

Remembering the Journey, Preparing for the Future

Parashat Devarim (Deuteronomy 1:1–3:22)

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Objective:

To introduce the themes of Parashat Devarim and understand how Moses' words prepare Israel for their future.

B. Key Verse:

"These are the words (devarim) that Moses spoke to all Israel..." (Deuteronomy 1:1)

C. Opening Thought:

Parashat Devarim marks the beginning of Moses' final address. It's a moment of reflection, correction, encouragement, and covenantal renewal.

II. CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE OF DEUTERONOMY

A. Deuteronomy = Devarim = "Words"

B. Fifth book of the Torah, presented as Moses' farewell speeches before Israel enters the Land.

C. Purpose: Reinforcement of Torah observance and covenantal responsibility.

Also to educate those who were born in the wilderness after Sinai on the journey and the Torah covenant made with Israel.

D. Date & Setting: 40th year, 11th month, east of the Jordan River.

E. Moshe is giving the Torah a second time. This time, the main recipients are those who have been born after the Torah was given at Sinai some forty years earlier.

F. This is where we get the common name for this book.

III. SECTION BREAKDOWN AND DISCUSSION POINTS

A. Moses Recounts Israel's Journey (1:1–18)

B. Review of events from Sinai, including:

1. Appointment of judges (1:9–18)

“And I spoke unto you at that time, saying: ‘I am not able to bear you myself alone; the Lord your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude.— The Lord, the God of your fathers, make you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you, as He hath promised you!— How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife? Get you, from each one of your tribes, wise men, and understanding, and full of knowledge, and I will make them heads over you.’ And ye answered me, and said: ‘The thing which thou hast spoken is good for us to do.’ So I took the heads of your tribes, wise men, and full of knowledge, and made them heads over

you, captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, and captains of fifties, and captains of tens, and officers, tribe by tribe. And I charged your judges at that time, saying: 'Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; ye shall hear the small and the great alike; ye shall not be afraid of the face of any man; for the judgment is God's; and the cause that is too hard for you ye shall bring unto me, and I will hear it.' And I commanded you at that time all the things which ye should do." (Deuteronomy 1:9–18, JPS 1917)

2. Delegation of leadership responsibility

C. Leadership is to be shared.

1. This teaches us about responsibility in community life.

- a) Few should be leaders
- b) Most are not qualified
- c) Leaders are under stricter rules

"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." (James 3:1, NASB95)

- d) This brings more severe punishment

"If there arise in the midst of thee a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams—and he give thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spoke unto thee—saying: 'Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them'; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or unto that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God putteth you to proof, to know whether ye do love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your

soul. After the Lord your God shall ye walk, and Him shall ye fear, and His commandments shall ye keep, and unto His voice shall ye hearken, and Him shall ye serve, and unto Him shall ye cleave. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken perversion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage, to draw thee aside out of the way which the Lord thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put away the evil from the midst of thee.” (Deuteronomy 13:2–6, JPS 1917)

2. We are to follow our leaders (Dt. 17:8-13)

“If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, even matters of controversy within thy gates; then shalt thou arise, and get thee up unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose. And thou shall come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days; and thou shalt inquire; and they shall declare unto thee the sentence of judgment. And thou shalt do according to the tenor of the sentence, which they shall declare unto thee from that place which the Lord shall choose; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they shall teach thee. According to the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do; thou shalt not turn aside from the sentence which they shall declare unto thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. And the man that doeth presumptuously, in not hearkening unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die; and thou shalt exterminate the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.” (Deuteronomy 17:8–13, JPS 1917)

3. We also have the example of Nadav and Avihu as well as Ezekiel’s watchman

passages in Eze. 3:17-21 & 33:7-9

4. The sages also addressed this in Mishneh Avot 1:11

“Wise men, be careful with your words, lest you incur the penalty of exile and be banished to a place of evil waters, and the disciples who come after you drink and die...”

5. This does not mean we will be clones of our leaders

D. The Sin of the Spies and Delay (1:19–46)

1. Refusal to enter the Land due to fear and lack of trust (Num. 13–14 revisited).
2. God’s judgment: the generation would die in the wilderness.
3. We should not allow fear affect our faith and obedience.

E. Wandering and Victories (2:1–3:22)

1. Israel’s 38 years of wandering summarized.
 - a) According to Numbers/Bamidbar, Israel camped at 42 different locations during their journeys.
 - b) Encampments lasted from a few days to ~11 months
 - c) The only location they may have revisited was Kadesh Barnea
2. Respect for Edom, Moab, and Ammon (Deut. 2:4–23)
3. Defeat of Sihon and Og—preparation for entering the land.
4. These victories teach us that The Almighty is faithful and his timing is spot on.?

IV. KEY THEMES

A. Memory as a Moral Anchor

1. Reflecting on the past is essential for growth. Dwelling on it, not so much.

B. Torah memory is communal, moral, and covenantal—not just historical.

1. Leadership and Responsibility

C. Leadership is distributed for the sake of justice and community health.

D. Qualities of leaders: wisdom, understanding, and fairness (1:13).

“Get you, from each one of your tribes, wise men, and understanding, and full of knowledge, and I will make them heads over you.” (Deuteronomy 1:13, JPS 1917)

E. Consequences of Disobedience

1. Fear led to rebellion, which led to delay and death in the wilderness.

a) IF Israel had gone directly to Canaan without going to Sinai and the other encampments, they could have reached Canaan in about a month.

b) IF Israel had gone directly to Sinai, camped there for the 40 days Moshe spent the first time on the mountain, then gone

F. Obedience is not just personal—it affects the whole community.

1. God's Faithfulness Despite Failures
2. Even after rebellion, God leads Israel to victories.
3. God's promises endure across generations.

V. MODERN APPLICATION

A. Personal Application

1. Trusting God in Uncertainty:

Like the Israelites who feared entering the land, we often hesitate when faced with new challenges. This portion reminds us to trust God's guidance even when the path ahead looks daunting.

2. Learning from Our Past:

Instead of hiding our failures, Moses models using the past as a teaching tool. We must reflect, learn, and grow from our missteps.

3. Choosing Faith Over Fear:

What choices are we making today out of fear? Are we limiting God's power by assuming defeat in advance?

4. Developing Just Leadership:

In our families, communities, and congregations, we should be raising and

supporting leaders who reflect the Torah’s standards of wisdom, understanding, and impartiality.

B. Societal Application

1. Justice and Shared Leadership:

Moses’ delegation reminds us of the importance of shared, transparent, and wise leadership—something desperately needed in civic, religious, and community structures today.

2. National Accountability:

Just as Israel’s sin affected the whole nation, our societal choices (corruption, injustice, apathy) impact everyone. Torah calls for collective responsibility and righteousness.

3. Preserving Collective Memory:

Societies that forget their moral and spiritual heritage often repeat their mistakes. We must teach our history and values intentionally and truthfully—especially to younger generations.

4. Vision for the Future:

Devarim is not just backward-looking—it’s a call to prepare for the Promised Land. Are we helping the next generation inherit a better, Torah-aligned world?

VI. CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

A. Summary Thought:

Devarim invites us to *remember, reflect, and respond*. It's not just about Israel's journey, but about ours—personal and collective.

B. Challenge Question:

What part of your journey is God asking you to reflect on in order to prepare for what's next?

C. Hebrew Vocabulary Focus:

1. *Devarim* (דברים) – Words, matters
2. *Zachor* (זכור) – Remember
3. *Emunah* (אמונה) – Faith/trust
4. *Shoftim* (שופטים) – Judges/leaders