

Truth and Preception

This weeks reading is from *Parsahat Devarim* (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22*), Moshe writes the Torah retelling the story of what happened that led the people to remain in the wilderness for forty years. The reason Moshe may be retelling the story might be as a follow up to what happened at the end of the book of Bamidbar / Numbers and the people of Reuben and Gad desiring to remain on the other side of the Jordan river. The MT states the name of the last book of the Torah is “*Devarim*,” derived from the opening of the Torah portion, אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים “*Eleh ha’devarim*,” “*These are the words*.” The English translations write the word “*Deuteronomy*,” which is derived from the Greek translation Δευτερονόμιον (Deuteronomion) meaning “*second law*” because the book of Deuteronomy appears to be a reiteration and summary of the Torah. The book of Deuteronomy may be divided into 3 major sections: (1) the retelling of the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land leading to this moment. (2) the people are reminded of the necessity to obey God and His ways. And (3) discussions on the topic of the unfaithfulness of Israel, and the unfaithfulness that causes the people to lose the land (the blessings and the curses).

In the narrative, we learn that Israel received God’s Torah and are commanded to turn and go to the Promised Land. The people are leaving their old way of life and setting themselves on the path of righteousness and holiness according to God’s word. As we study the Torah, we find many parallels that not only correspond to how we should be living our lives but also provide an illustration of what happens when we place our faith and trust in the Lord and in the one the Lord sends to deliver His people, as opposed to what happens when one chooses to not trust or obey the Lord.

According to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:19-21*, the people did not appear to be unfamiliar with war prior to their entering into the Promised Land. It seems the Lord was preparing them to take the Land of Israel while at the same time showing them how important it is to realize when He is with them they can do anything. However, if they are disobedient and sin, they should expect to have fewer victories. The whole idea is whether the people were believing in and following the Lord, or having doubt in their hearts. Reading through *Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:22-27*,

it appears as if the people had some doubts. They wanted to send men into the Land to see what it was like. The Lord however had told them that the Land is good prior to their going in.

ספר דברים פרק א Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:19-27

יט ונסע מחרב ונגלף את כל-
המדבר הגדול והנורא ההוא אשר
ראיתם דרך הר האמרי כאשר
צוה יהוה אלהינו אתנו ונבא
עד קדש ברנע: כ ואמר אלכם
באתם עד-הר האמרי אשר-יהוה
אלהינו נתן לנו: כא ראה נתן
יהוה אליהי לפניך את-הארץ עליה
רש כאשר דבר יהוה אלהי אבותיך
לך אל-תירא ואל-תחת: [שלישי]
כב ותקרבון אלי כלכם ותאמרו
נשלחה אנשים לפנינו ויחפרו-לנו
את-הארץ וישבו אתנו דבר את-
הדרך אשר נעלה-בה ואת הערים
אשר נבא אליהן: כג ויטיב בעיני
הדבר ואקח מכם שנים עשר אנ-
שים איש אחד לשבט: כד ויפנו
ויעלו ההרה ויבאו עד-נחל אשכל
וירגלו אתה: כה ויקחו בידם
מפרי הארץ ויורדו אלינו וישבו
אתנו דבר ויאמרו טובה הארץ
אשר-יהוה אלהינו נתן לנו: כו
ולא אביתם לעלות ותמרו את-
פי יהוה אלהיכם: כז ותרגנו
באהליכם ותאמרו בשנאת יהוה
אתנו הוציאנו מארץ מצרים לתת
אתנו ביד האמרי להשמידנו:

1:19 'Then we set out from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, just as the Lord our God had commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea. 1:20 'I said to you, 'You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the Lord our God is about to give us. 1:21 'See, the Lord your God has placed the land before you; go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. Do not fear or be dismayed.' 1:22 'Then all of you approached me and said, 'Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land for us, and bring back to us word of the way by which we should go up and the cities which we shall enter.' 1:23 'The thing pleased me and I took twelve of your men, one man for each tribe. 1:24 'They turned and went up into the hill country, and came to the valley of Eshcol and spied it out. 1:25 'Then they took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought us back a report and said, 'It is a good land which the Lord our God is about to give us.' 1:26 'Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God; 1:27 and you grumbled in your tents and said, 'Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us. (NASB)

The Lord God told the people that the Land was good and plentiful,

to go up and take the land because He is giving it to them (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:21*) The people appeared to be reluctant however to enter the Land, and so they recommend to Moshe to send 12 men to spy out the Land to see how good it really was. There does appear to be some lack of faith here on behalf of the people. Both Rashi and Rambam point out this aspect of the narrative that the people were doubting the Lord in their commentaries on the Torah.

Rambam on Bamidbar (Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:22)

“end for you men” — “According to your own judgment. I do not command you; if you wish, send. – Because Israel came up and said: “Let us send up men before us,” as it is stated (Deut. 1:22) “And you approached me, all of you” etc. Moses, however, consulted the “Shekhina.” He [Hashem] said: I told them [the Land] was good, as it is stated (Ex. 3:17): “I shall bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to a good land.” By their life! I shall give them room for error with the matter of the spies, in order that they may not inherit it.” – The words of Rashi, from an “aggadah.” שלח לך אנשים לדעתך אני איני מצווה לך אם תרצה. שלח לפי שבאו ישראל ואמרו נשלחה אנשים לפנינו כמו שנאמר (דברים א כב) ותקרבון אלי כולכם וגו' ומשה נמלך בשכינה אמר אני אמרתי להם שהיא טובה שנאמר (שמות ג יז) אעלה אתכם מעני מצרים אל ארץ טובה חיהם שאני נותן להם מקום לטעות בדבר המרגלים למען לא יירשוה לשון רש"י מדברי אגדה

Rashi on Bamidbar

(Sotah 34b) For yourself; I am not commanding you, If you want to-send spies. Because the Jews came to Moshe and said (Deuteronomy 1:22): “let us send spies before we enter” as quoted in the verse... Moshe took counsel with G-d. G-d replied “I already told you that the land is good. (Exodus 3:17) By my life, I give you the option to choose incorrectly by following the spies and not inherit the land.” שלח לך. לדעתך, אני איני מצווה לך, אם תרצה שלח, לפי שבאו ישראל ואמרו (דברים א, כב) נשלחה אנשים לפנינו, כמה שנא-

מר (שם) ותקרבוני אלי כלכם וגו', ומשה נמלך בשכינה אמר אני
אמרתי להם שהיא טובה, שנאמר (שמות ג, יז) אעלה אתכם מעני
מצרים וגו', חיייהם שאני נותן להם מקום לטעות בדברי המרגלים
למען לא יירשוה:

According to Rambam, the Lord showed mercy to the people for rejecting the good Land the Lord was bringing them into, and caused them to dwell in the wilderness until that generation of people had died for the purpose of their not inheriting what God had promised. Rambam quotes from Rashi, who says that the people come to Moshe about sending spies, and Moshe goes to the Lord to inquire what he should do. The Lord God replied *“I already told you that the land was good”* (*Shemot / Exodus 3:17*). So the point is the Lord told them this Land was good and they needed to be obedient and just go in and take what was given to them. According to Rashi, the Book of Devarim (Deuteronomy) opens with Moshe delivering a veiled rebuke to the Jewish people. Rashi explains that each word Moshe uses is an allusion to a sin committed by the people in the desert. Moshe addresses the people in this way in order not to humiliate them with his rebuke, so that their sense of dignity can be maintained while they are being reminded of their sins. According to Parashat Devarim, Moshe delivered a lengthy rebuke. Rashi’s explanation of the nature of Moshe’s rebuke is troubling, since Moshe specifically rebukes the people by reason of the spies’ evil report, and in Parashat Eikev he rebukes them concerning the golden calf. If Moshe is so concerned with protecting the dignity of the people, then why does he rebuke them at length for these two sins? The reason may be that Moshe is focusing upon the people’s lack of faith in the Lord God Almighty. The people were struggling with their faith and the narrative of the Torah reveals to us their struggle with a lack of faith in the Lord.

The question for us today is, *“Why do so many people struggle with a lack of faith in the Lord?”* We can see this even today in this present age. When the Apostle Paul said to be of good courage, and in *2 Corinthians 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. (NASB)* what he is telling us is to be careful of our perceptions of the truth. The children of Israel saw first hand all the mighty works of the Lord on the Egyptians. One would think that if they walked by sight, they would do very well seeing the pillar of

cloud during the day and fire during the night. The difference is “*what they knew to be true,*” as opposed to “*what they believed to be true,*” was the major struggle that occurs in the one who lacks faith in the Lord. The people perceived the Land to be filled with giants and impossible to conquer. The main reason the people struggled with a lack of faith was found within their perceptions of what is true, as opposed to what they knew to be true according to God’s word as God said, “*I already told you that the land was good*” (*Shemot / Exodus 3:17*).

Faith in the Lord God in heaven, is not a “*belief without proof.*” Clearly the people had been given sufficient proof that is evidenced by their coming out of Egypt, out of slavery, and out of bondage. Faith is not a belief without proof; faith is a complete trust and confidence in the Lord God in heaven and in His Messiah (His Deliverer). Our faith is built up over time as the one whom we have faith in proves himself faithful over and over again. Note this is what the Lord God is doing in our lives each day.

Our faith is placed upon the Lord God in heaven and in the one in whom He sent, Yeshua the Messiah. The Lord has provided us with his Word, the Scriptures, as a testimony of His faithfulness to His people all throughout history. Both the Rabbinic commentary (Midrash) and the Apostolic Writings speak of the Lord bringing His King Messiah to save His people. Yeshua come with the power of God, His righteousness, and His authority, to redeem, deliver, and save His people from this present evil age and for the world to come (See Midrash Tehillim 72). The Scriptures give testimony of this, and the Lord gives us a testimony in our lives by the way in which He is working and empowering us to live for Him. Despite these things, we still at times struggle with believing the biblical account because it doesn’t match up with our perception of reality. This idea of the reality of who God is and who His Messiah is are very important. One may believe the historical account, that Yeshua was a real person, he died, and that he led a perfect life, and was raised to life, but how the Lord gives us His Righteousness to us is more difficult to understand. The significance of realizing the Lord God in heaven has given us His righteousness is very important, because this great truth from the Scriptures (and as taught by the rabbis) is part of the struggle of faith, that if we do not understand the Lord has made us righteous, and so we have been called to live righteous lives for His glory, then our lives will not reflect

the fact that we really believe what we claim to believe.

In Midrash Tehillim 72, Part 5 we read in the Dibur Hamathil (דיבור המתחיל) saying “*He will come down like rain upon the shearing (Tehillim / Psalms 72:6).*” The homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “*How are we to interpret the phrase, upon the shearing?*” Note how the sun and the moon are mentioned with a reference to the world to come (כך הצדיקים עתידין להאיר לעולם הבא, שנאמר והלכו גוים לאורך ומלכים לנוגה (זרחך). The glory of God, the glory of the dominion of the King Messiah (למלך המשיח), and the salvation of the people in this present age are all drawn into context in the world to come (לעולם הבא). What we are seeing here in the midrash is the importance of the Messiah of God who is made King and is given an everlasting dominion. The Messiah is being given a preeminence or predominant position as the one who has with Him the glory of God, His righteousness, with truth and judgment. This is similar to what we read in *Hebrews 2:5-18* speaking of Yeshua the Messiah. The author of Hebrews contrasts the Messiah with the ministering angels and then proceeds to describe the supremacy of the Son into direct relation to the Messianic administration of “*the world to come.*” Is this not the same thing that is being taught according to *Midrash Tehillim 72, Part 4 and 5*? The ideal condition of man is to be ruled by the King Messiah, which is explained by reason of the purpose of His rule and reign, to be the one who judges the poor and the people, the one who saves the needy, and breaks the hold of the oppressor, who brings with Him the Righteousness of God to judge both the righteous and the unrighteous, and who also brings with Him the wrath of God to those who do not know Him. This is the rabbinic description of the Messiah of God, and it appears to also be the kind of description that is taken from the disciples, Paul, and all of the Apostolic Writings. These descriptions from the rabbis and the Scriptures provide us with a present day hope and future expectation of the Lord God in heaven working in our lives to save and deliver us in our time of need. The Scriptures are meant to build our faith by remembering what the Lord has done and what He promised to do for His people.

There are many reasons for the phenomenon of the lack of faith as it pertains to how we live our lives. The most significant reason is that many do not understand who God is in relation to our lives and the covenant relationship that we have with Him in the Messiah Yeshua. Notice what

the Lord God instructed the new generation of people before going into the Promised Land in Parashat Devarim. They are instructed to continually remind themselves of what the Lord had done for them saying, *“And these words that I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise”* (Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:6–7). The significance of these words is that we are to study and mature in our understanding of the covenant upon which Yeshua the Messiah had come and the Lord God in heaven had sent. The Lord knows that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Mark 14:38), and so He commands His people to be in constant remembrance of these things, and not simply as a mental exercise, but as a means for applying God’s truth and walking in His ways on a daily basis.

This is why believers need to be constantly reminded of what the Messiah has done for us and what the Lord God in heaven expects our response to be. The apostle Paul says, *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* (Romans 10:17). Our faith is built up as we continually study the word of the Lord. Our faith needs to be established upon the word of the Lord, and this is what Moshe seems to have been emphasizing in his reiteration of the events that took place over the last 40 years in the wilderness. We need to continually keep in mind Paul’s exhortation to walk by faith rather than sight as we study and learn about the Torah, we are learning more about our Messiah, and about the Lord God our Father in heaven. The most important aspect of our faith, is that in believing the Word of God, we act upon it and respond in a manner that demonstrates our faith in the Lord and in His Messiah Yeshua. Our response should not be based upon our perceptions, but upon the sure foundation, the truth of God’s Holy Word!



