

**Devarim**                      **Words**                      **Getting Ready to Hear the Law a Second Time**  
**Torah:**                      Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22  
**Haftarah:**                      Isaiah 1:1-3:22  
**Brit Chadashah:**              Acts 7:51-8:4  
No reading. No Jewish Hero. No Torah parade.

We begin Deuteronomy this week and this portion takes us from the disobedience at Kadesh Barnea, through the exiting from the wilderness, and on to the journey around Edom, Moab and Ammon. It takes us through the conquest of the kingdoms of Sihon and Og, whose combined territory was given the 2 ½ tribes (Reuben, Gad and part of Manasseh).

At the first disobedience at Kadesh Barnea, the rebellious people make probably one of the stupidest statements recorded in the Bible: “. . . it is because G-d hates us that He took us out of Egypt, in order to deliver into the hands of the Amorites and destroy us.” (Deut. 1:27) They took no heed of Moses affirmation of G-d's call and His provision and are condemned to wander in the wilderness for an entire generation.

There is a potentially confusing time line given. Let me explain. Deut. 1:3 says they are in their fortieth year from Egypt, when they arrive on the plains of Moab (1:5), after the moving around the three kingdoms, and destroying Sihon and Og (and setting up the 2 ½ tribes in Gilead). During this whole period of time, they have lacked nothing (2:7).

2:14 says that their wandering years lasted 38 years, before they go around their cousins and take on the biggest bullies in the neighbourhood. This means that the new generation had to spend two more years, beyond the 38 years of wandering, before they were able to set up camp on the plains of Moab. They saw their first military action when they annihilated Sihon and Og and took their punitive action against Moab.

During this time they left the drudgery and the shame of the wandering years behind them. The only action the lost generation experienced during the wandering was moving the camp, likely whenever the land around the camp became over grazed. At this time, the Negev and the Sinai were not yet full blown deserts, but were dry forests – no surface water, but which received adequate rain and got ground water from wells and sloughs.

When the rebellious generation was told they would have to wander for the rest of their lives, they shed tears of sorrow, but not of repentance. They did not listen when they were initially told to enter the land and now they do not listen when they are told not to try and enter the land. Trying to change G-d's mind, once He has spoken is sinful and fruitless. They perpetrated a second act of disobedience which confirmed that they were not worthy of entering the Promised Land.

In 1:46 it says they stayed at Kadesh Barnea for a long time before they went back into the wilderness, probably for two reasons. First they did not want to appear to be retreating because they were defeated and secondly they had to prepare for the wandering – perhaps making better carts and sturdier tents, and other preparations for a lifetime of wandering. They finally understood that they could not go forward and that Egypt was closed to them. If they and their children wanted to live, wandering was the only safe strategy.

Again, 2:7 said that they lacked nothing. Later we are told that their sandals and their clothes did not wear out. They also had a cloud by day and a fire by night (which is why they were probably not attacked). They were also fed by manna and quail and never lacked for water, which they likely got from springs and wells. However 2:15 also says that the hand of the L-rd was on them to destroy them in the camp. We are not told how this happened, but my best guess is some kind of early onset aging among the rebels.

The first mention of the newly arrived, second group of Philistines is mentioned (2:23). They are called the Capthorim or sea people and they were likely Minoan Greeks. They introduced iron weapons and a standing army for hire as mercenaries.

The account mentions that the entire kingdoms of Sihon and Og were devoted to destruction, except for their beasts and their treasures, which went to the people of Israel. When they conquered the kingdom of Og, they took some 60 towns, some of which were heavily fortified. Og was slightly over 3 meters tall (over 13 feet) and was listed as the last of the giants.

In Hebrew, the word for giants (Nephilim) either indicated great physical stature or, as in the Giants of Genesis 6, great fame. The daughters of men were the descendants of the line of Cain and the sons of G-d were the righteous descendants of Seth. Nephilim were not angels who interbred with men. Angels possess neither gender nor the organs necessary for reproduction.

The conquest of the lands of Sihon and Og were practice conquests, as was a police action to punish Moab. The camp was now composed of seasoned warriors who had seen the hand of G-d in action and they were now ready to camp on the plains of Moab and personally hear the Word of G-d for a second time.

They narrowly avoided destruction when they sinned with the Moabite priestesses and they were now ready to become the covenant people of G-d.

### **Sermon: Black Sabbath and the Art of Mourning**

The rock band, Black Sabbath, took their name from the Jewish custom of naming the last Sabbath before Tisha B'Av Shabbat Chazon or black Sabbath. This was the last gasp of freedom before the destruction of both the city and the temple. We are not supposed to mourn on the Sabbath, but we can rehearse past, present and future misfortunes as we consider why disasters happen – why bad things happen to good people and why good things happen to bad people. Acquiring wisdom is a suitable activity for the Sabbath.

Why bad things happen to good people, is an interesting philosophical question which Job tried to answer and he eventually concluded that G-d can do what he wants to whomever he wants, whenever He wants. In faith, we have to go according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh and if, while we are sowing good things, bad things happen to us, we need to make at least two affirmations. First, G-d is sovereign and never loses control of a situation and we need to submit our suffering to Him. Next, we need to ask ourselves how G-d wants us to respond to trials and tribulations, exercising both faith and obedience.

Last week, I spoke about some of the reasons why Jerusalem was destroyed and why the temple was burned – it was because of sinful disobedience and breaking of vows.

They had abandoned G-d and fought hard to win, after they had abandoned G-d, without ever repenting and seeking His provision and protect again. It is only as we walk with G-d that makes us His special people. Frequently, He has passed over one or several generations of those who did not walk with Him, so that He could bless the generation which seeks His face according to His Word. He is now moving among our Jewish people to bless the generation which is beginning to seek G-d through His Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth.

Over the many centuries since our Messiah walked among us, there has always been a constant trickle of our people who came to faith in the Messiah. Our prayer is that it will turn into a flood in our days – and it is starting to happen.

When we look at the fall of Jerusalem under the onslaught of both Babylon and Rome and when we consider the destruction of both temples, it is sad that so much potential was lost. In the time of our Messiah's earthly pilgrimage among us, there were more Jews alive than there are now – and many of them were gentile converts. The pace of conversion to Judaism was accelerating and if they had held off for another century without rebelling, the empire would have become Jewish.

Jews could have taken the Gospel to the ends of the earth in their millions. But despite so much lost time, it is time for our wandering to stop as we see millions of our people coming home to Israel – and starting to come home to the Messiah.

Throughout our people's wanderings, the Word and the Sabbath, along with the festival cycle, have brought our people great comfort. The Sabbath even brought comfort to our people in the death camps and we should mourn because it was through our own folly that Jerusalem was destroyed, not once, but twice. We need to remain part of the believing righteous core and lament the folly of many believers who are adopting teachings and lifestyles which go against the clear teachings of the Scriptures. May we never be found among their number.

This was the last Sabbath in the land before the first diaspora (scattering). We call it black because it precedes great tragedy. But we rejoice because our G-d has never forsaken His people and never will. It was the last Sabbath before the Romans breached Jerusalem's walls and the second diaspora began. Sadly, it is not over yet, but gladly, our land is Jewish again and many of our people are coming home.

We need to remember the underlying causes of the destruction and the dispersal and we need to make sure that none of this nonsense is allowed to be a part of our lives.

We can weep. We can remember.

We can learn not to disobey G-d. We can learn how to avoid spending our lives in an equivalent wilderness wandering of our own making.

Mourn for the right reasons and rejoice for the right reasons. Walking with G-d is the only way to live in our confusing, darkening world.

Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.