went on to do – to forget and to reject the One who gave the ability to be wealthy. The only outcome of such betrayal of the Saviour is destruction.