

**October 20, 2019 - Deut. 1:1–2:1 - Words of Moses**  
**Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 1:1–2:1 - Words of Moses**  
**Psalm 107**  
**Haftarah: Zechariah 8:16-23 + 9:10**

Deuteronomy is Greek for "Second Law," because much of the book is a repeat of what has been said before. Moses felt compelled to bring this reminder of the Law to Israel, because those ready to enter the Promised Land were only children - if born at all - when the Law was originally given at Mount Sinai.

But in Hebrew the title is *Devarim*, or "Words."

Deuteronomy consists of five retrospective discourses and poems that Moses addressed to Israel in Moab shortly before his death (**Deuteronomy 1:6-4:43, 4:44-28:69, 29-30, 32, 33**), plus two narratives about his final acts (**Deuteronomy 31, 34**).

The entire book constitutes Moses' "words" - his farewell address to the Israelites as they are poised on the edge of the Jordan River, ready to enter the Promised Land. According to Jewish tradition, it took Moses 36 days to deliver all these speeches that remind the Israelites of their wanderings, of their responsibilities to follow God's commandments, and of their obligations to treat one another with respect.

Much of Deuteronomy repeats stories and laws we know from earlier books of the Torah. But, interestingly, 70 of the approximately 100 commandments found in the book of Deuteronomy are not found in the earlier books. Most of these new laws deal with issues of actually settling and living in the Land of Israel, things the Israelites did not need to know before.

Deuteronomy is quoted more than 80 times in the New Testament. In His temptation in the wilderness, it seems obvious that Jesus meditated on Deuteronomy because in answering Satan, He quoted from it three times.

- **Deuteronomy 8:3**: "Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord."

- **Deuteronomy 6:16**: "You shall not tempt the Lord your God."

- **Deuteronomy 6:13**: "You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him."

**Deuteronomy 1:1** - "These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab."

At this point Israel was camped on the great plains of Moab, able to see across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. This was the land of Canaan that God promised

them but which they had not occupied for 400 years.

### Place Names

But these place-names are all either invented, or located far away from the east bank of the Jordan. Why are they mentioned here?

Commentary as early as Targum Onkelos, from the first century C.E., found an alternate meaning in the list of supposed place-names. According to Onkelos, the list is a reminder of the times the Israelites made God angry during their wanderings in the wilderness. A few centuries later, the Talmud agreed, and it became the traditional interpretation of the verse.

*Suf* - In other parts of the Torah, the word *Suf* is a place-name only in the combination *Yam Suf*, the Sea of Reeds (known in the English tradition as the Red Sea). This is the sea the Israelites crossed to escape from the Egyptian army; it lay between Egypt and the Sinai peninsula, far away from the Jordan. When the Israelites came to the Red Sea, they asked Moses why God had brought them there to die; weren't there enough graves in Egypt?

*Paran* - *Paran* was an unpopulated area just south of the Negev desert, south of the border of Canaan at the time. The Israelites were camped there when Moses sent twelve men to scout out the "promised land" to the north, and ten of the twelve who reported back said that the Israelites could never win a battle against the residents of the land. The people rebelled against entering Canaan. According to classic commentary, Moses mentions Paran at the start of his speech in Deuteronomy to remind the surviving children of Israel that their fathers' lack of trust in God doomed the people to wander in the wilderness for another 38 years. Now that they have another chance to cross into Canaan, albeit from a different border, they had better not repeat the earlier generation's mistake!

*Tofel* - No location named *Tofel* is mentioned anywhere in the Jewish bible, except in this single sentence. With a shift in vowels, the word is *tafeil*, whitewashing or plastering over. First-century commentaries consider *tafeil* a metaphor for slander, and explain that the Israelites slandered the manna—which is described as white, *lavan*, in **Exodus 31**.

*Chatzerot* - *Chatzerot* (Courtyards) was the name of the place the Israelites went right after Kivrot Hata-avah, the camp where they complained that they wanted meat instead of manna, and God sent quail—along with a plague (**Numbers 11:35**). In *Chatzerot*, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses on account of his wife, and God punished Miriam.

*Di-Zahav* - The last place in the list is *Di-Zahav*, a variant of *dai zahav*, which means "enough gold." Classic commentary pointed out that the Israelites brought so much gold out of Egypt, they could use it to make the golden calf at Mount Sinai.

The first sentence of Deuteronomy could be legitimately translated with all of the so-called place-names as common nouns or verbs, like this:

"These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan, in the wilderness, on the desert plain opposite coming to an end between beautifying and whitewashing, and then whiteness and courtyards and enough gold."

### **Declaring/ Digging Out the Meaning of the Law**

**Deuteronomy 1:5** - "On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying..."

"declare" = *ba'ar* - to explain, make clear, to dig, to engrave letters on stone

Moses began to "dig out" the hidden meaning of the Law, and also to point to the hope of "engraving" it on the hearts of his people, which God had already engraved on tablets of stone. This would be completed with the New Covenant of Messiah.

- **Jeremiah 31:33** - "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts..."

Quoted in Hebrews:

- **Hebrews 8:10** - "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts"

### **The First Command to Enter the Promised Land**

**Deuteronomy 1:6** - "The LORD our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount:"

Or, "God, our god, spoke to us at Choreiv [Sinai], saying: '*Rav-lakhem* sitting still at this mountain! Face about, pull out, and come to the highlands of the Emori and...the land of the Canaanite...'” (**Deuteronomy 1:6-7**)

'Enough!'

"long enough" = *rav-lakhem*

*rav* (רב) = abundant, plenty, huge, many, much, too much.

*lakhem* (לָכֶם) = for you, to you, belonging to you. ("You" is plural in *lakhem*. The singular is *lakh*.)

*Rav-lakhem* (רַב־לָכֶם) = Too much for you! You have too much! (Or in Yiddish-inflected

English, "Enough already!")

The nearly 40 year delay was not God's original intention. It came about because the generation of the Exodus failed to trust and obey God. The more time that passes, the greater the danger that the people of Israel will grow too comfortable where they are and will be reluctant to move on into the unknown.

The phrase is used later:

- **Deuteronomy 2:1-3** - "And we turned and we pulled out toward the wilderness on the way to the sea of reeds, as God had spoken to me, and we circled around the mountain of Seir many days. Then God said to me, saying: "*Rav-lakhem*, circling around this mountain! Face about, northward!"

And personally toward Moses himself when he pleads to enter the Promised Land:

- **Deuteronomy 3:26** - "But God was cross with me because of you, and would not listen to me. And God said to me: '*Rav-lakh!* Do not speak to Me again about this matter!"

And when we complain, or when we keep trying to change what cannot be changed, the way Moses begs God to reconsider and let him go to Canaan, we need to hear an inner voice saying "*Rav lakh!*" to shut us up, so we can concentrate on making the most of the life that we *do* have.

### **Moses' Lament - Deuteronomy 1:9-18**

In **Deuteronomy 1:9-18**, Moses describes his frustration with trying to be judge and be the "decider" for so many Israelites, and how they agreed and he appointed subordinate judges to share the load. Moses says he asked the people, on his own initiative. He does not mention that his father-in-law, Jethro, advised him to appoint subordinate judges from among the elders (**Exodus 18**).

Moses may have dropped Jethro from the tale because he was a Midianite, and Israel had just fought against the local Midianite tribes. But throughout Deuteronomy, many details are condensed, dropped or "smoothed over."

**Deuteronomy 1:12** - "How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife?"

"Oh how?" = *eykhah* - usually begins a lamentation (The Book of Lamentations is called *Eykhah* in Hebrew because it begins with this word)

The word *eykhah* appears only once before this in the Torah, when Adam and Eve have eaten fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and they try to hide from God among the trees of the garden. God calls out: "*Ayekhah?*" — a variant spelling, usually

translated as “Where are you?” But it could also be translated as “How are you?” or even “Oh, how could you?”

Moses says “*eykhah*” five times in the book of Deuteronomy, revealing his own exhaustion and frustration with the people. Moses' life included moments of intense revelation and a continuing communication with God like no other. But it was also punctuated by frustration, impatience, anger and exhaustion.

### Emphasizing Justice

**Deuteronomy 1:16** - "And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him."

Moses takes time to repeat instructions for judges here, at the very beginning of Deuteronomy, the "book of the Law" and as Israel is poised to enter the Promised Land as a new nation. These words about the rule of law and justice come at the beginning of what is basically their new Constitution.

"hear" = *shamo'a* - Not an imperative command, but the infinitive form of hear, more like "be hearing" i.e. hear them out, listen continuously and not cut it short.

"Go behind the words of the litigants and get at the truth...Pay attention to every nuance of their utterances." - commentary on this verse in the Or Ha-hayyim

"between" = *'ach* - brother of the same parents, thus reciprocal, equal

The rabbis said this word means “strictly equal and impartial treatment.”

"Respect of persons" means "lifting up the face toward." So the rabbis said a judge should not even gaze at one litigant longer than the other.

The stranger (*ger*) or imigrant or alien was especially under the protection of God and should receive justice because of his vulnerability.

**Deuteronomy 1:17** - "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it."

i.e. "rich and poor" not just in money or goods, age or status but also in reputation and good deeds.

A judge should not take note of external appearances, and neither defer to the rich or pity the poor in a court of law.

This is later emphasized by King Jehoshaphat:

- **2 Chronicles 19:6-7** - "And said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts (bribes).

The judgment is "for the Lord." Man is created in the image of God. If you convict the innocent it is like you have deprived your Creator of something and perverted the judgment of heaven.

Even so, justice through human judges would still be imperfect in this world. But Messiah will "not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." (**Isaiah 11:3-4**)

### **Recalling the Evil Report of the Spies - Deuteronomy 1:19-36**

The incident of the spies is recalled, but not the sin of the Golden Calf. Why?

Because Israel was now in the same position it was before - about to enter the land. The first generation had refused after the report of the spies. The current generation had the same opportunity.

(See **Numbers 13:1-33**)

**Deuteronomy 1:29-30** - "Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes;"

Actually, it was Caleb and Joshua, the two scouts who gave the minority report in favor of crossing the border, who reminded the people that God would fight for them. But in this week's Torah portion, Moses claims *he* was the one who argued with the Israelites.

[This is a good time to again consider what "giants" we fear. This fear is keeping us from inheriting fully the Promise of God. "Dread not! Neither be afraid of them."]

**Deuteronomy 1:41** - "Then ye answered and said unto me, We have sinned against the LORD, we will go up and fight, according to all that the LORD our God commanded us. And when ye had girded on every man his weapons of war, ye were ready to go up into the hill."

[As bad as the fear and unbelief shown in the incident of the spies was, this presumptuous plan made against God's command to attack the Canaanites made things worse. Our "great ideas" and schemes that contradict or try to get around God's plain word are always evil, even if they're for a good cause and made with sincerity. Instead, we need to respond to the Holy Spirit in faith, in the moment, to be "instant in

season and out" (**2 Timothy 4:2**)] Delayed obedience became disobedience here.

### Why Was Moses Prevented from Entering the Land?

**Deuteronomy 1:37** - "Also the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither."

Moses implies he was prevented from entering the Land because of their rebellion. Because of their resistance, he did not insist on going forward, and maybe this is part of the reason.

No mention is made of the "striking the rock" incident (**Numbers 20**), which previously was said to be the sole reason. That is only mentioned much later, in **Deuteronomy 32:51**.

Moses, now 120 years old, includes himself (and Aaron) in the generation that would die before entering the Land. He implies that their failure to rely on God is the reason why God will not let him cross into Canaan before he dies. Ramban (13th century rabbi also called Nachmanides) wrote that Moses wanted to demonstrate that the whole community is responsible for and suffers from any lack of faith in God. As the leader of all the Israelites, Moses had the most responsibility.

Moses had failed to instill enough *ma-aminim* (faith, reliance, trust, "amen") in the Israelites by the time they reached the southern border of Canaan.

Also, Moses lumps this new generation in with the old one - "for your sake."

### Striking the Rock Twice

Remember that the Rock was Christ:

- **1 Corinthians 10:3-4** - "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."

Moses striking the rock earlier in **Exodus 17** "pre-enacted" Christ's crucifixion, a pre-requisite for the living water. Speaking to the rock as the pre-incarnate Christ would produce again the rivers of living water, available because of that sacrifice.

However, Christ died "once for all." Striking it again (twice!) implied that Christ's sacrifice would not be enough, but would have to be repeated.

A rabbinical reflection:

"When a child is small, his teacher hits him and educates him. But when he grows up, he corrects him with words. So God said to Moses: When this rock was young, you struck it, as it is said, 'And you shall strike the rock...' (**Exodus 17:6**) But now, 'You shall

Speak to the rock' - Recite over it a chapter of Torah and that will produce water from the rock!" - Yalkut Shimoni 763

Moses' act of unbelief was an offence. But "woe to those by whom the offence comes."

- **Matthew 18:7** - "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

Moses also represents the Law, which in the hands of the leaders of an unbelieving generation of Jewish leaders resulted in Christ to be arrested and handed over to the Romans.

Also, in one sense, the Law (typified by Moses) had to give way to a new leader, the Messiah (typified by Joshua).

The combination of these events led to Moses being prevented from leading Israel into the Promised Land.

[For all the possible reasons the rabbis have offered for Moses' ban, see [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/3839434/jewish/Moses-Strikes-the-Rock-The-Full-Story.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3839434/jewish/Moses-Strikes-the-Rock-The-Full-Story.htm)]

**Other Sources:**

<https://mtorah.com/?s=Devarim>

<https://www.templemontreal.ca/learn/torah-portion/>

[https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide2017-Deu/Deu-1.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Deu/Deu-1.cfm)