
Devarim – Devarim/Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

2:1 We marched back into the wilderness by the way of the Sea of Reeds, as the Lord had spoken to me, and skirted the hill country of Seir a long time.

2:2-6 Then the Lord said to me: You have been skirting this hill country long enough; now turn north. And charge the people as follows: You will be passing through the territory of your kinsmen, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. Though they will be afraid of you, be very careful not to provoke them. For I will not give you of their land so much as a foot can tread on; I have given the hill country of Seir as a possession to Esau. What food you eat you shall obtain from them for money; even the water you drink you shall procure from them for money.

The Context – The verses in plain English

In Devarim, Moses speaks to the Israelites, reminding them of the events that took place and the laws they received during the course of their 40-year journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. As part of his recitation, he recalls God's instruction to the Israelites that they compensate those people whose lands they travel through for any resources they use during the journey.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

1) This divine injunction reflects the importance of using resources judiciously, and of respecting the rights of those whose resources we use. What challenges do we as advocates face in making sure these rights are maintained, particularly among the global poor? How are these rights threatened, and, if enforced, what role might they play in strengthening local communities around the world?

V'etchanan – Devarim/Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

6:3 Obey, O Israel, willingly and faithfully, that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, spoke to you.

6:4-9 Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

6:10-12 When the Lord your God brings you into the land that He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to assign to you – great and flourishing cities that you did not build, houses full of all good things that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant – and you eat your fill, take heed that you do not forget the Lord who freed you from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.

The Context – The verses in plain English

In V'etchanan, Moses continues what he began in the previous parasha (Devarim), reviewing for the Israelites the history of their liberation from Egypt and the subsequent giving of the Torah. He also repeats the verses of the Shema, a declaration of the fundamentals of the Jewish faith. "Do not forget God and what He has done for you," Moses in effect tells them. "This should be at the heart of everything you do."

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) Speaking through Moses, God makes explicit his commandment that the Israelites remember where they came from and what they have gone through. Why is retaining a memory of their origins so important? How does it shape their worldview? How does it help them – and us, their descendents – set day-to-day priorities?
- 2) God brings the Israelites into a rich and abundant land, but takes pains to remind them that its abundance predates their arrival (i.e., they cannot claim credit for it). How is maintaining this sense of perspective still relevant to us today? What does it suggest about our use of communal resources? How does it help propel our advocacy forward?

Eikev – Devarim/Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

8:2-3 Remember the long way that the Lord your God has made you travel in the wilderness these pasty forty years, that He might test you by hardships to learn what was in your hearts: whether you would keep His commandments or not. He subjected you to the hardship of hunger and then gave you manna to eat, which neither you nor your fathers had ever known, in order to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but that man may live on anything that the Lord decrees.

8:7-10 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

10:17-19 For the Lord your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

The Context – The verses in plain English

As he prepares them for their imminent arrival in the Holy Land, Moses urges the Israelites to express their gratitude to God by fulfilling His commandments. He describes the land they are about to enter and the great bounty it will provide them. And he outlines their obligation to care for their fellow men and women, regardless of their faith or origin.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) In Eikev, Moses describes the Israelites' ordeal in the desert as a divine test of their loyalty, devotion and commitment to God's mitzvot. How does experiencing hardship influence our own ability, as social justice activists, to relate to – and advocate for – people in need?
- 2) The Land of Israel offers its new inhabitants a rich variety of natural resources: grains, fruits, precious metals, etc. Why is access to a wide array of resources critical to any society's success?

- 3) Why does God emphasize the importance of helping all people? How do we manifest this obligation today, both here at home and around the world?

Re'eh – Devarim/Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

12:4-7 Do not worship the Lord your God in like manner, but look only to the site that the Lord your God will choose amidst all your tribes as His habitation, to establish His name there. There you are to go, and there you are to bring your burnt offerings and other sacrifices, your tithes and contributions, your votive and freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks. Together with your households, you shall feast there before the Lord your God, happy in all the undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you.

12:15-16 But whenever you desire, you may slaughter and eat meat in any of your settlements, according to the blessing that the Lord your God has granted you. The unclean and the clean alike may partake of it, as of the gazelle and the deer. But you must not partake of the blood; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.

14:27-29 But do not neglect the Levite in your community, for he has no hereditary portion as you have. Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your yield of that year, but leave it within your settlements. Then the Levite, who has no hereditary portion as you have, and the stranger, the fatherless and the widow in your settlements shall come and eat their fill, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the enterprises you undertake.

The Context – The verses in plain English

Because he will not be accompanying the Israelites into the Promised Land, Moses painstakingly reminds them of their commitments to God and their many obligations to each other. These include establishing a temple for divine sacrifice and providing for the needy. In addition, Moses tells them they may eat meat as often as they would like.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) In ancient times, the Temple served as a central location for demonstrating devotion to God. Today, without a Temple, how can we work locally and globally to ensure that divine

holiness extends to all communities? And, since we no longer practice animal sacrifice, what other actions can we take to affirm our partnership with God?

- 2) God grants the Israelites permission to indulge in frequent meat eating. What does meat represent for the Israelites – and for impoverished people in countries around the world today? How can we increase prosperity in these countries to maximize the number of people who benefit from its many blessings?
- 3) In this parasha, our commitment to caring for people in need is explicitly linked to our own prosperity. In what ways are we impacted by our neighbors' poverty? How does alleviating their suffering strengthen our own lives and communities?

Shoftim – Devarim/Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

16:20 Justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

20:5-6 Then the officials shall address the troops, as follows: “Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never harvested it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it.

20:19 When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city?

The Context – The verses in plain English

In Shoftim, Moses emphasizes God's vision of justice as an integral part of a well functioning society. He also lays out for the Israelites the rules of war, including exemption from battle for someone who has just built a house or planted a vineyard. And he shares with them God's explicit direction that, when laying siege to a city, they not cut down any fruit-bearing trees.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) Why is the Israelites' inheritance of the Promised Land so directly linked to their commitment to justice? What are the implications of this commitment for us as their descendants?
- 2) In offering a series of exemptions from war, God distinguishes some things as being more important than others. What do the things He has selected indicate about what He values? How do they inform our own priorities today?
- 3) Why must trees that yield fruit be preserved, even in times of war? How does this shape our thinking about our use – and distribution – of natural resources? What does it communicate about the urgency of meeting basic human needs, and about our role in doing so?

Ki Teitzei – Devarim/Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

22:9 You shall not sow your vineyard with a second kind of seed, else the crop – from the seed you have sown – and the yield of the vineyard may not be used.

23:25-26 When you enter another man's vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as you want, until you are full, but you must not put any in your vessel. When you enter another man's field of standing grain, you may pluck ears with your hand; but you must not put a sickle to your neighbor's grain.

24:19 When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless and the widow – in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings.

The Context – The verses in plain English

Of the Torah's 613 mitzvot (commandments), 74 appear in Ki Teitzei, including the laws of kilayim, which forbid the hybridization of certain plants and animals. In addition, the parasha outlines a number of other divinely given rights and responsibilities, such as the ability to eat from other people's property but the insistence that we respect it, and the obligation to remember the poor and needy among us.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates



- 1) God forbids the Israelites to sow grain in a vineyard; in other words, to mix two different kinds of seeds. What challenges do modernization and globalization present to poor and struggling communities in terms of their ability to maintain a distinct identity? Do you think the emergence of a unified global culture is a benefit or a distraction for these societies? Why?
- 2) In tackling global poverty, how do we balance the rights of landowners against those of the dispossessed? Are their needs mutually exclusive, or do their interests overlap? How can public policy be an effective tool in addressing these issues?

Ki Tavo – Devarim/Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

26:5-10 You shall then recite as follows before the Lord your God: “My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery and our oppression. The Lord freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O Lord, have given me.”

28:1-2 Now, if you obey the Lord your God, to observe faithfully all His commandments which I enjoin upon you this day, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings shall come upon you and take effect, if you will be heed the word of the Lord your God.

28:11 The Lord will give you abounding prosperity in the issue of your womb, the offspring of your cattle and the produce of your soil in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to assign to you.

The Context – The verses in plain English

Moses tells the Israelites that, when they finally enter the Land of Israel, they must express their gratitude to God by bringing an offering of “first fruits” to His temple. Moses also gives them specific instruction as to what to say when they present the divine offering. In addition, Devarim

lists the many blessings the Israelites will enjoy if they keep God's commandments (e.g., great prosperity), and the many curses awaiting them if they do not.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) Why are the Israelites told to recite a type of formula as they make their offering to God? What does the recitation accomplish? How does it force them – and us – to be mindful of our obligation to the less fortunate?
- 2) The Israelites learn that God will bestow great favor upon them if they uphold their covenant with Him. What are ways that we show ourselves to be God's faithful partners today? How can we help extend God's blessings of wealth and abundance to poor and hungry people around the world?

Haazinu – Devarim/Deuteronomy 32:1-52

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

32:13-14 He set him atop the highlands, to feast on the yield of the earth; He fed him honey from the crag, and oil from the flinty rock, curd of kine and milk of flocks; with the best of lambs, and rams and he-goats; with the very finest wheat – and foaming grape-blood was your drink.

32:15-16 So Jeshurun grew fat and kicked – you grew fat and gross and coarse – He forsook the God who made him and spurned the Rock of his support. They incensed Him with alien things, vexed him with abominations.

32:19 The Lord saw and was vexed and spurned His sons and His daughters.

The Context – The verses in plain English

As he prepares to die and leave the Israelites to enter the Holy Land by themselves, Moses recites a poem that God has dictated to him. In it, God prevails upon the Israelites to remember their deliverance from Egypt, and to stay true to their liberator (God Himself). The poem warns against the pitfalls of wealth and prosperity, and alludes to terrible consequences for abusing God's blessings – although, ultimately, God promises to maintain His covenant, and to look favorably upon His people.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates



- 1) What challenges do wealth and prosperity present for people – and societies – today? How can we use our resources to strengthen communities across the globe? Why is doing this important, not only for the beneficiaries of our support but also for our own wellbeing? How do the earth's natural resources link all people together in a circle of mutual interdependence?