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Parsha and Haftara of Devarim
by Julie Zhuk on 2023-07-22

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Parsha Devarim

In this week's Parsha, Moses reminded the Jews of their long journey of leaving Egypt and coming to Israel. They spent 40 yrs wandering around in the desert. They did many things that they shouldn't have done, yet G-d has forgiven them. G-d has told them to move forward. Moses was aware that he had little time left and was going to die. Their biggest mistake was believing the spies who didn't think that they were going to conquer the land and G-d decreed that the entire generation was going to die and not make it to see the Holy Land. Moses gives the Jews their eternal heritage which will be in the Holy Land.

They don't seem to realize that they will cross into the Holy Land after he has passed away. The point of the Parsha is not so much the intricate details of what happens. It's more about how Moses explains to the Jews how they should continue living life once he is no longer with them. They have gotten so used to having him around them. It will be a giant blow to learn that he will no longer be there, especially for Joshua when Moses dies the time he takes to grieve is longer than the rest of the Jews. The name of the Parsha is Devarim and it means Words. It is named for the opening statement of the fifth book of the Torah Devarim. Moses got the Torah from G-d and then transmitted it to the Jews. Moses used his own voice to pass down the words of G-d. He repeated the Torah using his own voice. The first four books of the Torah were written in the third person, it says "And G-d spoke to Moses." The last book, the fifth book was written in first person. It was written in the voice of Moses himself.

This difference is noted very importantly because it represents a change in the role that Moses had. It represents the change in the Torah. Moses had gotten the Torah and transmitted it to the Jewish people. Moses had the role to be royal and it was always through him that other humans had the connection to convey words of Torah precisely as they were given to him. The fifth book of the Torah was no longer that transmitter he used to be. The words, ideas, and teachings had now become internalized within himself. So now they were coming from his own voice. This explains how these themes are coming from the book of Devarim. This is the repetition of the Torah. He was reprimanding the Jewish people because he was trying to encourage the Jews to come back to G-d. The Parsha is asking how can a person who rejects the voice of morality and the will of G-d be inspired to go back. The Parsha says the answer is that inspiration is not coming from heeding the voice from above, but from listening to the voice that sets the example from within ourselves. There is commitment and courage to go back to G-d comes from the teachings and values of the Torah and this has become part of the Jew.

Haftara of Devarim

The Jewish people are in a grieving period of affliction. The Haftara is for Devarim this week. These three Haftarot are read during the three weeks of mourning between the fast of the seventh of Tammuz and the 9th of Av. In the Haftara, the prophet Isaiah relayed to the Jews a

vision he saw from G-d. He was experiencing the Judah and Jerusalem residents being chastised for rebelling against Him. G-d criticized them for repeating their errors and not abandoning their sinful ways. He expected more of them since they had been reprimanded before and been punished as well. G-d said, "Woe to a sinful nation, a people heavy with inquiry, those evil with doing seed, and corrupt with children, and they forsook G-d. They provoked the Holy One of Israel. Harsh words were employed.

G-d was comparing the Jewish leaders to the rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah. G-d allowed the Jewish people their sacrifices and offerings, flavored with pagan customs. G-d felt the Jewish people had gone from being a faithful city to becoming a harlot. He felt there was once justice; now it no longer had that. There was no more righteousness there but a city of murders. G-d comes off with a harsh tone, but Isaiah the prophet uses a softer tone with the Jews. He is encouraging people to repent sincerely. He wants the people to perform acts of justice and kindness towards the needy, the orphans, and he is promising them the best of land in return for their obedience. There is a famous quote in this Haftara, "If your sins prove to be like crimson, they will become white as snow; on the other hand, if they prove to be as red as a crimson dye, they shall become as wool." This is the ending part of the Haftara. G-d promises to re-establish Israel's judges and leaders when Zion will be redeemed through justice, and her people do teshuva through righteousness.