

Text: Deuteronomy 4:1, 2, 6-9

Theme: MOSES SPEAKS TO US

1. A New Testament Believer Prepares to Listen to Moses
2. Hold On to All of God's Word

“So now, Israel, listen to the statutes and the ordinances that I am teaching you, and carry them out so that you may live and so that you may enter the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving to you and take possession of it. ²Do not add to the word that I am commanding you, and do not subtract from it, so that you keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you.”

Dear Christian Friends:

A NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVER PREPARES TO LISTEN TO MOSES

Moses was standing before a vast sea of Israelites assembled on the plain of Moab opposite the land of Canaan. Forty years earlier the Israelites had left Egypt. It should have been a quick journey, but the parents of the present generation had disobeyed the Lord. God had banished the Israelites to the desert until a new generation was born. Moses was now addressing this generation of Israelites, working to keep them from making the same mistakes their parents had made.

Our reading today is taken from Moses' review of the law, which is found in the Book of Deuteronomy, a word that means “the second law.” Our question this morning is, Can we apply Moses' words to ourselves, and if so, is there anything we should keep in mind as we do? The answer is yes; we can indeed apply Moses' words to ourselves. And yes, there are a couple things we ought to bear in mind.

First, we are no longer part of God's Old Testament people. We are part of the New Testament church that is made up of Jews and Gentiles from throughout the world. Next week, Missionary Jordan will be sharing information about our brothers and sisters in the faith in Pakistan, a place very different from Bay City. The New Testament church is no longer a group of people living in a specific land. Rather, we look forward to entering the promised land of heaven, in which we are living spiritually now and which we will someday enter with new and glorified bodies.

Second, Moses' law was just that, a law. There was a conditional nature to it. By inspiration, Moses put it this way: **“So now, Israel, listen to the statutes and the ordinances that I am teaching you, and carry them out so that you may live and so that you may enter the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving to you and take possession of it.”** The statutes and ordinances were laws—a set of commands the Israelites had to keep if they were to remain God's people. God was giving them the land, but if God's Old Testament people wanted to possess the land of Canaan and hold onto it, they had to keep the law of Moses. We, however, are free from those laws and have the hope of heaven through faith in Jesus Christ, who has kept the laws in our place. However, those laws still have a place in our lives.

HOLD ON TO ALL OF GOD'S WORD

Consider this: A father is helping his son put together his first model airplane. They open the box, sort out the pieces, and unfold the directions. The small boy has little use for the directions, and when his father leaves the room for a moment, he immediately begins gluing pieces together. Some don't seem to fit together well, but with a little pushing he succeeds. The half dozen pieces left over don't seem to go anywhere, so he tosses them out. But something seems to be missing, so he jury-rigs some of the leftover plastic and comes up with a fair-looking car—but the kit was for a model airplane.

God's Word is not a kit or a set of directions. But many people go into God's Word like the boy approached his model airplane. They have little regard for the pieces and even less regard for how the words are meant to fit together. Their theological "airplane" turns into something quite different from what God intended.

As Moses stood before the Israelites, he fully understood how sinful human beings like to adjust God's Word to suit their own wants. He had seen it happen many times before in the last 40 years. The Israelites had changed the true, invisible God into a golden calf and worshipped it. Aaron's own sons, priests who served alongside their father, ignored God's instruction for offering incense. As a result, their offering was rejected.

By nature, people simply refuse to let God's Word be their final and complete authority. The Jews had what they called an unwritten oral tradition that Moses supposedly spoke and was handed down through Jewish teachers. These teachings, which were not part of God's Word, were elevated to the level of God's Word. And today, much of what Jesus taught, it is claimed, was not written down in the New Testament but was passed down through word of mouth by early church leaders. Much of the teaching of the modern Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches is based on such oral traditions.

And the list goes on and on. Additions to God's Word and subtractions based on what sinful people think God could never have said govern much of Christianity today. But God's Word is perfect. A living faith depends on holding fast to all of it. Otherwise, our faith will turn into something it was never meant to be.

The Israelites could not keep God's wonderful laws...and neither can we. So, in our place, God substituted Jesus, whose righteous life and innocent death have become ours by faith. He substituted his "new command," namely, the command that people love one another as he has loved us. He substituted promises based on obedience with an unconditional promise of a new and glorious kingdom in which all things work out for our good. And he promises heaven where we will be with him and free from all the problems of this life. How about an AMEN for that? AMEN!

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH—for Labor Day

P: Lord God, our Father and Creator: We deserve

C: to labor among thorns and thistles,

P: to eat by the sweat of our brow,

C: to work without reward,

P: For we confess

C: we have spoiled your creation by our sin,

P: we have marred our works by our neglect,

C: we have hurt your work by our rebellion.

P: We pray you, bless our labor

C: by him who was once a carpenter,

P: by him who came to be our servant,

C: by him who saved us to serve.

P: For Jesus' sake keep us and all who labor

C: from false dealing and unfair practice,

P: from excessive profit and unjust gain,

C: from lazy service and irrational demands.

P: Help us

C: to labor with love,

P: to labor with joy,

C: to labor with faithfulness.

P: Teach us that the best labor we give you is loving service to our fellowmen.

C: In Christ's name we ask it, who taught us to pray: