

4) We are in year 597 bce. Jehoachin becomes king of Judah (24:8-17). How old is he? What do the Babylonians do to Jerusalem? How does Jehoachin try to solve the crisis? Does he succeed? At what cost? What would you have done?

5) About 8 years later the Babylonians come back and lay siege to Jerusalem (25:1-11). How long does it last? What broke the people in Jerusalem? (25:3 and Eicha 4:4-10.) What do the Babylonians do to the buildings in the city, and what do they do with the people? As you read Eicha, ask yourself: What are the lamentations about?



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The weekly Haftarah Commentary
By Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Senior CY Faculty in Talmud and Midrash,
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TORAH SPARKS

Parashat Devarim

Shabbat Hazon

July 23-29, 2017 • 6 Av 5777

Annual (Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22): Etz Hayim p. 981-998; Hertz p. 736-749

Triennial (Deuteronomy 1:1-2:1): Etz Hayim p. 981-990; Hertz p. 736-743

Haftarah (Isaiah 1:1-27): Etz Hayim p. 999-1004; Hertz p. 750-754

Parting Words and Tough Questions

Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, Coordinator, Torah Sparks, the Conservative Yeshiva, Jerusalem

This Shabbat we begin Sefer Dvarim, Deuteronomy, the last book of the Torah. Sefer Dvarim records Moses' words to the children of Israel in the weeks before he dies. Moses knows his role is almost over – he has been barred from entering the Land and his successor has been appointed. But this is no farewell speech marked by anecdotes or nostalgia; it is more an “ethical will.” Moses recounts the events since leaving Egypt 40 years earlier, reviews legal material the people should know upon entry into Eretz Yisrael, and warns them about the dangers to their faith in God, most particularly from material success and the arrogance that can come from that.

The English name Deuteronomy, “second law,” comes from the Septuagint (Greek translation), but it is a mistranslation of the Hebrew *mishneh haTorah hazoth*, “a copy of this law” (Deut 17:18). The Hebrew name *Dvarim* is more significant – *aleh hadvarim*, “these are the words Moses spoke to all Israel...” *DBR* – “to speak, word/s” is a key root, in the Torah and in the story of Moses. It recalls Moses some 40 years ago, when God

first summoned him for a “job interview” at the burning bush, and Moses tried every way he could to avoid the task, including “*lo ish dvarim anochi*, I am not a person **of words** (a good speaker) (Ex 4:10).” To paraphrase the old Virginia Slims commercial, “You’ve come a long way, Moses.” He has indeed become a person of words and *Dvarim* is a book of his words.

The prophet Jeremiah, whose connection to this Shabbat we will soon see, had a similar reaction – in content and language – when God first informed him that he was designated to be “a prophet unto the nations.” *Henei lo yadati daber* – “I don’t know how to speak” (Jer 1:6).

Parshat Dvarim is read traditionally on the Shabbat **before** Tisha B’Av, the day that commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples. *Parshat Dvarim* and Tisha b’Av are connected verbally by the word *eicha*, “How, alas” in the sense of lament. *Eicha* is the Hebrew title and first word of Lamentations, in which the prophet Jeremiah grieves over the destruction of the Temple. And in line 12 of the first chapter of our Parsha, Moses laments that the burden of leading the children of Israel has become too much for him – *Eicha esah levadi* – “How can I bear alone your trouble, burden and bickering?” This verse is traditionally read in the sad, plaintive cantillation of *Eicha/Lamentations* on Tisha b’Av. But the choice of the word *eicha*, **how**, rather than *madu’a*, **why**, is significant. The Jewish response to trouble and tragedy can be **philosophical** – Why does this happen to us? Or it can be **practical** – How do we deal with it?

The work *eicha* recalls a word written the same way (without vowels) in Genesis 3:9 – *Ayecha?* “Where are you?” God calls to Adam in the Garden of Eden after he and Eve have eaten from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. The question is no less apt today. Where are WE, we must ask ourselves, as humans and as Jews. We may not have answers to the **why** questions of life – Why I am like this? Why did this happen? But if we can address the **how** questions – how do I deal with it? How can I be a better Jew? - then we are more likely to know **where** we are when God calls us.

A Vort for Parashat Devarim

Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, Coordinator, Torah Sparks

Moshe recalls appointing the judges at Horeb to take some of the burden of governing off his shoulders and instructing them: “Hear the disputes between your people and judge fairly...Do not show partiality in judging [**lo takiru panim bamishpat** – lit. ‘do not discern faces’] (Deut 1:16-17). R’ Aryeh Leib Zuenz, a/k/a R’ Laibush Harif (Poland 1768 – 1833), said that while judges must be very wise and perceptive, lest parties deceive them, they should nonetheless not “discern faces,” they should not take facial expressions as evidence of veracity. Instead, they should “**hear the disputes** and judge fairly.” Judges should decide on the basis of the facts alone and not on the basis of impression or facial expressions.

Table Talk

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, CY Faculty

We are starting Devarim, which is mostly Moshe’s final speech to the People of Israel. It contains historic narratives, legal material, and Moshe’s take on what might happen in the future.

1) Moshe shares with the people his sense of inability to lead all the people (1:9-18). What led him to this realization, and how does he solve the problem? We have heard a version of this story before, when Yitro proposed this solution (Shmot 18:13-27). Why do you think that this time we do not hear about Yitro proposing the idea?

2) Moshe recounts the event of the spies, the people’s reaction and the consequences (1:34-40). What is the punishment for the people? What is the consequence for Moshe? Why do you think that we did not hear about this when story was told in Bamidbar?

In the upcoming week we will mourn the destructions of both temples (586bce, 70ce) and various other calamities that befell the Jews on or about the 9th of Av (Tisha BeAv.) Here are a few questions related to **II Kings 24-25** and **Eicha**, where we can learn about the destruction of the First Temple.

3) II Kings 24 opens with the unstable situation that the Kingdom of Judah finds itself in. Who is the big power in the area now? This is history told with a biblical point of view. How does it explain why God does not ‘step in’ to save Judah (24:1-7)? (Manasseh was king of Judah. His story is found in II Kings 21.)