

D'varim

דברים “Words”

Dueteronomy 1:1 – 3:22

Torah Together



In Greek, **Deuteronomy** means “second law,” or in this case a restatement of the law. Considered by many to be the most important book in the Old Testament, it is quoted more than any other book in the Bible. *Yeshua* quoted from it when tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). Deuteronomy is thought to be the “Book of the Covenant” discovered in the temple during Josiah’s reign (**II Chronicles 34**).

1. The Command to Leave Horeb - 1:1-8

a) Exactly where did the events recorded in this chapter take place? What and where is the Arabah? What is another name for Horeb? Can you locate Mount Seir and Kadesh Barnea?

Moses spoke these words as the Israelites were encamped just east of the Jordan river, north of the Dead Sea, across from Jericho. The Arabah (meaning “dry” or “burnt up”) is the valley that runs north from the Gulf of Aqaba past the Dead Sea part way up the Jordan valley. (It is hot & desolate.) Mount Sinai was also known as Horeb. Mount Seir is commonly thought to be Petra, in the mountains of southern Jordan, in Edom. Kadesh Barnea is thought to be in southern Isreal, in the Negev, on today’s border with Egypt.

b) Exactly when did the events in this chapter take place? About how old was Moses at this time?

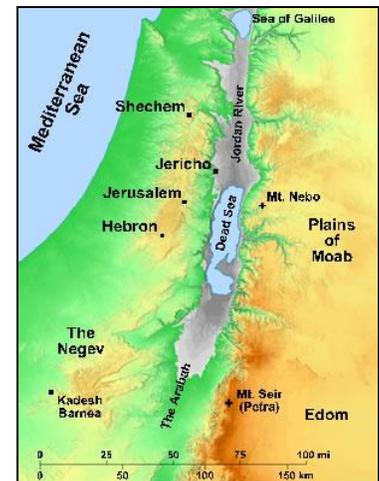
Verse 3 states that these events began on the 1st day of the 11th month, 40 years after leaving Egypt. Moses was about 120 years old at this time.

“These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the desert east of the Jordan”

Deuteronomy 1:1

c) Verse 6 begins Moses’ address to the people of Israel. What event in their history is Moses describing here? Approximately when did this event occur?

After spending approximately a year at Mount Sinai (receiving the Torah and building the Tabernacle) God told Moses it was time to go take the land that He had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.



These are Moses’ last words to the Israelites as they prepared to enter the land of Israel after 40 years in the desert. Moses died within just a few months of when these words were spoken.

The Plains of Moab are quite expansive with plenty of room for the several million Israelites to encamp. Furthermore, the land was much more fertile and productive than the desert land that they had been wandering in over the past forty years. Also, from this plateau, the Israelites could clearly see the land that God intended for them to possess. It was an ideal starting point for the next phase of their history, the conquest of the land that God had promised to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.



View westward from atop Mount Nebo in Jordan

A valley runs north from the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea to the Dead Sea and up to the Jordan River. This valley is called the *Arabah* which means “dry” or “burnt up.” The land in the valley rises slightly from sea level and then descends to the Dead Sea which is some 1400 feet below sea level, the lowest place on earth. To the east of this scorching and desolate landscape a large plateau, known as the Plains of Moab, rises to 2500 feet above sea level. On this plateau there is a hill called Mount Nebo. From Mount Nebo, one can look westward, across the *Arabah* and the Dead Sea, and see the hills surrounding Jerusalem and the Land of Israel on the other side, clear to the Mediterranean Sea.

As the Book of Deuteronomy opens, the Israelites are encamped on the Plains of Moab. They have been wandering in the desert south and west of here for forty years and are now in a position to enter the land God promised them. It is here that Moses records his last words to the Israelites, knowing that he will not accompany them as they cross the Jordan River. He will die and be buried here on Mount Nebo.

Today, Mount Nebo is easily reached from Amman, the capital of Jordan. There are the ruins of a 5th century church and a modern bronze statue known as the **Brazen Serpent** by Italian artist Giovanni Fantoni. It is symbolic of the bronze serpent created by Moses in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4-9) and the cross upon which *Yeshua* (Jesus) was crucified (John 3:14).

2. The Appointment of Leaders - 1:9-18

When and where did the event described in this passage occur? Who advised Moses about how best to judge and lead the Israelites?

When Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, visited Moses just after the Israelites arrived from Egypt, he saw the way Moses was spending all his time with the people and suggested that he delegate responsibility to various leaders.

3. Spies Sent Out - 1:19-25

In this passage, Moses describes the events recorded in Numbers 13. Do you find any differences in the two accounts? What additional information does Moses add?

In this passage, Moses relates that it was the people's idea to send the 12 spies into the land and Moses agreed. In the Numbers version, it appears that God told them to send in the spies. Upon reflection, it makes more sense that the people asked to send in the spies first (God certainly didn't need to send them in) and God agreed to their request.

4. Rebellion against God - 1:26-46

a) In this passage, Moses describes the rebellion of the Israelites after the return of the spies (Numbers 14). What additional information does Moses add?

The details given here agree with the description in Numbers. However, Moses adds some detail, e.g., in verse 28 the people accuse the spies saying, "our brothers have made us lose heart." The entire passage gives more detail to the sin of the people - failure to trust in God.

b) In verse 37, Moses states that the people are to blame for God's anger at him. Describe the event that led God to be angry with Moses. Do you think the people were to blame?

Although Moses blamed the people for God's anger with him, the event that caused God to be angry at Moses was when he struck the rock at Kadesh Barnea to produce water instead of speaking to it as God had directed (Numbers 20). It is certainly possible that Moses' frustration and irritation at the Israelites' lack of faith caused him to be angry and "lose his temper."

Scripture Link:

Exodus 18 explains what led Moses to appoint lower-level leaders for the Israelites.

Sometimes it can be difficult to understand the Israelites' apparent lack of faith. It had only been about a year since God miraculously led them out of Egypt. Yet here on the doorstep of the Promised Land, the people have a crisis of faith, not believing that God could do what he promised.

Scripture Link:

Numbers 20:1-13

describe the events that led to God's anger with Moses. Can you see why God was angry with Moses?

5. Wanderings in the Desert - 2:1-23

a) Verse 1 states that “for a long time we made our way around the hill country of Seir.” About how long do you think the Israelites spent wandering in the desert?

The Israelites spent about 38 years wandering around the desert in southern Israel and Edom.

b) What were God’s instructions to the Israelites concerning their “brothers, the descendants of Esau?” Did the Israelites follow these instructions? What happened? (Hint: See Numbers 20) Were the Israelites to own any land in Edom? Why or why not?

Although the Edomites would be afraid of the Israelites, they were not to “provoke them to war.” (The Israelites were to have no inheritance [land] in Edom.) According to Numbers 20, the Israelites were forced to go around Edom but there were no conflicts with the Edomites.

c) What were God’s instructions to the Israelites concerning the Ammonites, the descendants of Lot? Were they obedient to these instructions?

Similarly, God told the Israelites not to provoke the Ammonites and that none of their land would be given to the Israelites. The Israelites did not fight with the Ammonites and took none of their land.

6. Defeat of Sihon King of Heshbon - 2:24-37

a) When the Israelites asked Sihon, King of Heshbon, to pass through his land, what was his response? What happened?

When the Israelites asked to pass through Sihon’s kingdom, he came out and met them in battle. The Israelites were victorious at the battle of Jahaz, conquering the kingdom and taking control of the land.

b) Did the Israelites have reason to believe that they would be victorious over Sihon and the Amorites? Why or why not? How might this affect their future?

God had made it clear to Moses (and Moses made it clear to the people) that God would give them victory over Sihon. Furthermore, God said that other nations would hear of the Israelite victories and be fearful of them.

c) What did the Israelites do to Sihon, his army, and his country? Why was this done? What did they do to the Ammonites? Why?

The Israelites destroyed all the cities and inhabitants of Sihon’s kingdom. (The term used to describe the destruction is “cherem.” See Leviticus 27) However, they did not take any of the land of the Ammonites, as God had instructed.

Scripture Link:

Numbers 21:21-26 tell what happened when the Israelites encountered Sihon, the King of Heshbon. The outcome was much different than their previous encounters with the Edomites and the Ammonites. Can you think of any reason for the different outcomes?

Leviticus 27 defines the type of sacrifice known as **cherem** and often translated as “devoted to God.” As contrasted with a sacrifice that is “dedicated to God,” a **cherem** sacrifice is to be used entirely for the purposes of God without the possibility of redemption. Often this meant that the sacrifice was completely destroyed for God, as was the case with Sihon and the Amorites.

7. Defeat of Og King of Bashan - 3:1-11

a) What happened as the Israelites approached Bashan? Did they have reason to believe that they would win the battle at Edrei? What became of Og, his army, and his country?

Og and his army met the Israelites as they moved north from Heshbon. The Israelites defeated Og and his army at Edrei. God had said that he had already handed them over to the Israelites. The army and all the people were completely destroyed (“cherem”).

b) Can you locate on a map the land conquered by the Israelites?

The land conquered by the Israelites at this time lay on the east side of the Jordan river and stretched from the north end of the Dead Sea to Mount Hermon in northern Israel.

8. Division of the Land - 3:12-22

a) Which of the tribes of Israel received the land obtained when they defeated Sihon, king of Heshbon and Og, king of Bashan? Which tribes received which land?

The tribes of Reuben and Gad received the southern portion of the conquered land (from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea) and half the tribe of Manasseh received the northern portion, known as Gilead.

b) What did the men from these tribes have to do before they could live on this land?

The men from these tribes were to fight with the rest of the Israelites as they took possession of the rest of the land of Israel. (See Numbers 32) They could return to their families after the conquest of Canaan was completed.

c) What words of encouragement does Moses have for Joshua as he prepared to cross the Jordan?

Moses assured Joshua that what the Israelites had done to Sihon and Og they would also do to the inhabitants of Canaan because God was with them.

Scripture Link:

Numbers 32 tells the interesting story of the Israelite tribes that wished to have their share of the Promised Land on the east side of the Jordan river.

Digging deeper

1. Chapter 2 describes a common action that occurred in the history of the Edomites (descendants of Esau), the Ammonites and the Moabites (descendants of Lot), as well as the Israelites and the Caphtorites (people from Crete). What was this action? Does this give you any insight into the way God works in the history of man?

In all these cases, one people drove out another and took over their land: The Edomites (descendants of Esau) drove out the Horites taking over the hill country of Seir; the Ammonites and the Moabites (descendants of Lot) drove out the Rephaites taking over their land and cities; and we know that the Israelites drove out the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites and others, taking over the land of Israel. The passage also refers to people from Caphtor (Crete) driving out the Avvites from Gaza (southwestern Israel). These Caphtorites became the Philistines. Thus it appears that God uses one group of people as an instrument of judgment on another. Certainly, that is the case with the Israelites as they conquered the Amorites, fulfilling God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:16.

2. Read Hebrews 3:7 - 4:11. According to this passage, what was the root cause of the Israelites' sin that caused them to wander in the desert for 40 years? What does the writer equate with entering the Promised Land? What lessons can you learn from this?

The root cause of the Israelites' sin was a "hardening of their hearts" which caused them to lack faith in God (unbelief). (God had said that they would be successful if they entered the land to take possession of it, but they doubted His word.) The passage equates entering the Promised Land with entering God's rest. So, as a hard heart kept the Israelites from entering the Promised Land, a hard heart in us keeps us from entering into God's sabbath rest. The idea is to always keep a soft heart, listening for God's words and seeking to do His will (obey His commands) at all times.

For each *Torah* portion (*Parashah*), the ancient Hebrew scribes defined a corresponding reading from the prophets, called the *Haftarah* (conclusion). These passages are tied to the *Torah* portion by a key idea or theme. Also, after the New Testament (*Brit Hadashah*) was formalized, Bible scholars chose from it passages that also complement the *Torah* portion. These often provide additional insight into God's character and can lead to a better understanding of the unity and consistency of God's word.

For further study, see
Haftarah : Isaiah 1:1-27
Brit Hadashah : John 15:1-11; Hebrews 3:7-4:11