

1 These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan.— Through the wilderness, in the Arabah near Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab, ²it is eleven days from

א אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-
כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּעֶרְבָה
מִזֶּה סוּף בֵּין-פָּאֵרָן וּבֵין-תּוֹפֵל וְלָבָן
וְחֶזֶרֶת וְדִי-זָהָב: ² אֶחָד עָשָׂר יוֹם מִחֶזֶב

A UNIQUE BOOK (1:1–5)

The first five verses give the time and place of the delivery of Moses' farewell address.

1. These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel Apart from some connecting passages and the narratives about Moses' last days, the speaker in Deuteronomy is Moses, not an anonymous narrator as in the previous books of the Torah. Even the narratives and laws appear as parts of addresses in which Moses reviews the past 40 years and prepares the Israelites for the future.

on the other side of the Jordan In Transjordan, east of the river Jordan. Although Moses

never crossed over to the western side of the Jordan, this is written from the point of view of one already in the Land.

the wilderness The text locates this wilderness in the long narrow depression, or rift, that continues the Jordan Valley south of the Dead Sea down to the Gulf of Elat. This rift is known as the 'Arabah to this day.

2. It was an 11-day journey from Horeb (Mount Sinai) to Kadesh-barnea, the gateway to the Promised Land (see vv. 19–20). If the Israelites had trusted in God, this verse tells us, they could have entered the land immediately, without wandering in the wilderness for 38 years.

CHAPTER 1

Some of Deuteronomy's passages, ranging from the Decalogue to setting aside cities of refuge, duplicate contents found elsewhere in the Torah. But 70 of the approximately 100 laws in Deuteronomy are not found in the earlier books. These laws deal mostly with arrangements for living in the Land and with the new emphasis on a central sanctuary to be designated by God. Moses is telling the Israelites things they will need to know when they settle the Land, things they had no need to know before.

One way of viewing this book is to see it as divided into three parts. In the first part, Moses reviews the history of the people's wandering, emphasizing Israel's lack of fidelity and gratitude. This is followed by a legal section, and finally by Moses' farewell address. Hirsch detects a tone of urgency throughout Moses' remarks, prompted, he suspects, by the concern that when the families of Israel are no longer camped around the tabernacle but are living each on its own property, the benign influence of God's Presence will be lost.

1. Moses began his career by pleading that he was not "a man of words" (*ish d'varim*, Exod. 4:10). After 40 years of teaching Torah, however, he has become an eloquent "man of

words." The change is not due to improved rhetorical skills but to his enthusiastic commitment to his message (Deut. R. 1:1).

The Midrash, noting the similar sound of *d'varim* (words) and *d'vorim* (bees), comments that Moses' criticisms of the people are like the stings of a bee. A bee's sting hurts the person stung but it hurts the bee more, causing its death. Moses dies at the end of Deuteronomy because criticizing Israel has taken so much out of him (Deut. R. 1:6). This would imply that we should judge the validity of criticism not only by its factual accuracy but by how much it pains the critic to say it. The harsh criticisms of Moses are spoken with love, in contrast to the praises of Balaam, spoken as flattery.

to all Israel Including Moses himself. His criticisms gain credibility because he criticizes his own behavior as well.

1–2. Why list all these place-names? To avoid shaming Israel excessively, lest they lose all hope of ever pleasing God. For Moses had been inclined to remind Israel of all the times they exasperated and disappointed God; instead, he referred only to the locations where those events occurred (Rashi). Or perhaps Moses is recalling all the places God and Israel have been together, as reminiscing lovers might do.

Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the Mount Seir route.—³It was in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, that Moses addressed the Israelites in accordance with the instructions that the LORD had given him for them, ⁴after he had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtaroth [and] Edrei. ⁵On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this Teaching. He said:

⁶The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying: You have stayed long enough at this mountain. ⁷Start out and make your way to the

דֶּרֶךְ הַר־שֵׁעִיר עַד קֶדֶשׁ בַּרנֶּע: ³וַיְהִי
בְּאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בַּעֲשֵׁת־עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ
בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
כָּל־אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתוֹ אֲלֵהֶם: ⁴אֶחָד
הִכְתּוּ אֶת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֱמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב
בְּחֶשְׁבֹן וְאֶת עֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן אֲשֶׁר־יוֹשֵׁב
בְּעִשְׁתָּרֶת בְּאֶדְרֵי: ⁵בְּעֶבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּאֶרֶץ
מוֹאָב הוֹאִיל מֹשֶׁה בָּאֵר אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה
הַזֹּאת לְאָמֹר:

⁶יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ דִּבֶּר אֵלֵינוּ בְּחֹרֵב לְאָמֹר
רַב־לָכֶם שְׁבַת בְּהָר הַזֶּה: ⁷פָּנּוּ | וְסַעֲדוּ
לָכֶם וּבֵאוּ הָרָאֵם הָאֱמֹרִי וְאֶל־כָּל־שְׂכֵנֵינוּ

Horeb Deuteronomy's name for Mount Sinai. Situated somewhere in the Sinai peninsula, its precise location remains unknown.

Kadesh-barnea Sometimes called simply Kadesh, it was near the western border of Seir-Edom, on the southern boundary of the Promised Land, in essence the gateway to it.

by the Mount Seir route Seir, or Edom, the southernmost of the Transjordanian kingdoms, extended westward into the highlands of the eastern Negeb. "(Mount) Seir" usually refers to this part of Edom.

3. eleventh month Later known as *Sh'vat*, which falls in January and February. This verse merges Deuteronomy into the chronologic framework of the previous books of the Torah.

4. Ashtaroth [and] Edrei These two cities

were twin seats of government for Og, king of Bashan. Both places are mentioned in Egyptian documents and in a Ugaritic text.

5. in the land of Moab In the steppes of Moab, so called because the area belonged to Moab before it was conquered by Sihon (see Num. 21:29), from whom the Israelites wrested it.

this Teaching Hebrew: *ha-Torah*, derived from "*horah*" (teach, instruct). "*Torah*" refers to rules of civil and ritual procedures, moral exhortation, and instructive narrative as well as prophetic teaching and reproach. Moses frequently refers to Deuteronomy as "*this Torah*." In later times the term "*Torah*" was applied to the entire Pentateuch and, ultimately, to the totality of the Jewish religious tradition.

Moses' First Discourse (1:6–4:40)

Moses' first discourse serves as a prologue to the book. It emphasizes that the people's fate depends on their response to God's commands and promises. This address reflects the importance of his-

tory as the basis of Israelite religion. Religious belief in the Bible is based mostly on Israel's experience of God rather than on theological speculation.

5. to expound this Teaching He interpreted the Torah in many languages, so that future generations of Jews in many lands would have access to the Torah in a language and in terms that they could understand (*S'fat Emet*). There is holiness in the Hebrew language—"the holy tongue" (*l'shon ha-kodesh*)—in and of itself. It is also necessary, though, for people to learn what God requires of them in a language that they can understand.

6. You have stayed long enough There is a danger that the people Israel will grow too comfortable where they are and will be reluctant to move on into the unknown. There are times when our fulfillment as individuals or as a group requires us to leave the familiar and move on toward a goal.

hill country of the Amorites and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, the hill country, the Shephelah, the Negeb, the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and the Lebanon, as far as the Great River, the river Euphrates. ⁸See, I place the land at your disposal. Go, take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your fathers,

בְּעֶרְבָה בְּהָר וּבְשִׁפְלָה וּבְנֶגֶב וּבְחֹף
הַיָּם אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַלְבָּנוֹן עַד-הַנָּהָר
הַגָּדֹל נְהַר-פָּרָת׃ ⁸רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיכֶם
אֶת-הָאָרֶץ בָּאוּ וְרָשׁוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר

ISRAEL DISOBEYS THE FIRST COMMAND TO PROCEED
TO THE PROMISED LAND (1:6–2:1)

FROM HOREB TO REBELLION (vv. 6–33)

PROCEEDING TO THE PROMISED LAND
(vv. 6–8)

Moses begins his address by reminding his audience—the generation about to enter the Promised Land—that Israel had been commanded to enter the land a generation earlier (see Exod. 32:34–33:3; Num. 10:11–34). The entire retrospective that follows, through the end of chapter 3, deals with Israel’s response to God’s command and the consequences of that response.

6. You have stayed long enough The Hebrew for this phrase expresses impatience, indicating that God was eager for Israel to enter the land immediately. The nearly 40-year delay was not God’s original intention but the result of Israel’s failure to trust and obey God.

7. The Promised Land is described here in terms of its main regions.

hill country of the Amorites The central highlands running south to north, which would become the heartland of Israelite settlement. The Amorites were the inhabitants of these mountains, especially the southern ones that the Israelites would reach first, entering from the Sinai.

all their neighbors That is, the neighboring regions.

Arabah Here, the Jordan Valley from Lake Tiberias in the north to the Dead Sea (see 3:17, 4:49). The Arabah Rift south of the Dead Sea (mentioned in v. 1) was in Edomite territory and was not part of the Promised Land.

hill country The neighboring regions of the Amorites in the central highlands included the lands of the Hittites, Jebusites, Amalekites, Canaanites, and Perizzites.

Shephelah The “lowland,” the low hills between the Judahite part of the central highlands and the coastal plain.

Negeb In the Bible, the northern section of what is called the Negev today. Beginning 10 to 15 miles north of Beer-sheba, it extends about 30 miles southward to the wilderness of Zin, the

southern boundary of the Promised Land. Here the western part of the Negev is meant; the eastern part, like the Arabah, was part of Seir-Edom. The name “Negeb,” from the Hebrew נֶגֶב (dry), reflects the relative aridity of the region. Its average annual rainfall is 300 mm at the northern end and 100 mm at the southern end.

seacoast Of the Mediterranean.

land of the Canaanites The translation understands this phrase as referring to one part of the Promised Land: the seacoast, especially the area later called Phoenicia, and part of the Jordan Valley (see Gen. 10:15,19; Num. 13:29). Later Phoenician sources likewise call Phoenicia “Canaan.” The Masoretic trope of the Hebrew text, however, implies that the phrase refers to all the regions named in the first part of the verse, and takes the phrase in its common biblical meaning of the entire Promised Land (e.g., Deut. 11:30; Gen. 12:5). This meaning corresponds to the use of “Canaan” in ancient Egyptian sources when reference is made to the region of Canaan under Egyptian control.

Lebanon The inland Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountain ranges, including the Bekáa Valley between them, but not to the entire territory of modern Lebanon.

river Euphrates The part of the Euphrates that is on a direct line with the Lebanon range, i.e., the northwestern sector of the river in northern Syria. The Euphrates, therefore, represents the northern extremity of the Promised Land (e.g., 11:24).

8. take possession God’s gift of the land to the Israelites was viewed as analogous to a sovereign’s grant of land to a loyal servant. In an ancient Near Eastern document, a Hittite king makes a similar declaration to his vassal: “See, I gave you the Zippashla mountain land; occupy it.”

the LORD swore Here God refers to Himself in the third person, after using the first person in verses 6–8a. Such grammatical variation is common in the Bible and in other ancient Near Eastern literature. By referring to His oath to the pa-

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to assign to them and to their heirs after them.

⁹Thereupon I said to you, "I cannot bear the burden of you by myself. ¹⁰The LORD your God has multiplied you until you are today as numerous as the stars in the sky.—¹¹May the LORD, the God of your fathers, increase your numbers a thousandfold, and bless you as He promised you.—¹²How can I bear unaided the trouble of you, and the burden, and the bickering! ¹³Pick from each of your tribes men who are wise, discerning, and experienced, and I will appoint them as your heads." ¹⁴You answered me and said, "What you propose to do is good." ¹⁵So I took your tribal leaders, wise and experienced men, and appointed them heads over you: chiefs of thousands, chiefs of hundreds, chiefs of fifties, and chiefs of tens, and officials

נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לָתֵת לָהֶם וּלְזֶרְעָם אַחֲרֵיהֶם:
⁹וְאָמַר אֲלֵכֶם בְּעַת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר לֹא-
 אוֹכַל לִבְדִּי שָׂאת אֶתְכֶם: ¹⁰יְהוָה
 אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הֵרְבָּה אֶתְכֶם וְהִנֵּנֶם הַיּוֹם
 שְׁנֵי כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם לְרֹב: ¹¹יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי
 אֲבוֹתֵכֶם יִסֹּף עֲלֵיכֶם כְּכֶם אֵלֶּף פְּעָמִים
 וַיִּבְרַךְ אֶתְכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָכֶם: ¹²אִיכָה
 אֲשָׂא לִבְדִּי טְרַחְכֶם וּמִשְׁאָכְכֶם וּרְיָבְכֶם:
¹³הֲבֵן לָכֶם אֲנָשִׁים חֲכָמִים וְנִבְנִים
 וַיִּדְעִים לִשְׁבֹּטֵיכֶם וְאֲשִׁימָם בְּרָאשֵׁיכֶם:
¹⁴וְתַעֲנֵנוּ אֹתִי וְתֹאמְרוּ טוֹב הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר-
 דִּבַּרְתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת: ¹⁵וְאָקַח אֶת־רֹאשֵׁי
 שְׁבֹטֵיכֶם אֲנָשִׁים חֲכָמִים וַיִּדְעִים וְאֶתָּן
 אוֹתָם רֹאשִׁים עֲלֵיכֶם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי
 מֵאוֹת וְשָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֹת

triarchs, God shows the people that He fulfills His promises. As Moses explains later (4:37, 7:8, 9:5), this oath is the basis of the relationship between God and the present generation.

CHIEFS APPOINTED FOR THE JOURNEY (vv. 9–18)

9. Moses was worn out by the pressures of leadership (see Num. 11:11–15). The appointment of the chiefs is related in Exod. 18:13–27.

Thereupon Literally, "at that time."

11. Lest his audience think that he is complaining about their increase, Moses adds his hope that God will continue to enlarge their numbers.

the LORD, the God of your fathers Deuteronomy normally refers to God as "the LORD your God," and uses "God of your fathers" only when referring to the covenantal promises God made to the patriarchs.

12. The burden that prompted the appoint-

ment of officers was Moses' need to adjudicate legal disputes all day long (Exod. 18:13–18).

13. Pick In Exod. 18:13–23, the proposal to appoint judges was made by Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. In Numbers 11:11–17, it is God's suggestion. Here it is accounted to Moses. These sources reflect three different traditions. In Exodus and Numbers, Moses selects the candidates; here the people are asked to make the selection.

wise, discerning, and experienced In Exod. 18:21, the qualifications highlight moral qualities; here they emphasize intellectual traits. Deuteronomy regards justice and piety as expressions of wisdom (see 4:6,8).

15. The people recommended their tribal leaders, and Moses appointed them "heads," a term that refers to tribal leaders whose responsibilities include both military and judicial matters. Titles such as "chief of thousands" and "chief of hundreds" usually refer to military officers. Such integration of roles was common in tribal societies.

9. I cannot bear the burden Moses is aware that the era of teaching Torah is about to end and the era of doing battle to conquer the Land will soon begin. Realizing that he is no longer the right leader for the new era, he feels his strength diminish.

12. How can I bear unaided Hebrew:

eikhah essa l'vadi. Traditionally in public reading this verse is chanted to the plaintive melody for the Book of Lamentations (*Eikhah*). This *parashah* is always read on the *Shabbat* before *Tisha b'Av*, the fast day on which Lamentations is recited.

for your tribes. ¹⁶I charged your magistrates at that time as follows, "Hear out your fellow men, and decide justly between any man and a fellow Israelite or a stranger. ¹⁷You shall not be partial in judgment: hear out low and high alike. Fear no man, for judgment is God's. And any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me and I will hear it." ¹⁸Thus I instructed you, at that time, about the various things that you should do.

¹⁹We set out from Horeb and traveled the great and terrible wilderness that you saw, along the road to the hill country of the Amorites, as the LORD our God had commanded us. When

וְשֹׁטְרִים לְשִׁבְטֵיכֶם: ¹⁶וְאַצְוָה אֶת־
שְׁפִיטֵיכֶם בְּעֵת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר שְׁמַע בֵּין־
אֲחִיכֶם וּשְׁפִטָתֶם צֶדֶק בֵּין־אִישׁ וּבֵין־
אָחִיו וּבֵין גֵּר: ¹⁷לֹא־תִפְּרוּ פָנִים
בַּמִּשְׁפָּט כְּקִטְן כְּגָדֹל תִּשְׁמָעוֹן לֹא תִגְוֹר
מִפְּנֵי־אִישׁ כִּי הַמִּשְׁפָּט לֵאלֹהִים הוּא
וְהִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר יִקְשֶׁה מִכֶּם תִּקְרֹבוּן אֵלַי
וְשָׁמַעְתִּיו: ¹⁸וְאַצְוָה אֶתְכֶם בְּעֵת הַהוּא
אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּן:
¹⁹וְנָסַע מִחֹרֵב וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶת כָּל־הַמִּדְבָּר
הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא הַהוּא אֲשֶׁר רִאִיתֶם דֶּרֶךְ
הַר הָאֱמֹרִי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

16. In the ancient Near East it was traditional to address a charge to newly appointed judges, either at the time of their appointment or in codes defining their responsibilities.

Hear Idiomatic for "try a case," as in the English "hear a case."

fellow men Literally, "brothers," meaning fellow Israelites. Deuteronomy regularly uses this term to emphasize the equality and fraternity of all Israelites, whether king or servant, prophet or priest.

stranger Hebrew: *ger*. The resident alien, the non-Israelite residing among Israelites. This law protects the right of a *ger* to a fair trial.

17. Moses will not function as an appellate judge but will take over cases that lower judges find too difficult to decide, including those in which the law is not known and Moses has to consult God (e.g., Lev. 24:10–23; Num. 9:1–14).

for judgment is God's The judge is the representative of God who, as lawgiver, is concerned about justice.

18. At that time Shortly before the Israelites left Sinai. This verse refers to instructions ad-

ressed to the entire people (see Exod. 18:20). Teaching the laws to the entire citizenry is virtually unparalleled in other ancient cultures. Because Israel's primary duty to God is obedience to His laws, it is imperative that every Israelite be taught those laws. This is Moses' main goal in Deuteronomy.

ARRIVAL AT THE PROMISED LAND (vv. 19–21)

19. The route through the wilderness is described in detail in Num. 10:33, 11:35, 12:16, and 33:16ff.

the great and terrible wilderness The Sinai Peninsula, a land "with its *seraph* serpents and scorpions, a parched land with no water in it" (Deut. 8:15).

road to the hill country A road leading from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea, on the southern border of the Promised Land (Num. 34:4). The precise route is unknown.

as the LORD our God had commanded us The initial response of the Israelites to God's command had been obedience, and as a result they reached their destination.

16. Hear out The first obligation of a judge is to listen to all sides. This is embodied in Jewish law by the requirement that both litigants be present when either states his or her case (BT Sanh. 7b).

17. low and high alike The judge must not

only treat prominent and unknown individuals alike but also treat major and minor cases with equal seriousness (BT Sanh. 8a). What may seem trivial to a judge compared to other cases under adjudication is nonetheless important to the litigants (see Exod. 23:3).

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

1:17. Not only must rich and poor be judged alike but, contrary to American law, cases involving major and minor amounts of money or penalties also must be treated equally (BT Sanh. 8a). See Exod. 23:3.

we reached Kadesh-barnea, ²⁰I said to you, "You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the LORD our God is giving to us. ²¹See, the LORD your God has placed the land at your disposal. Go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. Fear not and be not dismayed."

²²Then all of you came to me and said, "Let us send men ahead to reconnoiter the land for us and bring back word on the route we shall follow and the cities we shall come to." ²³I approved of the plan, and so I selected twelve of your men, one from each tribe. ²⁴They made for the hill country, came to the wadi Eshcol, and spied it out. ²⁵They took some of the fruit of the land with them and brought it down to us. And they gave us this report: "It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving to us."

²⁶Yet you refused to go up, and flouted the command of the LORD your God. ²⁷You sulked in your tents and said, "It is because the LORD hates us that He brought us out of the land of

אתנו ונבא עד קדש ברנע: ²⁰ ואמר אלכם באתם עד-הר האמורי אשר-יהוה אלהינו נתן לנו: ²¹ ראה נתן יהוה אלהיך לפניך את-הארץ עליה רש באשר דבר יהוה אלהי אבותיך לך אל-תירא ואל-תחת:

שלישי ²² ותקרבון אלי כלכם ותאמרו נשלח אנשים לפנינו ויחפרו לנו את-הארץ וישבו אתנו דבר את-ההרך אשר נעלה בה ואת הערים אשר נבא אליהן: ²³ וייעב בעיני הדבר ואקח מכם שנים עשר אנשים איש אחד לשבט: ²⁴ ויפנו ויעלו ההרה ויבאו עד-נחל אשכול וירגלו אתה: ²⁵ ויקחו בידם מפרי הארץ ויורדו אלינו וישבו אתנו דבר ויאמרו טובה הארץ אשר-יהוה אלהינו נתן לנו: ²⁶ ולא אביתם לעלת ותמרו את-פי יהוה אלהיכם: ²⁷ ותרגנו באהליכם ותאמרו בשנאת יהוה אתנו הוציאנו

20. hill country of the Amorites Seems to refer to the Promised Land as a whole, just as the term "Amorites" sometimes designates its entire population, perhaps because these highlands became the Israelite heartland.

The LORD our God is giving to us At this very moment.

21. as the LORD . . . promised you This formula (attested also in Akkadian and Aramaic documents) assures Moses' listeners of success. God had promised that the same generation that experienced the Exodus would receive the land (Exod. 3:8, 17, 6:8).

Fear not and be not dismayed This formula usually expresses assurance, although it is phrased as an imperative. Here it is based on the promise to which Moses has just alluded.

THE PEOPLE'S REFUSAL TO PROCEED (vv. 22-33)

22. reconnoiter Explore the land and its resources. Information about the land is important both for strategic military purposes and for preparing to settle in it.

bring back word on the route . . . and the

cities That is, the scouts themselves should determine the best route and the order in which the cities should be attacked, or that they should obtain information about possible routes (such as which are narrow and dangerous) and the fortifications of the cities.

23. Named in Num. 13:2-16, where they are described as tribal chieftains.

24. wadi Eshcol "The wadi of the grape cluster(s)." Moses singles out this place, because it is where the scouts found the grapes that typified the land's fertility and where they saw the giants who so terrified the Israelites that they refused to enter the land.

25. some of the fruit of the land The "grapes, some pomegranates, and figs," which serve as evidence that the land is good (Num. 13:23, 27).

good Rich in produce and other natural resources.

27. sulked Better: "grumbled."

in your tents At night (Num. 14:1).

the LORD hates us Literally, "hatred of the LORD for us," a word order that emphasizes the people's perversity and ingratitude. (In the Bible,

Egypt, to hand us over to the Amorites to wipe us out. ²⁸What kind of place are we going to? Our kinsmen have taken the heart out of us, saying, 'We saw there a people stronger and taller than we, large cities with walls sky-high, and even Anakites.'"

²⁹I said to you, "Have no dread or fear of them. ³⁰None other than the LORD your God, who goes before you, will fight for you, just as He did for you in Egypt before your very eyes, ³¹and in the wilderness, where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you traveled until you came to this place. ³²Yet for all that, you have no faith in the LORD your God, ³³who goes before you on your journeys—to scout the place where you are to encamp—in fire by night and in cloud by day, in order to guide you on the route you are to follow."

clauses normally start with a verb; any other word that appears at the beginning has thus been singled out for emphasis.)

28. What kind of place Suggesting that the land is flawed. This aspersion is another illustration of the people's perversity, for the goodness of the land of Israel is practically an article of faith in the Bible.

Our kinsmen That is, the scouts. Referring to them as kinsmen emphasizes their credibility in the people's eyes.

taller than we The legendary height of the Amorites was later recalled by the prophet Amos (2:9), who describes them as having been tall as cedars and stout as oaks.

walls sky-high Canaanite cities were built on tells (mounds atop the remains of settlements) that were often founded on natural hills. Their walls must indeed have looked sky-high to people who had been living in the wilderness. In similar fashion, an Assyrian inscription describes an Israelite city as "reaching the sky."

27. the LORD hates us We often attribute to others our own feelings about them. The Israelites may have been ambivalent in their feelings about God, often resenting the demands that God placed on them, and they as-

מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לָתֵת אֹתָנוּ בְּיַד הָאֲמֹרִי
לְהַשְׁמִידָנוּ: ²⁸ אָנָּה | אֲנַחְנוּ עָלֵים אַחִינוּ
הַמָּסוּ אֶת-לִבָּבָנוּ לֵאמֹר עִם גָּדוֹל וָרֵם
מִמֶּנּוּ עָרִים גְּדֹלֹת וּבְצוּרֹת בַּשָּׁמַיִם וְגַם-
בְּנֵי עֲנָקִים רָאִינוּ שָׁם:

²⁹ וְאָמַר אֲלֵכֶם לֹא-תַעֲרָצוּן וְלֹא-תִירָאוּן
מֵהֶם: ³⁰ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הֵהָלֵךְ לִפְנֵיכֶם
הוּא יִלָּחֶם לָכֶם כָּכָל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֶתְכֶם
בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵיכֶם: ³¹ וּבַמִּדְבָּר אֲשֶׁר
רָאִיתָ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַף יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר
יִשְׂאֵאֱאִישׁ אֶת-בְּנוֹ בְּכָל-הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר
הִלַּכְתֶּם עַד-בָּאֲכֶם עַד-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה:
³² וּבַדֶּבֶר הַזֶּה אֵינְכֶם מֵאֲמִינִם בַּיהוָה
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: ³³ הֵהָלֵךְ לִפְנֵיכֶם בַּדֶּרֶךְ לְתוֹר
לָכֶם מָקוֹם לְחַנְתְּכֶם בָּאֵשׁ | לִילָה
לְרֹאשׁוֹתְכֶם בַּדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכוּ-בָּהּ וּבַעֲנָן
יוֹמָם:

Anakites A particularly gigantic group, next to whom the scouts felt like grasshoppers (Num. 13:32–33). It is quite possible that there were some exceptionally tall people in the area. Two 7-foot female skeletons have been found in a 12th-century B.C.E. cemetery on the east bank of the Jordan, at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh.

30. who goes before you That is, the vanguard (advance guard), protecting those who follow.

will fight for you, just as He did in Egypt At the Sea of Reeds (Exod. 14:14,25).

31. and in the wilderness God protected Israel from the Amalekites (Exod. 17:8–16) and from the natural dangers there (Deut. 8:15).

this place Kadesh-barnea.

33. The people ignore the evidence of God's care and guidance, although it is never out of their sight. The cloud and the fire have been constant, visible signs of God's presence since the day they left Egypt.

sumed that God had equally negative feelings toward them. One *midrash* imagines them saying: "If God really loved us, God would have given us the land of Egypt and sent the Egyptians into the wilderness" (Rashi).

³⁴When the LORD heard your loud complaint, He was angry. He vowed: ³⁵Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers—³⁶none except Caleb son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his descendants will I give the land on which he set foot, because he remained loyal to the LORD.

³⁷Because of you the LORD was incensed with me too, and He said: You shall not enter it either.

³⁸Joshua son of Nun, who attends you, he shall enter it. Imbue him with strength, for he shall allot it to Israel. ³⁹Moreover, your little ones who you said would be carried off, your children who do not yet know good from bad, they shall enter it; to them will I give it and they shall possess it. ⁴⁰As for you, turn about and march into the wilderness by the way of the Sea of Reeds.

³⁴וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֶת־קוֹל דְּבָרֵיכֶם וַיִּקְצֹף וַיִּשָּׁבַע לֵאמֹר: ³⁵אִם־יֵרָאֶה אִישׁ בְּאַנְשֵׁים הָאֵלֶּה הַדּוֹר הָרַע הַזֶּה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לָתֵת לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם: ³⁶וְזוֹלָתִי כָּלֵב בֶּן־יִפְנֶה הוּא יֵרָאֶה וְלֹד־אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר דָּרַךְ־בָּהּ וּלְבָנָיו יֵעַן אֲשֶׁר מָלֵא אַחֲרֵי יְהוָה: ³⁷גַּם־כִּי הִתְאַנֵּף יְהוָה בְּגִלְלַכֶּם לֵאמֹר גַּם־אֲתָה לֹא־תָבֹא שָׁם: ³⁸יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון הֶעֱמִד לִפְנֵיךְ הוּא יָבֵא שָׁמָּה אֹתוֹ חֵזֶק רַבִּיעִי כִּי־הוּא יַנְחִילָנָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל: ³⁹וְטַפְכֶּם אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתֶּם לָבֹי יְהוָה וּבְנֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ הַיּוֹם טוֹב וָרָע הֵמָּה יָבֹאוּ שָׁמָּה וְלָהֶם אֶתְנָנָה וְהֵם יִירָשׁוּהָ: ⁴⁰וְאַתֶּם פְּנוּ לָכֶם וּסַעו הַמִּדְבָּרָה דֶּרֶךְ יַם־סוּף:

THE PEOPLE'S ABOUT-FACE (vv. 34–41)

Moses' plea to the people fell on deaf ears. According to Num. 14:11–20, God would have destroyed the entire generation and replaced them with Moses' descendants, had Moses not persuaded Him to be lenient.

34. your loud complaint According to Num. 14:11 and 22, it was the people's lack of faith in God that provoked His ire.

He vowed That is, God swore, echoing verse 8. This generation's rejection of the sworn Land is met by a new swearing that now deprives them of it.

35. this evil generation Refers to males who were 20 and older at the time of the incident (Num. 14:29, 32:11), spoken of as warriors (i.e., men of military age) in Deut. 2:14, 16. The phrase here contrasts with "the good land" and suggests the fitness of the decree: An evil generation may not enter a good land.

36. Caleb, a leader of the tribe of Judah (Num. 13:6), is exempted from the decree because he kept his faith that the Lord would enable Israel to overcome the Amorites and pleaded with the people to remain faithful (Num. 13:30, 14:6–9). According to Num. 14:6 and other passages, Joshua joined Caleb in this plea.

the land on which he set foot Hebron.

37. Although Moses does not specify what provoked God's anger at him, there is an implication here that somehow it was connected with

the rebellion. The plain sense of the passage seems to be that Moses, personally blameless, was caught up in God's anger at his contemporaries. Possibly this was due to Moses' acceding to the people's request for scouts. Even if that request did not imply a lack of faith in God initially, it eventually led to the people's loss of faith. Perhaps Moses was held accountable for the consequences of their initiative because he had approved it.

38. Joshua, Moses' aide (see Exod. 24:13), is his natural successor. His fitness is indicated in Num. 27:18 where he is described as "an inspired man," a man moved by the spirit of God. Joshua's prior military experience also prepares him to lead Israel in the coming wars (Exod. 17:8–13).

Joshua Hebrew: *Y'hoshu-a*. The name probably means "the LORD (*y'ho*) is a noble (*shu-a*)."

allot Joshua will assign each of the tribes and clans its territory.

39. Here God's address to the people is resumed.

who you said would be carried off See Num. 14:3.

your children who do not yet know good from bad Therefore, they cannot be held accountable for the rebellion. The parallel passages in Numbers indicate that this refers to children below the age of 20.

40. God's reversal of His promise is now made real. At the very border of the Promised Land the people are sent back into the wilderness from which they had just come. Thus the journey

⁴¹You replied to me, saying, "We stand guilty before the LORD. We will go up now and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us." And you all girded yourselves with war gear and recklessly started for the hill country. ⁴²But the LORD said to me, "Warn them: Do not go up and do not fight, since I am not in your midst; else you will be routed by your enemies." ⁴³I spoke to you, but you would not listen; you flouted the LORD's command and willfully marched into the hill country. ⁴⁴Then the Amorites who lived in those hills came out against you like so many bees and chased you, and they crushed you at Hormah in Seir. ⁴⁵Again you wept before the LORD; but the LORD would not heed your cry or give ear to you.

2 ⁴⁶Thus, after you had remained at Kadesh all that long time, ¹we marched back into

⁴¹וַתַּעֲנֵנִי | וַתֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי חָטֵאנוּ לַיהוָה
אֲנַחְנוּ נַעֲלֶה וְנִלְחָמֶנּוּ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּנוּ
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וַתַּחֲגֹרוּ אִישׁ אֶת-כְּלֵי
מִלְחָמָתוֹ וַתַּהֲיִנוּ לַעֲלֹת הַהָרָה: ⁴²וַיֹּאמֶר
יְהוָה אֵלַי אֲמֹר לָהֶם לֹא תַעֲלֹוּ וְלֹא-
תִלָּחֲמוּ כִּי אֵינֶנִּי בְקִרְבְּכֶם וְלֹא תִנָּגְפוּ
לִפְנֵי אֹיְבֵיכֶם: ⁴³וַאֲדַבֵּר אֲלֵיכֶם וְלֹא
שָׁמַעְתֶּם וַתִּמְרוּ אֶת-פִּי יְהוָה וַתִּזְדּוּרוּ
וַתַּעֲלֹוּ הַהָרָה: ⁴⁴וַיֵּצֵא הָאֱמֹרִי הַיֹּשֵׁב
בְּהָר הַהוּא לִקְרַאתְכֶם וַיִּרְדְּפוּ אֶתְכֶם
כַּאֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂינָה הַדְּבָרִים וַיִּכְתּוּ אֶתְכֶם
בְּשַׁעִיר עַד-חֲרָמָה: ⁴⁵וַתִּשְׁבוּ וַתִּבְכוּ לִפְנֵי
יְהוָה וְלֹא-שָׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקִלְכֶם וְלֹא הֶאֱזִין
אֲלֵיכֶם:

ב ⁴⁶וַתִּשְׁבוּ בְּקֶדֶשׁ יָמִים רַבִּים כִּימִים
אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבֶּתֶם: ¹וַנֵּפֶן וְנִסַּע הַמִּדְבָּרָה

"through the great and terrible wilderness" was for naught.

by the way of the Sea of Reeds That is, "on the road to the Sea of Reeds," which led from Kadesh-barnea to the Gulf of Aqaba. The "Sea of Reeds" refers both to the sea the Israelites crossed when leaving Egypt and to the Gulf of Aqaba. The latter is meant here, because the Israelites never returned to the former.

41. The people's response to God's decree seems one of contrition, but in fact it is as rebellious as their reaction to the original command. When ordered to "turn about and march" and "go up" to the land (vv. 7,21) they "refused to go up" (v. 26). Now that they are commanded to "turn about and march" away from the land, they respond "we will go up" to the land.

We will go up It is we who will go up, not the next generation, contrary to God's decree.

GOD RETURNS THE PEOPLE TO THE WILDERNESS (1:42-2:1)

42. The people believed that God would not enforce His decree if they reversed themselves. God makes His intentions explicit, countermarching both the people's declaration that they would go up and fight (v. 41) and His own earlier command (v. 21).

I am not in your midst The Israelites, believing that God was still in their midst, were certain of their ability to overcome militarily superior

enemies. Indeed, Moses had reminded them of God's presence when they refused to go up and fight. Ironically, it is only after God withdraws from their midst that they insist on going.

43. An ironic contrast with verse 26: "you refused to go up [into the hill country], and flouted the command of the LORD." The similar wording highlights the people's stubborn contrariness.

44. By their own action, the Israelites had brought about the disaster they had feared (v. 27): defeat at the hands of the Amorites.

Amorites Here, a general designation for all the natives of the Promised Land.

bees Wild honeybees of the type found in ancient Israel. Similar remarks relating to bees are found in Mesopotamian and Greek sources.

45. Again you wept Having swung from despair to overconfidence (vv. 27-28,41), the people's mood swung back to grief.

46. Literally, "And you remained at Kadesh many days, like the days that you remained." "Many days" can refer to periods of a few days or of many years. The translation implies that "you remained at Kadesh" refers to the time up through the return from battle, with no further delay there.

2:1. In their first act of obedience since leaving Horeb, the Israelites leave Kadesh-barnea and return to the wilderness, as commanded in 1:40.

long time Literally, "many days." Nearly 38 years (see 2:14).

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.

²Then the LORD said to me: ³You have been skirting this hill country long enough; now turn north. ⁴And 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 ⁵not 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 pos-

דרך ים־סוף באשר דבר יהוה אלי ונסב את־הר־שעיר ימים רבים: ס

חמישי ² ויאמר יהוה אלי לאמר: ³ רב־לכם סב

את־ההר הזה פנו לכם צפונה: ⁴ ואת־

העם צו לאמר אתם עברים בגבול

אחיכם בני־עשו הישבים בשעיר וייראו

מכם ונשמרתם מאד: ⁵ אל־תתגרו כם

כי לא־אתן לכם מארצם עד מדרך

כף־רגל כִּי־ירשה לעשו נתתי את־הר

ISRAEL OBEYS THE SECOND COMMAND TO PROCEED TO THE PROMISED LAND (2:2-3:29)

God begins to move the Israelites into a position from which they can enter the Promised Land as soon as the previous generation has died out. Instead of entering directly from the wilderness in the south, as they could have done 38 years earlier, the Israelites must now approach from the east. This route requires them to pass five states that run the length of Transjordan, from south to north: Edom, Moab, Ammon, and the Amorite kingdoms of Sihon and Og.

PASSING THROUGH SEIR (vv. 2-8)

The first stage of the northward march through Transjordan takes the Israelites through part of the territory of Seir-Edom, east of the Negev highlands. Inhabitants there were seminomads, as indicated by Egyptian inscriptions of the 13th century B.C.E. and the paucity of archaeological evidence of a sedentary population.

³ This command was uttered near the end of the last year of the wanderings in the wilderness, as is evident from verse 7, which states that they were in their 40th year.

turn north To judge from verse 8, the Israelites were now at the southern tip of Seir-Edom, near Elath and Ezion-geber.

4. the descendants of Esau The Edomites, descendants of Jacob's brother and hence the Israelites' kinsmen (see Gen. 36).

Seir Because the territory about to be traversed is south of Moab (see vv. 3,8), Seir refers here to the eastern part of Seir-Edom, either the part in the 'Arabah or the part in the highlands farther east. Eastern Seir-Edom extended northward for 100 miles (160 km) from the Gulf of Aqaba to the southern end of the Dead Sea and wadi Zered.

afraid of you The prospect of a huge population and its cattle traversing their territory would be alarming.

⁵ The verse expresses one of the pervasive themes of this chapter: God gave the Edomites their land, just as He is about to give the Israelites theirs. The same is said of the lands of the Moabites and Ammonites in verses 9 and 19. Their right to their lands must be respected.

CHAPTER 2

4-5. Until now, Israel's encounters with other nations have been uniformly negative: enslavement in Egypt and war with Amalek, Sihon, and Og. Once they settle in the Land, however, they will have to live at peace with neighboring nations. That will require their learning to see the descendants of Esau as "your kinsmen." Perhaps regarding them as

kinsmen will even turn them into friendlier, more cooperative neighbors.

be very careful not to provoke them Your ancestors had to deal with feelings of weakness and inadequacy when confronting the Canaanites. You will have to deal with the moral challenge of not abusing your superior power in dealing with weaker peoples (N. Leibowitz).

I have given . . . as a possession to Esau God's special relationship to Israel does not