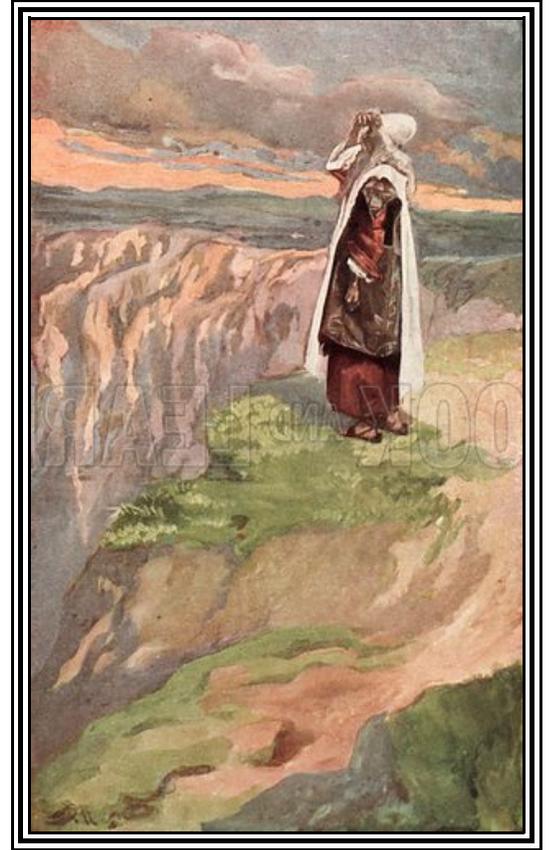


THRU THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

MARCH 23-MARCH 27

Old Testament: Deuteronomy 27-34; Joshua 1-13

This week's OT readings begin with the concluding segment of the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses brings his farewell message to its triumphant conclusion with two grand epic poems which serve both to restate the substance of God's covenant with Israel and the pathetic history of Israel's constant failure in contrast to the endless acts of merciful deliverance by a gracious God who has cared for them consistently and has delivered them over and over again because He is a God of grace whose longsuffering compassion far surpasses human comprehension. To recognize the critical importance of this message it must constantly be kept in mind that the nation has come to a crucial turning point in its history. The years of deliverance and formation are over. The only leader they have ever known will shortly be gone. The challenge of the conquest lies before them. Moses wisely uses the occasion of his own impending death, while he has their undivided attention, to remind them of the core realities of their existence and their covenant relationship with God. The poetic format adds power to his message with its use of cadenced rhythm and rhyme. The effective use of contrast drives the message home. The prophet takes on the role of a prosecutor in a courtroom to define his case. One the one hand there is God:



Moses Views The Promised Land
James Tissot

“I will proclaim the name of the LORD and ascribe greatness to our God! The rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice. A God of faithfulness without iniquity just and upright is He!” (Deuteronomy 32:4)

The perfection and faithfulness of God are contrasted with with the absolute imperfection and unfaithfulness of Israel.

“They have dwelt corruptly with Him; they are not longer His children because they are blemished. They are a crooked and twisted generation. Do you thus repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless people?...But they are a nation void of counsel and there is no understanding in them.”

(Deuteronomy 32: 5-6,28)

Scores of illustrations and examples follow as the poetic narrative documents the point. God's provision contrasted with Israel's ingratitude; God's protection unrecognized as Israel's claims His victories as their own; God's devotion to the people who He had chosen contrasted with their chronic idolatry as they to whoring after the idols and false gods of the nations around them. The narrative is punctuated with fearsome warnings of impending judgement:

“See now that I even I am He and there is no God beside Me. I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal and there is none that can deliver out of My hand. For I lift up My hand to heaven and swear. If I live forever and sharpen my flashing sword and My hand takes hold on judgement, I will take vengeance upon My adversaries, and I will repay those who hate Me. I will make my arrows drunk with blood and I shall devour flesh - with the blood of the slain and the captives from the long-haired heads of the enemy.”
(Deuteronomy 32:36-42)

The cadence of this grand epic poetry puts the Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey" to shame. It rumbles like the thunder of a mighty storm.

The final segments foretells the future of the tribes in the form of blessings which are also predictive. They provide a fascinating insight into the events which shall unfold before our eyes across the centuries to come.

And finally, with simple words no doubt penned by Joshua, the death of the founding and foremost prophet of Israel is recorded:

“And so Moses, the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD and He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows the place of his burial to this day. Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated...And there has not arisen since a prophet in Israel like Moses whom the LORD knew face to face, and there was none like him for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants to all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.” (Deuteronomy 34:5-7; 10-12)

This grande finale brings the founding era of Israel's history to a close. They are about to enter the Promised Land and will remain there until the longsuffering of God has finally been exhausted and they are permanently dispossessed of the land by the Babylonians many

centuries in the future.

Next comes Joshua. “*Joshua*” is a form of the name “*Jesus*.” The content of this book covers the story of Israel from the crossing of the Jordan River into the promised land until the completion of that conquest. It’s overall theme is the irresistible power of God’s people in overcoming the world and taking possession of that which God had promised them as an inheritance, provided only they maintain their trust in God’s strength and permit no sin of disobedience to break their covenant relationship with Him.

A major issue typically raised by this story of bloody conquest is the appropriateness of God’s command that Israel exterminate the Canaanite people throughout the land. It must first be noted that the divine commands which define the conquest and require total destruction (i.e. Deu. 20:16-18)

“In these cities that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance you shall save nothing alive that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites as the LORD your God has commanded that they may not teach you to do according to their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and cause you to sin against the LORD your God.”

It must first be noted that this stringent conquest is not arbitrary, imposed upon innocent people. The nations which occupy the promised land were notorious for the degradation, perversion, and bloody human sacrifices of their vile idolatries. Furthermore, well over 600 years elapsed between Abraham’s arrival in Canaan and the time of the conquest. That would mean that these people had the witness of believers in the true God among them God among them for an extended period of time and chose to ignore it. Genesis and Exodus further indicate that there were local groups in the region who followed the true God, like Melchizedek and the Jebusites and Jethro and the Midianites. However by the time of the conquest these groups had been absorbed into the vile idolatry of the majority. Thus the stern punishment of God upon these nations was a just punishment imposed upon profoundly corrupted peoples who had been granted centuries to repent and turn from their sin. Furthermore, this situation is unique, because Israel was directly commanded by God to serve as the instrument of divine judgment by God Himself. This circumstance would never be replicated at any other point in history. Israel (from the establishment of the national covenant at Mount Sinai to the destruction of the Kingdom of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar) was the only genuinely theocratic state in human history. God’s concern as specified in the text cited above, is also that if the Canaanites were allowed to remain they would pollute the Israelites and lure them into idolatry. Israel failed to obey God and that is exactly what happened eventually bringing the dispossession of Israel from the land because of their chronic idolatry intermingling with the Canaanites.

This weeks reading's take us thru the actual war of conquest from the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River, to the miraculous downfall of Jericho, thru the campaigns which follow up to the division and settlement of the land which will be discussed in next weeks readings.

New Testament Readings - Luke 12-16

The Gospel readings from Luke 12-16 focus specifically on the public ministry of Jesus before the focus shifts toward the final journey to Jerusalem and the events of the Passion. The segment is replete with parables and miracles. The role of Jesus as one who is perceived by the Jewish religious establishment as a challenge to the status quo of 2nd Temple Judaism intensifies throughout this section setting the stage for the sadly ironic contradiction that the chosen people themselves, who had been entrusted with the Messianic promises, will become the instrument of destruction for the Savior whom they had been waiting across the centuries. This is the classic and most tragic example of the human inclination to follow their own inclinations and traditions rather than to humbly submit to the Word of God on its own terms. The information was all their. The message was clearly defined. They did not have to reject Jesus. They chose to do so of their own free will. A prideful sense of entitlement was preferable repentance based upon an acknowledge of their own sinfulness. God took no pleasure in that decision, as Jesus weeping over Jerusalem demonstrates (Luke 13:31-35) nor did He impose it on them. Next weeks readings in Luke will proceed toward the passion.