

Drash on Parashat D'Varim

Ahavat Yeshua DC Service

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With Parashat D'varim we have left the fourth Book of the Torah, Bah-meed-bahr (Numbers in most Bibles), and arrived at the fifth and final Book of the Torah, Deh-Vah-reem (Deuteronomy in most Bibles). The name of the parashat and the book are the same and are derived from of the first Hebrew words therein:

אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה
Elleh ha-Deh-vah-reem ah-sheer dee-behr Moe-sheh"

which in English (and in the same order as their Hebrew counterparts) are:

"These the words which spoke Moses"

so the title literally means *The Words*.

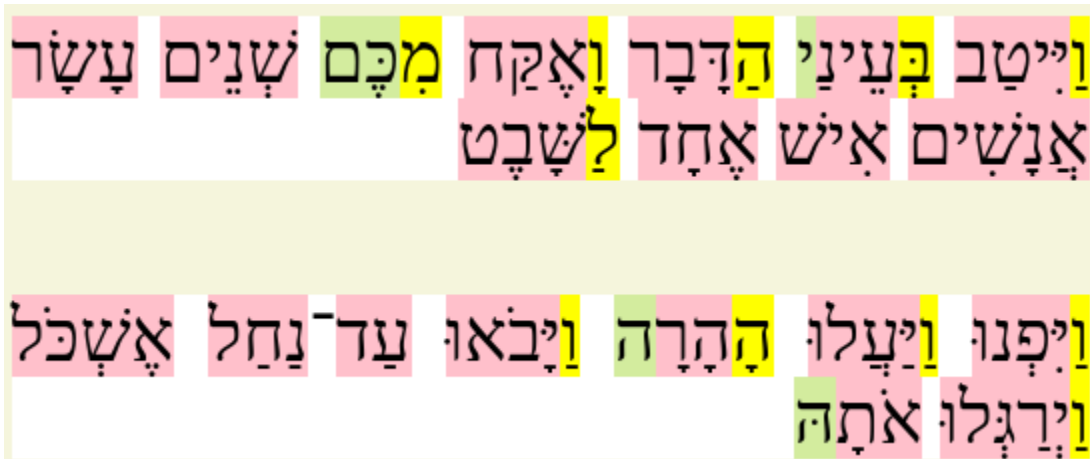
In many ways this Book summarizes the preceding four and is understood to contain speeches made by Moses near the end of his time leading Israel through the desert. The first two parashats are a speech that reviews Israel's history starting with the departure from Mt. Horeb (aka Sinai), where the Covenant was established. Then comes a "repetition of the Law," which is what the word Deuteronomy means. Moses is guiding the renewal of the Covenant with the children of the generation that received the Covenant originally. Lastly the transferal of leadership to Joshua and Moses' death are chronicled.

This particular parashat starts by setting the stage for the entire Book, then Moses begins his history lesson, focusing on the delegation of most of his judging work to a hierarchy of judges, the spy mission and its short-term consequences, the wanderings in the desert, the judgments on the Heshbonites and the Bashanites, and the dividing of the land between the tribes along with the charging of the Eastern tribes to participate in the remaining military actions beyond the Jordan River.

I presented this drash four years ago at the northern Maryland havarah Shabbat service (Embassy Church was unavailable to Ahavat Yeshua that day). As a lot has changed during those years, some of which make this drash more pertinent to us, and since most of you have never heard it, I believe Yah desires this slightly enhanced reprise.

Yahamod Jean bat Ya'akov.

Our first reading recounting the scouting mission by Dr. Toth is Deuteronomy chapter 1 verses 20-26 (TLV) beginning with the Hebrew of just verses 23 and 24:



²⁰ I said to you: 'You have come to the hill country of the Amorites, which Adonai our God is giving to us.

²¹ See, Adonai your God has set the land before you—go up, take possession, as Adonai God of your fathers has promised you. Do not be afraid or discouraged.'

²² "Then all of you came near to me and said: 'Let's send men ahead of us to explore the land for us and bring us back word about the way we should go up and the cities we will enter.'

²³ "The idea seemed good to me, so I took twelve men from among you—one man for each tribe. ²⁴ They turned and went up into the hill country, and they came to the Wadi Eshcol and spied it out. ²⁵ They took in their hands some of the fruit of the land and brought it down to us. They also brought back word to us and said, 'Good is the land that Adonai our God is giving to us.'

If you consider this section in isolation from the rest of the Torah, it is reasonable to infer the idea of sending scouts into the Promised Land originated with all the people and was approved by Moses. It completely leaves out God's point of view.

However, the entire chapter of Numbers 13 seems to chronicle the story differently. While it tells the tale with a great deal more detail, it begins with God's words to Moses:

1 Adonai spoke to Moses saying, 2 "Send some men on your behalf to investigate the land of Canaan, which I am giving to Bnei-Yisrael. Each man you are to send will be a prince of the tribe of his fathers, a man from each tribe."

3 So according to the word of Adonai, Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran.

Was Moses having a serious senior moment in the D'varim telling of the story? If you only consider the Numbers account, it is reasonable to think the mission was entirely God's idea. If you are scratching your head, you are not alone. This apparent inconsistency has been considered by a lot of people, both before and after Yeshua's first advent. Dr. Louis H. Feldman wrote about this in a lengthy scholarly paper with 27 footnotes entitled *Josephus on the Spies (Num 13-14)*. Professor Feldman was a devout Jew who was recognized by just about all of Dr. Michael L. Brown's peers as the world's foremost authority on Flavius Josephus, the first century Jewish historian. In evaluating what Josephus wrote about the history of this event he draws not only on the Torah but also other sources contemporary to Josephus such as the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria and an unknown source called Pseudo-Philo. At the end of it all, he offers no insight into the actual historical source of the inspiration to scout the land, only states what the sources wrote about the moment in history and noting they do not agree with each other. It would have been improper for him to insert his own opinion, unfortunately, or even to facilitate discerning it by reading between the lines. He makes cases for how and why the Biblical accounts were revised by the historians. It seems historians cannot help us with this question.

In b. Sotah 34b, the Talmud offers a possible explanation. Within the web page at thetorah.com entitled *Whose Idea Was It to Send Scouts?* we find a translation of this passage and a commentary upon it. But first let us note that few English translations of the Bible translate the first words of Numbers 13:2 as the Talmud translation does. The TLV rendition we heard, however, is very similar. This translation into English of the Torah quotation is crucial for the Talmud passage to

make any sense. Thus the web page puts the original passage in Hebrew next to its English translation:

'Send, for yourself, men' - Resh Lakish said: "'Send for yourself' - of your own volition. Would a person really choose something that seems bad to him? This is what is written: 'The matter seemed good in my eyes.' Resh Lakish said: 'In my eyes' - but not in the eyes of God."

The commentary in the web page continues as follows:

Resh Lakish combines the two stories by creating a multi-step process.

1. The people requested to send scouts, as Moses says they did in Deuteronomy.
2. Moses likes the idea, as recorded in Deuteronomy.
3. Moses then asks God for permission. This is not recorded anywhere but assumed.
4. God agrees to send scouts, albeit reluctantly.

Thus, Numbers only records the final part of a process whose beginning parts are recorded only in the preamble to Deuteronomy.

It should come as no surprise there are other opinions within Jewish thinking about this matter. We read in a drash at [blogs dot timesofisrael dot com slash /freedom-needs-patience-shelach-lecha-5777:](http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/freedom-needs-patience-shelach-lecha-5777)

"According to Maimonides, then, it was irrelevant who sent the spies."

Could that be right? If so, is that irrelevance only within this context, or is it a general principle? What did Yah think about spying out the land a generation later during Joshua's watch? The second chapter of the Book of Joshua is silent about this. Does God approve or disapprove of countries spying on each other? Does it make a difference to Him who is doing the spying? Doesn't spying inherently involve deception and lying at a minimum?

I could go on. We need to resolve questions like these without opening the door to doubt and unbelief that can shipwreck our faith. Also consider these questions are not merely academic for believers who must be undercover to live and cautiously do God's work in many parts of the world having governments hostile to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—governments that hold the power of the sword.

Determining what is sin for undercover agents operating within hostile countries is not straight-forward. Or is it?

Yahamod Ralph ben Ralph.

Our second reading from the *Haftarah* is II Kings chapter 6 verses 8-23.

8 Now the king of Aram was warring against Israel. He consulted with his officers, saying, "In such and such a place will be my camp."

9 But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, saying, "Be careful not to pass this place, for the Arameans are coming down there." 10 So the king of Israel sent word to the place the man of God told him and warned him about, and so he was on his guard there—more than once or twice.

11 His heart upset over this matter, the king of Aram summoned his officers and said to them, "Tell me, which one of us is on the king of Israel's side?"

12 But one of his officers said, "No, my lord the king. Rather, Elisha the prophet who is in Israel keeps telling the king of Israel the very words that you speak in your bedroom!"

13 So he said, "Go, see where he is, so I may send and seize him."

Then it was reported to him, "Behold, he is in Dothan."

14 So he sent horses, chariots and a great army there. They arrived at night and surrounded the city.

15 Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was surrounding the city. So his attendant said to him, "Alas, my master! What are we going to do?"

16 "Fear not," he replied, "for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17 Then Elisha prayed and said, "ADONAI, please open his eyes that he may see." Then ADONAI opened the eyes of the young man and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

18 When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to ADONAI and said, "Please strike this people with blinding light." So He struck them with blinding light according

to the word of Elisha. 19 Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the road, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man whom you seek." So he led them to Samaria. 20 Upon their arrival in Samaria, Elisha said, "ADONAI, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So ADONAI opened their eyes, and they could see—behold, they were in the middle of Samaria.

21 When the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "Shall I surely strike them down, *Avi*?"

22 "Don't strike them down," he replied. "Would you strike down those whom you have captured with your own sword and bow? Set before them bread and water that they may eat and drink and go back to their master." 23 So he prepared a great feast for them. After they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went back to their master. Ever since, the marauding bands of Aram stopped invading the land of Israel.

Now *that's* how to conduct espionage *and* foreign policy! Did you notice how Elisha finessed the redirection of the enemy's army without technically lying? The King of Aram was persuaded to cease his hostility non-violently. We can safely presume Elisha did this God's way in every particular. Therefore, we can hypothesize an undercover believer may be able to thread the needle of Godly spying by unfailingly keeping in step with the Spirit and praying into manifestation the power of The Almighty as needed.

Yahamod, Elaine bat Benyahmeen Mosheh.

Our third reading from the *B'rit HaDashah* is from Matthew chapter 19 verses 23:26 (TLV):

23 Then *Yeshua* said to His disciples, "Amen, I tell you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

25 When the disciples heard this, they were utterly astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?"

26 And looking, *Yeshua* said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Is a rich man entering God's kingdom more difficult than what we just heard Elisha brought about? Who cares? Either is miraculous! Properly done, most unbelievers have to admire what God can orchestrate, and He clearly gets all the glory when it is undeniable something was impossible with men.

Allow me to reiterate if we are of a mind that God doesn't usually work like this, we need to immediately look within ourselves for the possibility we are harboring doubt, lack of faith, and/or unbelief. If so, we must be immediately agree with the Holy Spirit's point of view, most sincerely repent, and ask forgiveness. It can be *dangerous* to wait to get back in step with the Spirit! There are situations in life, especially in hostile countries, when a single second of getting out of step with the Spirit will open a door for the adversary to eliminate you or people you really care about. Be ever vigilant. Train yourselves to do this *before* you find yourselves *in* a hostile country, whether by international travel or by political changes within the country you inhabit. Consider Proverbs chapter 28 verse 12 (Complete Jewish Bible translation) that contrasts the results of opposing worldviews coming into political power:

**When the just are triumphant, there is great rejoicing,
but when the wicked rise up, people hide.**

In China especially, whether you should hide or publicly bring about a miraculous sign or wonder in any given situation is not a decision you should make without the clear leading of The Holy Spirit. Do the right things at the right times according to what God defines to be right.

The next parashat is Vah-eht-chah-nahn and covers Deuteronomy chapter 3 verse 23 through chapter 7 verse 11.