

Parasha 44 - **D'varim** ("Words")

Torah:	Deut 1:1-3:22
Haphtarah:	Isaiah 1:1-27
B'rit Chadasha:	Acts 7:51-8:4 (recommended by Jeff Feinberg) John 15:1-11; Hebrews 3:7-4:11 (recommended by David Stern)

This week's Torah portion recounts the history of Israel from the time they left Mt. Sinai until the time that Joshua was commissioned as Moses' successor and Israel was about to enter the promised land. Disbelief in G-d's promises causes Israel to spend almost 40 years wandering in the wilderness when they could have entered the land almost immediately after leaving Sinai. Aghast at G-d's decree that they must spend a whole generation wandering because of their disobedience, Israel hastily rallies troops to conquer the Promised Land, despite G-d's warning that He is not behind them. Consequently, they suffer a crushing defeat.

Edom and Moab, peoples related to the Israelites, allow Israel to pass through their territories enroute to the Promised Land. Afterwards, because they denied Israel passage to Canaan, Israel defeated the kings Og and Sihon and acquired their lands (areas east of the Jordan and north of the Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites). It is decided that these acquired lands will be allotted to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. This is under the condition though that they will first cross the Jordan with the other Israelite tribes and assist in the conquest of Canaan.

The defeat on Sihon and Og were events of great significance for Israel. True, Israel had fought the Amalekites after leaving Egypt, but the kingdoms of Og and Sihon consisted of large numbers of heavily fortified cities, conquering them was quite an accomplishment for a people who did not have the financial resources that came from settled agricultural life. The last verses of the Torah portion tell us how Joshua was given the wisdom to understand that the victories over Og and Sihon were peanuts compared to the amazing things that G-d could do for Israel in the land if they trusted G-d wholeheartedly.

On our pilgrim's journey through this life, we must at least occasionally reflect on past successes and failures, taking what we learn from them and applying that knowledge in facing whatever challenges confront us in the present and/or future.

It's so easy to blame others for things that are our responsibility. In Deut 1:28, the Israelites said: "Our brothers made us lose heart. They say 'The people are stronger and taller than we are. The cities are large with walls up to the sky.'" Even Moses was not immune to this kind of trap. In speaking of his fellow Israelites and G-d forbidding him to enter the Promised Land, Moses said: "Because of you the L-RD became angry with me" (Deut 1:37). This past week, how well has each of us accepted responsibility for our own actions? True, maybe someone else soaked the fuse in gasoline, but so often, no one else but us lit the match...

Deut 1:40: “Turn around and set out toward the desert along the route to the Sea of Suf”. Israel previously had been heading straight for the promised land, but G-d ordered them to make an about face, 180 degrees, and to back off so that they could have time to deal with what was causing them not to trust G-d. The verse we looked at earlier where Israel said “Our brothers made us lose heart” shows us that Israel understood that somehow, something made them lose heart (even if they attributed that losing heart to the wrong cause). If we’re feeling down and discouraged, how often do we carefully consider the reasons why we might be in that state of heart and/or mind and focus on the things that can help us through the difficulty (G-d’s goodness for instance?)

Deut 1:5: “East of the Jordan in the territory of Moab. Moses began to expound this Torah”. I was curious about this word “expound”, so I looked it up. The Hebrew comes from a root meaning “to dig a well [especially in the desert]” or “to engrave”. This week, when your spiritual throat was parched, did you have a well you could go to? Also, a piece of jewelry can be beautiful but becomes an even more special gift after having been engraved with a personalized message. Have you spent time in G-d’s word lately allowing Him to engrave His message of love on your heart?

Deut 1:39: “And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good and evil – they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it.” Here, persons not knowing good and evil qualify to enter a good land. In Genesis, Adam and Eve’s knowledge of both good and evil caused them to lose their hold on the promised land of the garden of Eden. Why? What does it mean to **know** both good and evil? In scripture, the work for “know” is often used euphemistically, meaning, “to be intimate with”. For example, “so-and-so knew his wife, and she conceived and bore a child”. In the same way that scripture emphasizes the value of a man “knowing” only 1 woman (and vice versa) in the context of marriage, we are not meant to be intimate with evil, but to stand before Yeshua, the officiator at the wedding between us and Torah and to say “I do”.

Where the Torah portion focuses on how when we are disobedient, no fruit is forthcoming, the Haphtarah emphasizes that when we are obedient and good fruit results, we must continue in faith and obedience in order for fruit to continue to be produced...

Isaiah 1:16ff: “Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong, learn to do right. Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. ‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the L-rd. ‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.’”

The context for Feinberg’s recommended B’rit Chadasha passage for this week is when Stephen addresses the Sanhedrin in response to charges of blasphemy. Stephen recounts the history of the children of Israel from Abraham to what was then the present. Stephen very directly confronts the Sanhedrin members with their lack of faithfulness to G-d and

Torah. But he doesn't regard these Sanhedrin members as lost causes. He offers them the cure for their faithlessness, a sight for sore eyes. Acts 7:55-6: "Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of G-d, and Yeshua standing at the right hand of G-d. 'Look', he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of G-d.'"

Can you see Him? Have you been looking?

Shabbat Shalom