

Devarim Selected Shorts – Number 39  
Rabbi Eliot Malomet Shabbat Hazon 8 Av 5781 July 17, 2021

דברים א':א

(א) אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל-כל-ישראל בעבר הירדן במדבר בערבה מול סוף ביו-פארן וביו-תפל ולבן ונחצרת ודי זקב:

Deuteronomy 1:1

(1) *These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan.— Through the wilderness, in the Arabah near Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazereth, and Di-zahab...* There are so many places named in this verse, and another 53 place names in this parasha! The Torah emerges in a world without the visual depiction of information. Maps won't exist for several hundred years. This is geography as narrative; cartography as text. Embedded in this text is a structure of values: God assigns different lands to different peoples and all peoples are related to one another by common ancestry. In presenting Israel's location at the end of the Torah, we hearken back to the Torah's first story with God asking Adam: איכה, where are you? Adam doesn't know where he is; here, we can almost pinpoint Israel's geographic location.

דברים א':ג

(ג) ויהי בארבעים שנה בעשתי-עשר החדש באחד לחודש דבר משה אל-בני ישראל ככל אשר צנה ה' אתו אלהם:

Deuteronomy 1:3

(3) *It was in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, that Moses addressed the Israelites in accordance with the instructions that the LORD had given him for them...* And here we also can pinpoint Israel's temporal setting. Consider the following: Moses dies on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the 40<sup>th</sup> year since the Exodus. How do we know this? The Israelites crossed the Jordan on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month in year 41 from the Exodus (Josh 4:19). 3 days earlier (the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month) they completed the 30-day mourning period for Moses. Thus we deduce that Moses died on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month (ie. 7 Adar which is observed as Moses' Yahrzeit to this day!) The speeches of Devarim are delivered from the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 11<sup>th</sup> month to the 7<sup>th</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup> month, ie. 37 days. An interesting contrast: after getting the Ten Commandments, Moses goes up Mount Sinai and goes silent for 40 days. Here, Moses doesn't stop talking in front of the people for 37 days, then goes up Mount Nebo to die. But wait! Wasn't Moses supposed to die after the Midian war? (See Numbers 31:2) Yes! But we get the

sense that he is in no rush to die (a theme elaborated beautifully in the classic midrash). A moderately paced reading of this filibuster takes about 3 hours, and in the synagogue these speeches will continue for next 8-10 weeks! The more he speaks the more he stays alive. It's not in his self-interest to stop speaking words of Torah, they keep him alive. There's a message here.

דברים א':ד

(ד) אחרי הלתו את סיוח מלך האמרי אשר יושב בהשבוך ואת עוג מלך הבשן אשר-יושב בעשתרת באדרעי:

Deuteronomy 1:4

(4) *after he had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtaroth [and] Edrei.* We get a sense that Moses is being a little selective in what he recounts here. The book of Numbers ends with a rather brutal war against Midian but there is no mention of that here.

דברים א':ח

(ח) ראה נתתי לפניכם את-הארץ באו ורשו את-הארץ אשר נשבע ה' לאבותיכם לאבריהם ליצחק וליעקב לתת להם ולזרעם אחריהם:

Deuteronomy 1:8

(8) *See, I place **The Land** at your disposal. Go, possess **The Land** that the LORD swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to assign to them and to their descendants after them.* This is Moses' recollection of what God said when they were done at Sinai. Recall that the original plan was to leave Egypt, get God's covenant, build the mishkan, and move on into **The Land**. The way Moses tells it, it is as if God cannot wait to fulfil the promise. But that was not meant to be. Notice that the Land of Israel is almost always referred to simply as **The Land**. This ties nicely with God's first message to Abraham, לך-לך... אל- Go forth to **The Land** that I will show you. **The Land** will emerge as one of the central themes of Deuteronomy.

דברים א':כ"ג

(כג) ויטב בעיני הדבר ואקח מכם שנים עשר אנשים איש אחד לשבט:

Deuteronomy 1:23

(23) *I approved of the plan, and so I selected twelve of your men, one from each tribe.* Deuteronomy tells the story of the spies differently. In Numbers, God tells Moses to *Send*

forth men. Here, the idea of reconnaissance originates from the people and Moses approves.

**דברים א':ל"א**

(לא) ובמדבר אָשֶׁר רָאִיתָ אֲשֶׁר נָשָׂאָהּ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כְּאִשֶּׁר יִשְׂאֶה אִישׁ אֶת־בְּנוֹ בְּכָל־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הִלְכְתֶם עַד־הַמִּקְוֹם הַזֶּה:

**Deuteronomy 1:31**

(31) and in the wilderness, where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you traveled until you came to this place. We have many metaphors for God and Israel in the desert. In Exodus (19:4) God takes Israel out of Egypt on eagles' wings. In Jeremiah, Israel is God's young bride. In Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd. The use of multiple metaphors to depict the God-Israel relationship is one of the defining features of the Bible and animates Jewish theology to this day.

**דברים א':ל"ז**

(לז) גַּם־בִּי הִתְאַגַּף ה' בְּגַלְלַכֶם לֹאֲמַר גַּם־אַתָּה לֹא־תִבֹא שָׁמָּה:

**Deuteronomy 1:37**

(37) Because of you the LORD was incensed with me too, and He said: You shall not enter it either. Wait: whose fault was it that Moses couldn't go into **The Land**? Wasn't it because he struck the rock? Whatever Moses' own culpability is, we get the sense here (and throughout the book) that he blames the people for his banishment from **The Land**. This is a complicated relationship.

**דברים ב':א'**

(א) וַנִּפְּן וַנִּסַּע הַמִּדְבָּרָה דֶּרֶךְ יַם־סוּף כְּאִשֶּׁר דִּבֶּר ה' אֵלַי וַנִּסַּב אֶת־הַר־שִׁעִיר יָמִים רַבִּים: {ס}

**Deuteronomy 2:1**

(1) And we turned and we journeyed back into the wilderness by the way of the Sea of Reeds, as the LORD had spoken to me, and skirted the hill country of Seir a long time. Moses includes himself in the "we". A few verses earlier, God told the people to turn for themselves and journey into the desert. But Moses understands that he must lead them. **We turned. We journeyed.**

**דברים ב':י"ט**

(יט) וְקִרְבַּתְךָ מוֹל בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן אֶל־תִּצְרַם וְאֶל־תִּתְגַּר בָּם כִּי לֹא־אָמַן מֵאֲרָץ בְּנֵי־עַמּוֹן לִךְ יְרֻשָׁה כִּי לְבָנֵי־לוֹט נְתִיבָהּ יְרֻשָׁה:

**Deuteronomy 2:19**

(19) You will then be close to the Ammonites; do not harass them or start a fight with them. For I will not give any part of the land of the Ammonites to you as a possession; I have assigned it as a possession to the descendants of

Lot.— Lest anyone claim that God only apportioned land to Israel, here the Torah presents God giving the "Land of the Ammonites" - to the Ammonites, the descendants of Lot. The theology embedded in this recounting is that the apportionment of territory to nations and peoples is the divine prerogative. Nations are defined by borders, and borders are defined by God.

**דברים ג':ט"ו**

(ט) צִידוֹנִים יִקְרָאוּ לְהַרְמוֹן שְׂרָגוֹ וְהַאֲמֹלִי יִקְרָאוּ לוֹ שִׁנִּיר:

**Deuteronomy 3:9**

(9) Sidonians called Hermon Sirion, and the Amorites call it Senir— Throughout this parasha we have various statements of this type, pointing to an interesting history of place naming and settlement. This would be akin to saying: Americans call the territory we live in, New Jersey, and the Lenape call it Lenapehoking.

**Haftara Texts**

**ישעיהו א':ב'**

(ב) שָׁמְעוּ שָׁמַיִם וְהִאֲזִינִי אֲרֶץ כִּי ה' דִּבֶּר בְּנִים גְּדֹלְתֵי וְרוֹמְמֹתַי וְהֵם קָשְׁעוּ כִּי:

**Isaiah 1:2**

(2) **Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up— And they have rebelled against Me!** Isaiah channels Moses, but inverts the order of heaven and earth. (Deut. 32:1)

Isaiah 1:2 - HAZON		Deut. 32:1 SONG OF MOSES	
שָׁמְעוּ שָׁמַיִם	<b>Hear, O heavens</b>	הִאֲזִינִי הַשָּׁמַיִם	<b>Give ear, O heavens</b>
וְהִאֲזִינִי אֲרֶץ	<b>and give ear, O earth,</b>	וְאִדְבְּרָה	<b>let me speak</b>
כִּי ה' דִּבֶּר	<b>For the LORD has spoken</b>	וְתִשְׁמַע הָאֲרֶץ אִמְרֵי־יְיָ:	<b>Let the earth hear the words that I utter</b>

Isaiah's listeners would have easily gotten the reference to the Song of Moses. There Moses speaks for himself; here Isaiah speaks for God. Both poems speak of Israel's duplicity and contain the motif of the rebellious child. The message: what Moses said long ago has come to pass in the here and now.

**ישעיהו א':י'**

שָׁמְעוּ דְבַר־ה' קְצִינֵי סֹדֶם הִאֲזִינִי תוֹרַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ עִם עֲמֶרְהָ:

**Isaiah 1:10**

**Hear the word of the LORD, You chieftains of Sodom; Give ear to our God's instruction, You folk of Gomorrah!** How bad do you have to be to be compared to Sodom and Gomorrah? Pretty bad. But you can turn your destiny around. That's Isaiah's mission.

Shabbat Shalom!