–Save This Page as a PDF–

The Historical Prologue
1:6 to 4:49

Moses now fills in some gaps of the account previously given. **He** begins **his** discourse by reviewing the events that occurred in the course of their forty-year journey from **Egypt** to **Sinai**, and then from **Sinai** to **Mo'ab**. This historical prologue, though it also represents selected material from the earlier books, serves a particular purpose in its present context. The Near Eastern treaty, in its historical prologue, described the events underlying the treaty. In **Deuteronomy**, likewise, the historical basis for the covenant begins with the covenant promise made to **Abraham** and then it continues to the initial stage in the realization of the promise at **Horeb**. The importance of history has two focal points: (a) there is a covenant tradition of promise, from **Abraham** to **Moshe**; and (b) there is the experience of **the LORD** in history working out in action the content of that promise.

Therefore, for the renewal of the covenant described in **Deuteronomy**, the prologue recalls not only the covenant's history, but also the ability of **the LORD** of the covenant to fulfill **His** promise. What **ADONAI** had done in the past, **He** could continue to do in the future. There is thus a presentation of a faithful **YHVH**, whose demand was for a faithful **people**.[26] **Moses** makes it clear that history is the sphere in which **the LORD** works out the fulfillment of **His** promises. **His** provision of victory over **Isra'el's** enemies **(1:28, 2:24-25** and **30)** and **His** care for **His**

covenantal **nation** during **their wilderness** wanderings **(1:31; 2:6-7)** serve as part of **His** fulfillment of **His** oath to **their** ancestors that **He** would bring **Isra'el** into **the Promised Land (1:8, 21** and **35).**

In **his** description of **Isra'el's** experiences, **Moshe** bluntly examines **their** repeated acts of unfaithfulness, and the dire consequences of **their** conduct. **Isra'el's** refusal to trust in **God's** promise to deliver **the land of Canaan** into **their** hands (regardless of its powerful defenses), revealed **their** fickle nature. In spite of all that **YHVH** had done up to the time of **Isra'el's** rebellion at **Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 13:1** to **14:45)**, **His people rebelled** against **Him** and declared that **Ha'Shem hated them (1:26-27)**. Because of **their** treacherous conduct, **Isra'el** experienced the full force of the anger of **Ha'Shem (1:34** and **37, 2:14-15, 3:26, 4:21** and **24-25)**, and faced divine rejection of sorts. **ADONAI** withdrew **His** presence **(1:42)** and closed **His** ears to **their** cries **(1:45** and **3:26)**.

Finally, these chapters also have a forward look. **Moses** is not simply looking at past failures, but giving an overview because **Isra'el's** forty days at the base of **Mount Sinai** would have clear implications for **their** future attitudes and conduct. They needed to remember and not forget **(4:9-10) God's** life changing character and actions. **Moshe** provided this overview to prepare **ADONAI's** people for the great challenge ahead of them. **The Israelites** would be able to conquer the land of Canaan and live in harmony with **God's** expectations only if **they** lived in the light of **His** awesome power and majesty. **YHVH's** promise and past faithfulness provided the grounds to trust **Him** in the present, and in the future. But **the Israelites** should never forget that **Ha'Shem's** swift and harsh response to mutiny in the past, should serve as a warning against rebellion and unbelief in the days to come.[27]