

Deuteronomy

Lesson 1

Preface

The original Jewish name for this book comes from the first two Hebrew words of the first sentence, *Elle haddabharim*, which are translated into our English as *these are the words*. The name Deuteronomy that we use comes from the 250 BC Greek Septuagint translation which called the book *Deuteronomion*, which can be translated into our English as *the second law*. Therefore, it is often said that this book is a second restatement of the laws already found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Although the laws were given to Moses by the LORD after the completion of all the history found in the book of Genesis, a thorough study of all five books shows that the LORD held to the laws He gave to Moses in the book of Genesis even before the law was given to the Jews. For instance, when the LORD called for the animals to fill the Ark built by Noah, there were a specific number of clean and unclean animals who arrived. Yet, the law of clean and unclean animals had not been given to the world until the LORD dictated it to Moses at the Tent of Meeting in the last months of the first year after the nation of Israel had made its Exodus from Egypt.

The actual part of this book that contains the words Moses recorded on the scrolls and delivered as an oral message to the Nation of Israel on his one-hundred and twentieth birthday can be divided into three sections. First, Moses revisited the main events in the forty year history that he spent with the nation (1:1 – 4:40). Second, Moses revisited all the laws dictated by the LORD to Moses while he was on Mount Sinai and later at the Tent of Meeting. When the Tent of Meeting, also known as the Tabernacle was completed the LORD left Mount Sinai and took His place above the Mercy Seat which rested on top of the Ark of the Covenant (5:1-26:19). Third, Moses delivered a profound application based on a faithful adherence to the law which implored the Nation of Israel to seek the blessings of total obedience to the law or accept the curse that would come if it rebelled against the law. Once Moses delivered this three part message, he gave the scroll he was reading from to the Levites to place in the Ark of the Covenant.

After delivering the scroll to the Levites, Moses sang a song. He then spoke a word of blessing on each tribe. The song and the blessings were recorded and added to the scroll. On that day, Moses' one-hundred and twentieth birthday, he climbed Mount Nebo to see the Promised Land and then he died. The record of his death and burial by the LORD in the valley of Baal-Peor was also recorded and added to the scroll.

The name of Moses was not forgotten after his death nor through the rest of the ages as well as the rest of the Old and New Testament Scriptures. All the Scriptures rely on the work of the Mosaic Law given to him by the LORD.

Moses – the LORD's faithful servant. What an example for us all! As we study this book, may we grasp its importance for our lives as we read and study the rest of the Bible from the position of the Jews.

Jim Hastings

Chapter 1

Moses' Final Campsite

The Location of the Camp (1:1)

We begin our study of the book of Deuteronomy with the Nation of Israel in its final campsite with Moses, exactly where it was at the end of the Book of Numbers, nestled on the Plain of Moab, next to the Jordan River, in the Arabah, across the river from Jericho.

After the nation had heard the content of this book, Joshua would be the new leader and the nation would cross over the Jordan headed west to conquer the Promised Land. The book begins with the author describing the location of the Camp. Chapter 1, verse 1 says, *“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”* (1:1).

The Authorship

Right off the bat, it is obvious that Moses did not write this introduction because some unknown person is announcing that what we are about to read is the words of Moses and the author is also telling us where they are located when Moses gave these words. Who wrote this introduction? More than likely it was Joshua who took Moses' place in leadership after Moses' death. However, that is only one of our traditions. How can we make this conclusion? First, after Joshua was commissioned to take his place, Moses completed his oral presentation of the writings of the contents of this book and commanded the Levites to place it in the Ark of the Covenant (31:23-26). Second, Moses then sang a song recorded in Chapter 32:1-43. Third, then the LORD instructed Moses to immediately climb Mount Nebo where the LORD allowed him to look at the Promised Land before he died on that mount (32:48-52). Fourth, before Moses climbed the mountain, he blessed the sons of Israel as recorded in Chapter 33. Who recorded Moses' words and actions after he had completed his text and handed it to the Levites to put in the Ark? It could have been Eliazar, the High Priest who took the place of his father Aaron a few months before, but more than likely it was Joshua, Moses' successor. The people were accustom to the law being recorded by its nation's leader and because Joshua was the new leader, his record would have been accepted. Also, Aaron, as the High Priest did not write a single word of the Scripture and neither did his son to our knowledge. A clue to Joshua's possibility is found in Joshua 24:26. “And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God... .” Because Joshua was allowed to write a book under his name and enter that writing into the “book of the law,” it can be reasonable that the LORD allowed him to complete the story in the book of Deuteronomy as well as place this introduction to Moses' words at the beginning of Deuteronomy Chapter 1.

The Location

First we read that they were camped “... across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah... .” This means the camp was on the east side of the Jordan River in the Arabah Valley. The word “Arabah” means *a barren area* and it was the unoccupied valley that runs from north of the Sea of Galilee all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba which is the eastern finger of the Red Sea. The valley is about fifteen miles in width with the Jordan River running through its middle. Some of the valley is as wide as 25 miles in certain locations. Prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Dead Sea did not exist and the Jordan River flowed all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba in this Arabah. However, in the year of the birth of Isaac, Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed and the Dead Sea was formed in the crater stopping the Jordan River from flowing the remaining one hundred miles to the Sea of Aqaba

(Genesis 18-21).¹ Even with the formation of the Dead Sea which stopped the flow of the Jordan River, the Arabah continued to the Sea of Aqaba with little water flow. We must be careful when studying about the Arabah because most modern scholars and commentaries refer only to the lower part of the valley that extended from the bottom of the Dead Sea and proceeded south to the Sea of Aqaba. The modern description of the valley would lead a student to conclude that the camp of Israel was many miles south of its true location. It was on the east side of the Jordan River due east of the ancient city of Jericho which sat on the west side of the Jordan. The camp was located in the Arabah in the northwestern portion of the land of Moab.

A look at a relief map of the country and surroundings of Israel is especially helpful. A relief map shows all the topography of the land to scale (Fig. 1) The mountains and valleys, rivers and streams are all shown to scale with the mountains rising off the page to show the heights of all the terrain. On that map it is easy to see that there is a valley that runs all the way from north of the Sea of Galilee to the eastern finger of the Red Sea. That valley is called the Arabah. It is also easy to see that the Jordan River must have run that entire length. We can also see that mountains run on each side of the Arabah. A relief map uses colors to show the levels of the ground above sea level. The lighter the color, the lower the land. The darker the color the higher the land. On the relief map it is clear that the Arabah is lower than the Mediterranean Sea and near the Dead Sea, it is 1,420 feet lower than sea level (Fig. 2). But on this relief map, we also see the a place in the northwestern most part of Moab, next to the Jordan river called the Plains of Moab. The northern edge of the Dead Sea is in its western bottom corner. Its eastern border is a high mountain range that begins far to the north where Mount Herman is found and runs all the way past the Plains of Moab to almost the Indian Ocean. The Plains of Moab sit east of the Jordan River and it is about 15 miles wide east to west and 18 miles long north to south. Although it looks small on the map, it is not. For those who live in Houston, the city has a highway that loops around the city called the Loop 610. The complete 610 loop and all the land inside that loop will fit nicely in the area called the Plains of Moab. That plain is more than adequate for the camp of the Nation of Israel with all its cattle and



Figure 3: Satellite Map of the Plains of Moab today

such. In addition, it is some of the most fertile ground in Moab. A satellite map of the area shows all the plots of land covered in green fields of food for harvest (Fig.3).

The passage also says that the camp was “...opposite *Suph*, between *Paran* and *Tophel* and *Laban* and *Hazeroth* and *Dizahab*....” We must focus on the word “opposite.”



Figure 1: Relief Map of Israel



Figure 2: The Dead Sea and the Plain of Moab

¹ Drouhard, R. L. (2016). [Arabah](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

It is the key to understanding where the camp was located. The word “opposite” is the Hebrew word *mowl* and it means *front* or *in front of* or *forward*. Any of these meanings indicate that something is in front of something else. In this case, the camp was in front or forward from “Suph.” The word Suph, which was the Hebrew word for *red* or *reed*, is found in the Hebrew Scripture in this one place by itself. Some say that Suph in this verse means the Red Sea; However, every other reference to the Red Sea is *jam suph* with *jam* being the word for *sea*. Nevertheless, I agree. Suph must mean in this context the *Red Sea*.

As for the location markers of Paran, Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth and Dizahab, most scholars take the position that these are the boundaries of the limits of the boarders of Moab. But we know where the village of Paran sits in the Arabah, about forty miles south of the Dead Sea but nowhere near Moab. Tophel and Laban are mentioned only here in this passage with no further indication as to their whereabouts. And while Hazeroth is mentioned in the book of Numbers, Dizahab is not. These villages were never part of the tribal area of Moab; therefore, the mention of these names cannot indicate some unknown localities in Moab. However, Hebrew names have meanings. Tophel means *a drum*; Laban means *white*; Hazeroth means *villages*; Dizahab means *gold*. While all of this was evident to the nation of Israel when this verse was written, these last five locations have been difficult to justify by commentators of the past.

But on the other hand, something much simpler may be understood by the words “...opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab... .” Perhaps this is a description of places where the Nation of Israel moved forward from Mount Sinai to this final camp with Moses.

Back in the Book of Numbers we find the Nation of Israel passing through many locations on the way to Kadesh-barnea. Twice they made the journey to Kadesh. First, in the second year after the Exodus. Second, in the fortieth year after the Exodus. The last time was for the death of Miriam before they headed east to cross the mountain where Aaron died and was buried, before they turned north to stop at the final campsite with Moses. How can we surmise this? Verse 2 gives a clue.

The Distance from Mount Sinai(1:2)

“It is eleven days’ journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea.” (1:2). This verse tells us the distance from Mount Sinai and specifically the place called Horeb to Kadesh-barnea, an eleven day’s journey. It is often considered that in the Bible, a days’ journey is about twenty miles at the most for individuals and small groups to travel on foot and with carts. For a camp the size of the Nation of Israel, carrying everything they had, moving in mass together, a days’ journey could not have been twenty miles, ten at the most. If this opening passage was intended to give a short synopsis of the journey from Mount Sinai the last time, as I surmise, it is written in reverse order. Turning it around we find that it took eleven days after they left Mount Sinai which was east of Suph, a reference to the Red Sea, taking them through Dizahab, Hazeroth, Laban and Paran as well as Mount Seir on the way to Kadesh-barnea. To get there, they journeyed through many villages and watering sites as well as traversing Mount Seir which is located on a mountain range in the Edomite tribal area between Mount Sinai and Kaddish-Barnea. By the direct established trade routes, it is 110 miles from Mount Sinai to Kaddish-Barnea. These routes would have been the most logical roads to travel even for the Nation of Israel because there are mountains that needed to be crossed and the trade routes led to the passages through the mountains. Water was also a factor and the trade routes were purposefully established to pass by good watering places for man and beast.

Because it was 110 miles from Mount Sinai to Kaddish-barnea, the eleven day journey took them about ten miles per day. Why so slow? Carrying the loads were a factor; however, the transfer of the holy objects, the Ark of the Covenant, the Menorah and the Tent of Meeting was done in a reverent way. Not too fast and not too slow. The priests carrying these objects were in the middle of

the caravan and slowed the process. Those ahead could not move faster than the priests on foot and those behind could not overrun them.

According to Numbers 33:16, the first nights camp that was recorded on the journey away from Mount Sinai was in a place called Kibroth-hattaavah. The name means *graves of desire*. It is not a village but the place where the Israelites murmured against God as found in Numbers 11:34. The mention of this name in the final exit from Mount Sinai is a reminder of what happened there thirty-eight years before. It is plausible that *Dizahab*, mentioned last in Deuteronomy 1:1 was the camp just after Kibroth-hattaavah but not before *Hazeroth*.

Numbers 33:17 takes the journey from Kibroth-hattaavah to Hazeroth. Although it is but a blur and its location is not known, an important story occurred there thirty-eight years before.

According to Numbers 12, *Hazeroth* was the place where Miriam squabbled with Moses and the LORD gave Miriam leprosy and the journey to Kadesh-barnea was stalled because of her sin. Miriam was put outside the camp because of her leprosy. Leprosy was diagnosed by the whiteness of the rotting skin. The location of *Laban* comes after *Hazeroth* (in reverse order) in Deuteronomy 1:1. *Laban* is most likely the name the Israelites gave to the place where Miriam waited out her leprosy. It was more than likely just outside the camp at *Hazeroth*.

Moving backwards through the list in Deuteronomy 1:1, *Tophel* is the next location mentioned by Moses. *Tophel* is located on the east side of the Edomite mountains in present day Jordan. Today it is called *Tufileh* and it is about fifteen miles southeast of the Dead Sea. It is the perfect location for a camp before descending into the valley of the Zered River to turn west to head toward Kadesh-Barnea.

Paran was mentioned next. According to Numbers 10:12, 33, *Paran* was a three days' journey from Sinai. It is about sixty miles from Mount Sinai. Under normal conditions, without the mass of humanity and belongings, three days was reasonable. But it was not reasonable in this last journey from Mount Sinai. Years before, Paran was the home of Ishmael and a place of refuge. From *Tophel*, the camp would move down into the Zered River Valley, cross the Arabah and move west to Paran. *Paran* was on the western edge of the Arabah in the Wilderness of Paran. Kadesh Barnea was just a short distance away headed north west on the border of the Wilderness of Paran and the Wilderness of Zin which was the border of Edom's land. It was the perfect place to send out the twelve spies to search out the Promised Land. It was also the place where the great sin occurred on the part of the Nation of Israel that caused the camp to be sent back to Sinai for thirty-eight more years until everyone over twenty years of age died except for Joshua and Caleb and their immediate families. How many would die? We do not know exactly; however, the census taken at the beginning of the book of Numbers says that there were 603,550 men twenty years of age and older who were able to go to war. That did not include the women, children under twenty years of age and the elderly feeble. Needless to say, at least 603,550 people died as the result of the sin at Kadesh-barnea and they were buried in the sand. At the time Moses gives this account in Deuteronomy, thirty-eight years had passed and everyone over twenty had died. The new group that will enter the Promised Land stood with Moses. How many were there? Numbers 26 tells us that the new number of men, twenty years of age and older who are able to go to war are 601,730. No one is over fifty-eight years of age accept for Moses, Joshua and Caleb and some of Joshua and Caleb's immediate family who were pardoned from the death because of Joshua and Caleb's report. As for the others there, many were not even born when the great sin occurred at Kadesh-barnea thirty-eight years before. The census does not include women, children under twenty years of age.

On that last journey for the Nation of Israel, the camp revisited the place of its great sin thirty-eight years before. There Miriam died and was buried. From Kadesh-barnea, the camp turned east to cross the land of the Edomites, crossing near Paran to Mount Seir, a mountain range whose highest point was called Mount Hor named after the Horite people who had dwelt in the area long before. There, on the Mount Hor peak, on the Mount Seir range, Aaron died and was buried. From Mount

Seir, the Nation of Israel journeyed through the land of Moab by the northern trade route. Moving to the northernmost part of Moab they settled in the Plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River, in the Arabah, and Israel men who could go to war moved north fighting two wars with two Amorite kings.

All the places mentioned by the unknown author of Deuteronomy 1:1 have been justified as monumental places which represented a great impact on the history of the Nation of Israel. Finally, the land on the east side of the Jordan River belonged to Israel and was part of the Promised Land. The camp was in the Arabah of the Plain of Moab where Moses gave his last address to the people.

The Year after the Exodus (1:3a)

^{3a} “*In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel ...*” (1:3a) tells us the date that Moses began to deliver the message found in this book. In Numbers 20, we find that the Nation of Israel left Mount Sinai for the last time in the first month of the fortieth year. It took eleven days to get to Kadish-barnea where Miriam died and was buried. That means that it was almost a full ten month journey, with all its stops and starts, wars and whatnot, to arrive at the day Moses began to speak this last message to the people on the first day of the eleventh month. What was the purpose of this book?

The Purpose of the Book (1:3b-5)

To Remind Israel of the Commandments (1:3b)

The first purpose of this book is to remind Israel of the commandments “... *according to all that the LORD had commanded him to give to them, ...*” (1:3b).

The Remind Israel of the Enemies (1:4)

The second purpose of this book is to remind Israel of the enemies they have faced. The Scripture says, “... *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*” (1:4). These battles were detailed in Numbers 21.

The Remind Israel of the Law (1:5)

The third purpose of this book is to remind Israel of the law. Where would he remind them of the law? The text says in verse 5, “*Across the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law, saying, ...*” (1:5).

With that, whoever penned these first five verses into this book stopped writing and Chapter 1 verse 6 through Chapter 30:20 records all that Moses had written and delivered in his speech to the nation save for a few places where this mystery writer will add a few short remarks of importance information. In chapter 31:1, it is clear someone else began to write the narrative that took place. In addition, in 31:1, the narrative tells us that the day Moses delivered the message to the people was his birthday being the age of a one-hundred and twenty years old on that day. Not only was it Moses' birthday, it was also his resignation day from being the leader of the Nation of Israel – Joshua was commissioned that day. This tells us that Moses was born on the first day of the eleventh month of the Jewish year, one-hundred and twenty years before. In addition it was also Moses' funeral day. We will learn more about all of this as we move through the study of Deuteronomy.