

A New Book with a New Look

We are entering the first chapter of the last book of the Torah, the book of Devarim better known by the Greek name of Deuteronomy. The Hebrew name means "words" while the Greek name suggests a repetition of what was written previously.

The style of the writing is obviously different from what has been seen in the previous four books. Devarim is written from the point of view of Moshe who is summarizing what has happened for the past 40 years of wandering in the desert and camping out at various oases.

It is written in the form of a speech given to the new generation of Israelites and the precise date is given, the first day of the eleventh month, the month of Shevat. We are on the verge of crossing the Jordan River and entering into what will be known as Israel and what was then the land of Canaan. Moshe lists the triumphant parts of the past as well as those that were difficult and troublesome. He describes the complete slaughter of competing mid-Eastern nations by us Israelites and describes our defeats in some of the battles. Our lack of faith in the journey is also pointed out.

Moshe stresses that this is the land promised by God to our distant ancestors. Yet, Moshe knew that he would not be allowed to enter the land and that Yehoshuah would lead us there.

As a metaphor, the chapter reminds us that the next moment in our lives is always the Promised Land. To continue the journey we sometimes have to make peace with those parts of ourselves that are hostile to our goal. We have to keep learning what our ultimate goals are. We have to protect those weak parts of ourselves and be patient with them. Internally we need to find those parts of ourselves that will lead us to what we have to do next and, in turn, understand what we need to learn to accomplish this.

May we continue to help support and encourage each other on the journey and learn to write our own summary of our own story of travel.

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