

פרשת דברים *Parashat Devarim*

*Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:1-5:22, Isaiah 1:1-27
Mark 14:1-16*

The Question of a “New Commandment?”

Moshe opens in the last book of the Torah saying the following, *Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:1-2*, אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל- כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּמִדְבַּר בְּעֶרְבָה מוֹל סוּף בֵּין-פָּאָרָן וּבֵין-תּוֹפֵל וְלִבְנוֹ וְחִצְרוֹת וְדִי זָהָב: ב אַחַד עָשָׂר יוֹם מִחֶרֶב דָּרָךְ הַר-שֵׁעִיר עַד קִדְשׁ בְּרִנְעַ: *1:1 These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab. 1:2 It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. (NASB)* Moshe comments in *1:2* that it is an eleven day journey from Horeb (Mountain of Sinai) to Kadesh Barnea via Mount Seir. Interestingly, it took Israel 40 years to make this eleven day journey. Basically, Moshe is admonishing the people because of their sin due to the spies report and complaining which delayed entry by forty years. (*Siftei Chakhamim, Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:2 Part 3*) According to Midrash Rabbah on Devarim / Deuteronomy, the rabbis say the words אַחַד עָשָׂר יוֹם מִחֶרֶב, “*eleven days from Horeb*,” must be understood to mean that for only eleven days after leaving Mount Horeb the people of Israel are described as perfect. The Midrash goes on to discuss the 40 days that Moshe was up on the mountain of Sinai, and then de-

scribes how during the last 29 of the 40 days the people were contemplating making the golden calf. Another rabbinic opinion states that the people were only faithful to God for two days out of the 40 that Moshe was up on the mountain. This opinion is based upon *Isaiah 58:2* which states, וְאוֹתֵי יוֹם יוֹם יִדְרְשׁוּן, “*As to Me, they seek Me out one day, one day (daily).*” Another opinion states that the people remained faithful for only one day based upon *Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:10* “*the day you stood before the Lord your G’d at Mount Horeb.*” A further comment / opinion in the Midrash states that the people were not even faithful for even one day but committed idolatrous acts even on the very same day. The source text for that is from *Isaiah 17:11* which states, “*on the morning you sow, you see it bud but the branches wither away on a day of sickness and mortal agony.*” (*Rabbeinu Bahya, Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:2 Part 1-2*) The idea being drawn out here is related to the problem of sin, for some its effects are quick, for others, it takes time, but every man is given to sin, and eventually, at one point, repentance is necessary, and one must go before the Lord seeking forgiveness of sin. (*The way the midrash describes the peoples sins sounds like a parallel to the parable of the sower.*)

Moshe continues in the Torah on *Devarim / Deuteronomy* saying according to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:7-8*, זָפְנוּ | וְסַעֲוּ לְכֶם וּבֵאוּ הָרַ, הָאֲמֹרִי וְאֶל-כָּל-שְׂכֵנֵי בְעֶרְבָהּ בְּהָר וּבְשִׁפְלָהּ וּבְנִגְבֹּ וּבְחוֹף הַיָּם אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַלְבֹנֹן עַד-הַנָּהָר הַגָּדֹל נְהַר-פָּרָת: ח רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֵיכֶם אֶת-הָאֶרֶץ בְּאוֹרְשׁוֹ אֶת-הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לְתַתּ: 1:7 ‘Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the sea-coast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. 1:8 ‘See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them.’ (NASB) Moshe states that the Lord has placed the land before the people to go in and possess it. This is interpreted according to *Sifrei Devarim 7:1* in the following way.

Sifrei Devarim 7:1

ראה נתתי לפניכם את הארץ - אמר להם: איני אומר לכם
לא מאומד ולא משמועה, אלא כשם שאתם נכנסים לארץ
- אין אתם צריכים כלי זיין, אלא קובע דיופטין ומחלק.

*(Devarim 1:8) "See, I have set before you the land":
He said to them: I am not giving you approximation
or hearsay, but "See (with your own eyes.) ... Come
and possess the land.": When you enter the land, you
will have no need of weapons but only compasses and
rulers (to divide the land among you).*

It is interesting how Sifrei on Devarim midrashically interprets the going and taking the Land as not needing weapons, only compasses and rulers for the division of the land. This idea is of the Lord God going into the Promised Land ahead of the people and waging war Himself on their behalf. According to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 20:16-18* the Lord God told Israel, *20:16 However, in the cities of the nations that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not leave alive anything that breathes. 20:17 You must completely destroy them— the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites— as the LORD your God has commanded you, 20:18 so that they cannot teach you to do all the detestable things they do for their gods and cause you to sin against the LORD your God... (BSB)* The Torah commands the utter destruction of the enemy, for the purpose of not being taught to practice their detestable ways. The example may be taken from Jericho, the Scriptures tell us, *"And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword."* (*Joshua 6:21*) Why did the Lord God order the destruction of women, children, and animals? This seems cruel and warlike in attitude. It is important to understand the loss of innocent life is to be avoided, however in this situation, the Lord had warned Israel against the nations such that they would not be influenced the religious practices of the surrounding nations. The Lord God chose Israel through whom He would reveal His character, His Messiah, and to be His witness of the one true and living God. The land at that time was corrupted by the religious practices of moral depravity, child

sacrifice (death by fire of Molech), etc. allowing these people to live would have led to the moral depravity of Israel. In order to establish herself (Israel) as a witness to the world, to bear God's testimonies, all remnants of the previous pagan cultures needed to be destroyed. Failure to do so led to the nation falling into sin as we read according to the book of Judges and 1 and 2 Kings. As we move forward to the time period of Yeshua the Messiah, we see Yeshua interpreting the Torah in the following way.

Matthew 5:43-48

5:43 'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 5:44 'But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 5:45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 5:46 'For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 5:47 'If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 5:48 'Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (NASB)

Notice how Yeshua said *“you have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” (5:43)* The idea is the Torah describes the people of the Land of Canaan as the enemy that has been given over to destruction. Yeshua however said about the enemy *“love”* and *“pray”* for them. Is this a new command Yeshua is giving that does away with the Torah command concerning the enemy? The idea here is related to a method of interpretation of the Torah. Yeshua was not creating something new in the sense of a command as compared to a new and fresh interpretation of the Torah that was more consistent with the character of God being both merciful and loving.

This week we are looking at the Scriptures from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:1-18*.

Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:1-18

1:1 These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab. 1:2 It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. 1:3 In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the Lord had commanded him to give to them, 1:4 after he had defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth and Edrei. 1:5 Across the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law, saying, 1:6 'The Lord our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, 'You have stayed long enough at this mountain. 1:7 'Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. 1:8 'See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them.' 1:9 'I spoke to you at that time, saying, 'I am not able to bear the burden of you alone. 1:10 'The Lord your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are this day like the stars of heaven in number. 1:11 'May the Lord, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand-fold more than you are and bless you, just as He has promised you! 1:12 'How can I alone bear the load and burden of you and your strife? 1:13 'Choose wise and discerning and experienced men from your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads.' 1:14 'You answered me and said, 'The thing which you have said to do is good.' 1:15 'So I took the heads of your

tribes, wise and experienced men, and appointed them heads over you, leaders of thousands and of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and officers for your tribes. 1:16 'Then I charged your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien who is with him. 1:17 'You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.' 1:18 'I commanded you at that time all the things that you should do. (NASB)

א אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל-כל-ישראל בעבר הירדן במדבר בערבה מול סוף בין-פארן ובין-תפל ולבן וחקצרת ודי זקב: ב אחד עשר יום מחרב דרד הר-שעיר עד קדש ברנע: ג ויהי בארבעים שנה בעשתי-עשר חדש באחד לחדש דבר משה אל-בני ישראל ככל אשר צוה יהוה אתו אלהם: ד אחרי הפתו את סיוחן מלך האמרי אשר יושב בקשבון ואת עוג מלך הבשן אשר-יושב בעש-תרת באדרעי: ה בעבר הירדן בארץ מואב הואיל משה באר את-התורה הזאת לאמר: ו יהוה אלהינו דבר אלינו בחרב לאמר רב-לכם שבת בקר הזה: ז פנו | וסעו לכם ובאו הר האמרי ואל-כל-שכניו בערבה בקר ובשפלה ובנגב ובחוף הים ארץ הכנעני והלבנון עד-הנהר הגדל נהר-פרת: ח ראה נתתי לפניכם את-הארץ באו ורשו את-הארץ אשר נשבע יהוה לאבותיכם לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב לתת להם ולזרעם אחריהם: ט ואמר אלכם בעת ההוא לאמר לא-אוכל לבדי שאת אתכם: י יהוה אלהיכם הרבה אתכם והנכם היום ככוכבי השמים לרב: [שני] יא יהוה אלהי אבותכם יסף עליכם ככם אלה פעמים ויברך אתכם כאשר דבר לכם: יב איכה אשא לבדי טרחכם ומשאכם וריבכם: יג הבו לכם אנשים חכמים ונבנים וידעים לשבטיכם ואשימם בראשיכם: יד ותענו אתי

וַתֹּאמְרוּ טוֹב-הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר-דִּבַּרְתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת: טו וְאָקַח אֶת-
 רְאֵשֵׁי שְׁבִטֵיכֶם אַנְשֵׁים חֲכָמִים וַיִּדְעִים וְאֶתֵּן אוֹתָם רְאֵשִׁים
 עֲלֵיכֶם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת וְשָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת
 וְשֹׁטְרִים לְשִׁבְטֵיכֶם: טז וְאֶצְוֶה אֶת-שְׁפִטֵיכֶם בְּעֵת הַהוּא
 לֵאמֹר שְׁמַע בֵּין-אַחֵיכֶם וּשְׁפֹטֶתֶם צְדָק בֵּין-אִישׁ וּבֵין-אָחִיו
 וּבֵין גֵּרוֹ: יז לֹא-תִפְרֹוּ פָּנִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט בַּקָּטָן כַּגְּדֹל תִּשְׁמַע-
 עוֹן לֹא תִגּוּרוּ מִפְּנֵי-אִישׁ כִּי הַמִּשְׁפָּט לְאֱלֹהִים הוּא וְהַדָּבָר
 אֲשֶׁר יִקְשֶׁה מִכֶּם תִּקְרֹבוּן אֵלַי וּשְׁמַעְתִּיו: יח וְאֶצְוֶה
 אֶתְכֶם בְּעֵת הַהוּא אֶת כָּל-הַדָּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּן:

The Torah is the wisdom of God. According to the Talmud, the sages state that the Torah may be interpreted in four general ways, (i) peshat, (ii) remez, (iii) drash, and (iv) sod. The peshat is the simple meaning of the text, stating that it means exactly what it seems to mean in a literal sense. Remez is the hint of allusion to something that is contained within the Torah. Drash, the root for the word Midrash expounds at a deeper level upon the meaning of the text. Sod is the esoteric mystical meaning that may be drawn out from the text. This draws upon the kabbalistic interpretation, as in the word Bereshit “*in the beginning*” (בְּרֵאשִׁית), the esoteric interpretation is this may be divided into two words as “*bara*” and “*sheet*” meaning “*created with six*” which alludes to the Lord God creating using the six worlds of Zeir Anpin (Mercy, Severity, Beauty, Victory, Splendor, and Foundation). In the rabbinic literature, the rabbis also discuss the phrase שְׁבַע־פְּנֵי לְתוֹרָה means “*seventy faces to the Torah*” which suggests the different levels of interpretation of the Torah. *Midrash Rabba on Bamidbar / Numbers 13:15* and the *Mishnah Pirkei Avot 5:26* state that “*everything is in the Torah*” in relation to the idea of the seventy faces of the Torah. The Torah is a work of God through Moshe and therefore reveals to us the character of God, who He is, and how much He loves us. The idea of seventy faces reveals to us how there are many ways of looking at the Torah. The rabbis say the Hebrew Word for eye is Ayin (עַיִן), and the gematria (numerical value) for this word is seventy and the Sages say that this has a sacred significance in the Tanach as each generation who studies God’s Word adds to the ongo-

ing life of the Torah as it is lived out in God's people. One important point is related to going deeper into the analysis of the Scriptures. The rabbis offer up wisdom stating that one must not attempt to enter into the Remez, Midrash, and Sod levels of interpretation until one has mastered the Peshat (the simple meaning). (*This is also one of the reasons why Judaism suggests one does not study the Zohar until one is 40 years old, having studied Torah for many years.*) This is also why Rashi is so important for us to read, His Peshat is the first step in the exegetical interpretation of the Torah, and for understanding the plain, historical meaning. Rashi's commentary is essential before launching into the more mystical esoteric meanings. When we read the Apostolic Writings, especially the life of Yeshua, we receive the broad spectrum of the Jewish exegetical method (Peshat, Remez, Drash, and Sod). Yeshua used these Jewish exegetical techniques to elevate the teachings of the Torah to the intent of one's heart before God and men. (For further reading, see Parashat Matot and Maasei from last week.)

The question about the Torah and its correct interpretation is related to *"what defined Israel's spiritual relationship to their God?"* It was the Torah, a Hebrew word which literally means *"teachings"* or *"instructions"* in the righteousness of God. The rabbis believed the books of the Torah were delivered to Moshe letter by letter, word by word, and sentence by sentence. This divinely inspired book was then given to the Children of Israel. For the people of Yeshua's day, the Torah of God given through Moshe formed the central teaching document that regulated and governed every aspect of one's life, culture, family, relationship, marriage, society, and spiritual connection to God, and one's relationship with the surrounding nations. The Torah was the foundation stone upon which the nation and the people of Israel, the writers of the Bible, and those who joined themselves with the God of Israel stood. We have read in the past how the rabbis believed the Messiah would be the ultimate teacher of the Torah, that he would answer all our questions, and he would be Torah observant, a teacher, and a king who would rule the nation of Israel like King David did. Did Yeshua uphold or abolish the Torah of God that was given to Israel by the hand of Moshe? This is a very important question and is related to the contrast that was made in Yeshua's interpretative method, his teachings that focused upon the root of the command

as opposed to the letter. Because of the differences in the emphasis placed upon the command as related to the intention of the heart, to love, to have mercy, and to forgive, between Yeshua and the Pharisees, traditional Christian theology teaches regarding *Matthew 5:17* that Yeshua came to annul the law by living it out perfectly himself. This idea of living it out perfectly, the Christian teaching follows that having fulfilled the law for Christians, he thus freed Christians from having to live it which in essence means he freed Christians allowing them to violate the Torah without the repercussions of its penalties.

Matthew 5:17-19

5:17 'Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

5:18 'For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 5:19 'Whoever

then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (NASB)

In the next verse (*Matthew 5:18*) he states that heaven and earth will not pass away, nor the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Torah until all is accomplished. He goes on to say in *Matthew 5:19* regarding those who teach others to annul the commandments shall be called least in the kingdom, and those who teach to keep the commandment shall be called great. Notice how Yeshua says “*whoever keeps and teaches them.*” This is significant because it causes the teacher to keep what he is teaching to others. Yeshua uses heaven and earth to describe the immutable nature of God’s Law just like Moshe does in Parashat Haazinu calling heaven and earth as witnesses to the Torah in Devarim / Deuteronomy. The word “*fulfilled*” in *Matthew 5:17* is the Greek word πληρόω plēroō meaning “*to make full, to fill up, i.e. to fill to the full, to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally.*” Simply stated, the Torah will not pass until we see the demise of heaven and earth come to pass. Based upon *Matthew 5*, Yeshua

upholds the validity of the Torah as it was given in antiquity through his servant Moshe. He also upholds the Torah centric teachings upon which his disciples could base their teachings. In addition to this, Yeshua describes in *Matthew 5:19* of rewards in heaven for keeping His commands, either of being the greatest, or the least in the kingdom of heaven. So the idea here is one's level of reward will be determined by one's orientation towards the Torah. (*This reminds us of the parable of the Talents.*) An important point here is that things are related to the person who is already in the kingdom, in a covenant relationship with God, one does not earn his way into the kingdom or into the covenant relationship. One gains access to the kingdom through faith by the mercy and grace of God. The Scriptures have always taught, from the beginning, that man is saved by grace through faith in the blood. The blood of the sacrifice which foreshadowed the work of the Messiah. Notice how Paul argues that one enters into the kingdom by faith through the example of Abraham according to Romans Chapter 4. The Scriptures do not teach that man earned his way into heaven, or into a relationship with God, or into the kingdom through works. (i.e. dispensationalism) The Scriptures teach that our faith and relationship with God is that which leads us to good works of righteousness (*Ephesians 2:8-10*). It is then on this basis that Yeshua makes the statement *John 5:24*, "*He that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death unto life.*" Remember the Torah imperative of hearing and obeying the words which were spoken from heaven. *Devarim / Deuteronomy 12:28* states, "*Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God.*" We hear in order to observe and obey the word of God. This was also stated in the book of Joshua, "*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*" (*Joshua 1:8*) Meditating upon the word of God day and night is the key to be observing and obeying the word of God and this is key to what Yeshua was saying in *John 5:24* to the one who hears and believes! In *Matthew 5:20*, Yeshua instructed

his disciples unless their righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees they would not enter into the kingdom of heaven. He was speaking of the point and purpose of the Torah, turning from the traditions of men, greed, self righteousness, arrogance, and hypocrisy, all of the things that Yeshua focused upon which met at the heart of the Torah command. Yeshua's teachings upon the Torah were focused upon faith, love, mercy, forgiveness, and spiritual issues (those things done from a pure heart). This was the circumcised heart principle that is taught in the Torah, something of which Paul drew out in his teachings on the new covenant. The reason Moshe wrote in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:1-2* of the eleven day journey was to admonish the people because of their sins. This is the heart of the Torah, to live a repentant life before a holy God. Yeshua interpreted the Scriptures within this theological principle of to love and pray. The New Commandment that we read about in John 13:30 to "*love one another*" was given as part of his final instructions to his disciples. This principle is taught in the Torah (*Vayikra / Leviticus 19*) This commandment appears thirteen times in twelve verses in the New Testament. (see *John 13:34, 15:12, 15:17, Romans 13:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 John.3:11, 3:23, 1 John.4:7, 4:11-12, 2 John 1:5*) Yeshua was not creating something new in the sense of a command as opposed to a new and fresh interpretation of the Torah that is consistent with the character of God both of being merciful and loving towards others.