

for SEFER DEVARIM

[The first battery of questions will deal with the **book** of Devarim; questions on **Parshat** Devarim will follow.]

PART I - WHAT IS (or ISN'T) SEFER DEVARIM?

INTRODUCTION -

It is commonly understood that Sefer Devarim is a **review** or **repeat** of Chumash, the following set of questions will help you determine if this assumption is indeed correct, while preparing you for your study of the book.

If indeed Sefer Devarim is a **review** of Chumash, then we would certainly expect that it would review both the main stories as well as the primary mitzvot that are found in the books of Breishit, Shmot, Vayikra, and Bamidbar.

To ascertain if this is indeed true, let's review the main topics of each book of Chumash, and see if they are discussed anywhere in Sefer Devarim.

1. In Sefer Breishit, we find the story of Creation, the Flood and the story of the Avot, etc. Are any of these stories repeated in Sefer Devarim? If so, which story and where it is repeated? Which stories are 'missing'?

2. In Sefer Shmot we find the stories of Moshe's birth, the Ten Plagues, the Exodus, matan Torah, chet ha-egel, and building the mishkan. Can you find any of these stories in Sefer Devarim? If so, where?

Which stories in Shmot are definitely not in Devarim?

What "mitzvot" are recorded in Sefer Shmot? Are any of them repeated in Sefer Devarim?

3. Recall how the second half of Sefer Shmot discusses the Mishkan in great detail (parshiot Teruma, Tetzaveh, first half of Ki Tisa, Vayakhel & Pekudei). Is any of this detail repeated or summarized in Sefer Devarim? If so, where?

Is the Mishkan itself ever mentioned in Sefer Devarim? Is the Bet ha'Mikdash and/or korbanot ever referred to?

If so, where?

4. You may have noticed that stories of Matan Torah and chet ha-egel are found in Sefer Devarim chapters 5 and 9 (respectively). In what context are these stories presented in Sefer Devarim - as part of an ongoing review of Bnei Yisrael's history? If not, why are they recorded, and why are some of the details different?

5. Recall from Sefer Vayikra that it contains numerous mitzvot, most of which deal with the mishkan and korbanot. Are any of these mitzvot repeated in Sefer Devarim? If so, which mitzvot, in what context (and where)?

Are there any categories of mitzvot in Sefer Vayikra that are not mentioned at all in Sefer Devarim? If so, can you explain why?

6. Recall from our study of Sefer Bamidbar how it contains both 'narrative' and 'mitzvot'. While the narrative focused on the story of Bnei Yisrael's journey from Har Sinai towards Eretz Canaan [including the preparation for that journey], most of its mitzvot seemed to have 'belonged' in Sefer Vayikra.

To the best of your recollection, which stories from Sefer Bamidbar are repeated in Sefer Devarim? Are these stories presented in an orderly fashion? If so, where in Sefer Devarim and in what context?

Can you identify which stories are missing (and why)? For example, do we find a review of the stories of Korach, Bil'am, and

the "mei meriva" incident? If so, are they presented as part of a complete review, or are they mentioned just in passing?

7. The story of the meraglim is indeed 'repeated' in chapter one of Sefer Devarim. Can you explain why specifically that story receives so much detail and is one of the first stories of Chumash to be repeated in Sefer Devarim (even though it didn't take place until the second year in the desert)?

The story of the conquest of Sichon & Og is also quite detailed in Parshat Devarim (see chapters 2-3), more so than in its original account in Sefer Bamidbar (see 21:21-35). Can you explain why? In your answer, relate to the final psukim of Parshat Devarim (i.e. 3:20-22)!

8. Recall that Sefer Bamidbar also contained many mitzvot (e.g. - sota, nazir, birkat kohanim, challa, tzitzit, para aduma, trmidim u-musafim etc.). Are any of those mitzvot repeated in Sefer Devarim? If so, where? If not, can you explain why they aren't?

9. Do we find any mitzvot in Sefer Devarim that were never mentioned earlier in Chumash? If so, name a few examples.

If Sefer Devarim is indeed a review of Chumash, would it make sense that it would contain mitzvot that were never mentioned earlier?

10. Based on your answers to all the above questions, would you still say that Sefer Devarim is a review or repeat of Chumash?

If not, then what is it?

[In case you can't answer that question, it is recommended that you continue with Part II.]

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PART II - A BOOK OF SPEECHES

1. If you have ample time, take a few minutes to browse through Sefer Devarim, noting how most of the book is written in the first person (i.e. as though Moshe himself is talking). Can you explain the reason for this style?

Do we find this style in any other Sefer of Chumash?

2. Be sure that you understand the difference between 'first person' and 'third person'. Then, go the beginning of Sefer Devarim and start reading the first few psukim, and determine if they are in first person or in third person (and explain why).

Note that even though the Sefer begins in third person, after several psukim we find a switch to 'first person' - and that style continues for several chapters.

In what psukim does this switch to first person occur? Can you explain why?

Until where does this 'first person' style continue?

[If you give up, scan until [towards the] end of chapter 4.]

In case you didn't notice, you just identified a speech, the first of many speeches found in Sefer Devarim. Quickly scan these four chapters (i.e. 1:5-4:40) and see if you can identify the main topic (or topics) of this first speech?

Attempt as well to understand its flow of topic.

3. Next, carefully read the opening psukim of chapter 5, trying once again to identify a speech and if so, where it begins.

[This speech should be a bit easier to identify.]

Scan this speech that begins in 5:1 and attempt to find where it ends (i.e. where is that next time that we find that Chumash returns to 'third person' form). As you scan through this speech, looking for when it ends, see if you can identify its primary topic(s).

[You will probably give up after a while, since this speech continues on and on, all the way until the end of chapter 26!]

If you have ample time, try to verify this by yourself. If you have even more time, see if you can identify any other speeches in the remainder of Sefer Devarim (i.e. between chapters 27 and 34). If you find a section that is not another speech, see if you can identify what it is, and how it relates to the rest of the book.]

4. Review 4:41-49, noting how it forms a short narrative (i.e. it's written in third person), the bridges between the first speech in chapters 1 thru 4, and the next speech that begins in chapter 5.

In what manner does this narrative relate to either of these two speeches. Be sure that you can explain 4:44-45.

[The pasuk 4:44 should sound very familiar!]

For an interesting explanation of the connection between 4:44-45 and Devarim 1:1-5 (and Devarim 5:1-2), see Ramban on Devarim 1:1. You'll only understand this Ramban if you first study these psukim in relation to these two speeches.]

5. Now that we have determined that chapters 5 thru 26 form a long speech - we'll refer to it as the 'main speech', as it will form the primary section of the entire book. To understand the purpose of this speech, we'll need to take a careful look at its opening few lines.

Carefully study 5:1 - the opening pasuk of this speech - noting how it serves as an introduction.

Based on this introductory pasuk, what should be the primary topic of this lengthy speech?

Then read 5:2-3, and try to understand how these two psukim relate to the short introduction in 5:1. [In other words, how does the 'covenant at Sinai' relate to the mitzvot that will be taught by Moshe Rabbeinu in his speech?]

Then read 5:4-5, and try to understand how these two psukim relate to the short introduction in 5:1.

In your opinion, does the statement made in 5:4 contradict the statement made in 5:5? If so, can you resolve this contradiction?

6. Note how a 'review' of the Ten Commandments follows immediately afterward in 5:6-18; and how this review is followed by a story in 5:19-31. Be sure that you understand how and why that story follows the Ten Commandments, and how it relates to mitzvot that will follow in the main speech. [Make sure that you understand how 5:28 (and 6:1) relate to 5:1.]

As you review the story in 5:19 thru 6:3, be sure to note how this story records how and when an entire set of mitzvot were once given (at Har Sinai) and how this story relates to the main speech. Be sure as well that you understand why Moshe begins this 'main speech' with this story?

7. Review once again 5:27-28, noting how these psukim relate directly to 6:1. Also, as your review 5:28 thru 6:4, be sure that you understand when Moshe is quoting from what happened forty years ago, and what he is stating now [or adding on] in his present speech to the people.

Note again how 5:28 describes a set of mitzvot that God gave Moshe to teach Bnei Yisrael. When were these mitzvot first given to Moshe Rabbeinu, and when (in your opinion) did he first teach them to Bnei Yisrael?

In your answer, relate to Shmot 34:29-32, noting the context of those psukim.

8. Review 6:1 once again, in its context. Which mitzvot does the word "v'zot" (in 6:1) refer to? How does your answer relate to what will now follow in the main speech? [If you have time, browse thru chapters 6 thru 26 to verify your answer.]

Can you explain why this 'main speech' of Sefer Devarim is commonly referred to as 'ne'um ha-mitzvot'?

9. Carefully review once again Shmot 34:27-33!

Note how they describe how Moshe taught Bnei Yisrael - "all of the laws that God had instructed him on Har Sinai".

In your opinion, what specific laws does 34:32 refer to? [Note that the commentators offer various opinions.]

Does it make sense that Moshe, after he came down from Har Sinai with the second luchot, would have taught Bnei Yisrael all of the laws that God had given him on Har Sinai? [Was there any reason why he shouldn't?]

Are all of those laws - i.e. that Moshe received on Har Sinai and taught Bnei Yisrael when he descended - recorded in Sefer Shmot? If so, where?

[In your answer, relate to Shmot 35:1-5, i.e. why Sefer Shmot does record the laws of the mishkan.]

If these mitzvot are not recorded in Sefer Shmot, then where in Chumash are they recorded?

In your answer, relate to Devarim chapter five (and the above questions), and the speech that it introduces.

10. Next, carefully study 6:1-8. [Some of these psukim should sound very familiar.] Try your best to understand how these psukim relate to chapter five (and the above questions).

As you translate 6:6, explain what the word 'devarim' in the phrase 've-hayu ha-devarim ha-eileh' refers to! Relate to 5:1!

How does this phrase - 've-hayu ha-devarim ha-eileh' - relate to the story in chapter 5 and the mitzvot that follow in chapters 6 thru 26? [How does it relate to the word "devarim" in 1:1?]

11. In 6:7, we all find the commandment of 've-shinantem le-vanecha...'. How did you translate the verb 'leshanen' in this pasuk? How is the meaning of leshanen different than the verb 'lelamed' [to teach], as was used in 5:1, 5:28, and 6:1?

Based on the context of this pasuk, which mitzvot require 'shinun' [repetition]?

Based on this question, why do you think that Chazal refer to this sefer as **Mishneh Torah** - because it contains a repetition of laws, or because it contains laws that require repetition?

Before you prepared these questions, how did you understand the meaning of the name: "mishneh Torah"? Based on these questions - how would you now translate the phrase mishneh Torah?

Relate to the use of this phrase in Devarim 17:17-19!

From what 'shoresh' does the word mishneh stem from?

[Relate this to the meaning of **mishneh** as in 'mishnayot'.]

12. Now, read Devarim 1:1. In the opening phrase 'eileh ha-devarim' - what does the word 'devarim' refer to? [Note how almost every commentator offers a different opinion.]

Can you relate the word devarim in 1:1 to the same word in 6:6? Can you relate this to this same word in Shmot 34:27?

Be sure to note the explanations of Ibn Ezra and Ramban on the meaning of Devarim in 1:1, and be sure you understand how their conclusions relate to the above questions.

13. If indeed the phrase "eileh ha-devarim" refers to the same "devarim" as in 6:6, how would this help you understand the first several psukim in Sefer Devarim?

In other words, had Moshe ever taught these laws before, and if so when (and where)? If so, why was it necessary to have taught these laws so many times?

Have these laws ever been recorded in Chumash before? Can you explain why they may not have been?

14. Based on the above questions, what in your opinion is the primary topic of Sefer Devarim, and what is the purpose of this Sefer? [Keep this question in mind as you study the book!]

15. Review 27:1-4, simply to verify that this begins a new section of the book, and hence, proving that the main speech concluded at the end of chapter 26.

If so, then 26:16-19 forms Moshe Rabbeinu's concluding words of this lengthy speech of "mitzvot" and rebuke.

With this in mind, carefully study 26:19, while comparing its content to Shmot 19:3-6 (and its context) and to your study of these questions thus far. Be sure that you understand as well how 26:16 relates to 5:1.

Based on this 'finale' of the main speech, answer question 14 (above) once again!

16. If you have time, review 27:1-11, noting how the topic of this commandment also relates to the content of the main speech.

Attempt to explain why this 'ceremony' on Har Eival is necessary, considering that forty years have elapsed since Matan Torah.

Note as well the primary topics in the remainder of Sefer Devarim, and attempt to construct a very general outline for the entire book. As you study Sefer Devarim, your outline should become more detailed; but it should also help you understand how all the parts of this book are thematically connected.

[Note: This topic, i.e. how the main speech of Sefer Devarim relates to the topic of the first speech - continues (in greater detail) in our questions for Parshat Devarim below.]

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for PARSHAT DEVARIM

PART ONE - THE OPENING PSUKIM PARSHAT DEVARIM

1. After completing the questions on Sefer Devarim, begin your study of Parshat Devarim by noting once again how it records a speech given by Moshe Rabeinu to the Bnei Yisrael in the fortieth year. In other words, verify how the opening psukim (1:1-5) form the introduction to this first speech, which continues from 1:6 thru 4:40.

2. As you review 1:1-5, note how 'cryptic' the first two psukim of the book (1:1-2) appear to be. Before you study the various commentaries on these two psukim, try your best to understand them on your own. If possible, attempt to relate them to your conclusions from the questions above on Sefer Devarim.

Now, let's discuss the commentators.

3. See Ramban and Ibn Ezra on Devarim 1:1 in regard to the meaning of the word "devarim".

Are these two interpretations the same or different?

If they are different, in what manner are they similar?

If they are similar, in what manner are they different?

How do these two opinions relate to the questions in Part Two above?

4. See Emek Davar [the Netziv] on Devarim 1:1. How does his interpretation relate to the above questions? In what manner is his interpretation different than Ramban & Ibn Ezra?

5. Rashi, Ramban, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Seforno, and Chizkuni all present different approaches to explain the flow of topic in these two opening psukim. First, read and attempt to understand each 'parshan' on your own). Afterward (or when you give up), continue below:

A. In the classic commentators, we find two basic approaches that explain what these psukim are talking about.

The first approach, advanced by Rashi & Seforno [also by Chazal in the Sifri], understands that the phrase '**eileh ha-devarim**' refers to Moshe Rabeinu's **rebuke** ['tochacha'] of Am Yisrael for their behavior in the desert. The fact that we have never heard of many of these places is simply because these names reflect what happened at each site (and not the real name of that site).

The beauty and simplicity of Rashi's interpretation is that he explains not only the meaning of each name, but he also explains why the psukim are so ambiguous:

"lefichach satam et ha-devarim, ve-hizkiram be-remez mipnei kvodam shel yisrael..."

According to Rashi, the Torah intentionally made this pasuk difficult to understand! Even though this pasuk rebukes Am Yisrael, it does it in sort of a hidden way, so that only one who knows how to 'read between the lines' understands the rebuke. However, in a simple reading of the text, it would go unnoticed - in order not to publicly embarrass Am Yisrael.

See also Seforno, Targum Unkelos (who leaves his normal style of literal translation for this pasuk), and the first few lines of the Chizkuni.

B. The second approach, advanced by Ramban, Ibn Ezra, & Rashbam, understands that the phrase '**eileh ha-devarim**' refers to the **mitzvot** which are recorded later in the Sefer; and hence has nothing to do with rebuke. Then, the obvious question is: what are all these places?

Rashbam understands that all of these places simply describe **one place**, i.e. the place where these mitzvot are now being said by Moshe to Bnei Yisrael in the 40th year. The use of so many names is simply to **pinpoint** the exact location. He brings other examples in Chumash (like in the beginning of Parshat Re'ay) where a location is described in such a manner.

[Thus according to Rashbam, Yam Suf must mean the Dead Sea which is near Arvat Mo'av and not the Red Sea!]

In contrast to Rashbam, Ibn Ezra & Chizkuni explain that each place describes a **different** site during Bnei Yisrael's journey through the desert, and at each of these various sites Moshe had already taught Bnei Yisrael these mitzvot. Now in the 40th year on the first day of the eleventh month, he is going to teach these **mitzvot** one last time at a national gathering at Arvat Mo'av - even though he had already taught these laws to them in the Midbar & Arava & "mul suf", etc.

Ramban agrees that "eileh ha-devarim" refers to the mitzvot, but he doesn't explain why all of the different places are listed and what happened at each. At the end of his peirush, he quotes the Sifri, similar to Rashi (above) and Targum Unkelos - explaining how the names of these places reflect a certain rebuke.

It seems that Ramban may be trying to combine both of these approaches. Surely, ha-devarim refers to the **mitzvot** which follow, but the places which are mentioned may be a subtle manner of tochacha. Note also how Ramban explains '11 days from Chorev...' as a type of tochacha.

In contrast, Ibn Ezra would disagree with Ramban's explanation of '11 days from chorev...', as he suggests that Moshe had taught these laws ["devarim"] to Bnei Yisrael during their original eleven day journey from Har Sinai to Kadesh Barnea, as they were marching to the land of Israel - the site where these laws would need to be fulfilled.

In your opinion, which of these interpretations makes the most sense?

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PART TWO - THE FIRST SPEECH

1. Recall our earlier discussion of how chapters 1 thru 4 form a speech (in contrast to Moshe Rabeinu's main speech in Sefer Devarim that covers chapters 5 thru 26).

To help you understand what this speech is about, and its purpose - scan its entire content, and attempt to construct an outline. In regard to chapter one, it would be especially helpful if you would divide it into paragraphs, giving a title to each one.

See if you can follow the logic behind the flow of topic in this speech.

2. As you review the primary topics of this speech, note how chapter one begins with the story of how (and when) Bnei Yisrael left Har Sinai to conquer the land and continues with the story of the spies; followed by the story of the conquest of Transjordan (in chapters 2 & 3), followed but what appears to be some words of guidance and rebuke (in chapter four).

Can you explain why Moshe chose to include specifically these details of Jewish History, while 'skipping' many others?

Based on its content, attempt to explain how and why this speech can serve as a fitting introduction to the mitzvot that Moshe plans to teach Bnei Yisrael in his main speech.

3. Clearly, 1:6-8, forms the opening 'paragraph' of Moshe's speech. Similarly, 1:12-17 clearly forms a distinct paragraph.

Therefore, review 1:9-11 once again, and attempt to determine if they form an independent topic, or do they form the thematic introduction to 1:12-17 or conclusion of 1:6-8?

Attempt to understand the flow of topic between these three paragraphs! [What event/time does "ba'et ha'hi" refer to in 1:9?]

Note as well the thematic and textual parallels between to 1:6-11 and Breiishit chapter 15 [i.e. "brit bein ha'btarim"].
[Note especially Breiishit 15:4-8, 13-14, & 18; and the repeated use of the word "yerusha", and how this covenant with Avraham relates to theme of the rest of Chumash!]

Attempt to explain the thematic connection between that covenant, and Moshe's primary point in these opening lines of his speech; while relating to what is about to happen in a few months time.

4. As you review 1:12-18, note how some of these psukim seem to 'ring a bell' from Parshat Yitro (i.e. Shmot chapter 18).

If so, be specific regarding which psukim relate to Yitro.

Is Yitro himself mentioned here in Sefer Devarim? If not, can you explain why isn't?

Are there any other psukim here that remind you of earlier passages in Chumash?

What does the phrase "ba'et ha'hi" refer to in 1:16? Is the same time period or event that this phrase refers to in 1:9?

[If / when you give up - see Bamidbar 11:1-20 (noting especially 10-15)!]

Use this parallel to Bamidbar 11:1-20 to answer the above question!

5. In your opinion, why does Moshe bring up the topic of 'judges' at this point in his speech? Does this relate in any manner to the mtizvot that he will teach in his main speech?

6. Carefully study 1:18!

Who does "etchem" refer to in this pasuk, the judges or the people? Relate to 1:16 when you answer this question!

Once again, what time does "ba'et ha'hi" refer to in 1:18?

When the judges were appointed, or when you left Har Sinai?

What does the word "devarim" refer to? Does it relate to the word "devarim" in 1:1 (and in 6:6)! Relate your answer to the controversy among the commentators in regard to the meaning of the word "devarim" in 1:1 (see questions above).

7. Note how 1:19-21 forms yet another paragraph, which leads into the story of the spies in 1:22-45. How do these three psukim bridge between the first topic of the speech re: the judges etc. and the story of the spies?

8. Can you explain why the story of the spies become the primary topic of chapter one? How does it relate to the main speech that begins in chapter 5, and its primary topic?

9. In chapters 2 & 3, Moshe Rabeinu explains in minute detail why Bnei Yisrael **did not** fight Edom, Ammon & Mo'av and how they **did fight** Sichon & Og (i.e. in much greater detail than was recorded in Sefer Bamidbar (see chapter 20). Can you explain how and why it is so important for Bnei Yisrael to hear these details at this time? [Note as well 1:4!]

How does this topic flow from the story of the spies, and how does it relate to the primary theme of this introductory speech?

In your answer, relate as well to why Moshe also explains in detail how and why the 'ma'apilim' lost their battle (1:41-45).

10. Review 3:21-22, noting how this section concludes with a mention of Yehoshua, and God's promise to help Bnei Yisrael conquer the land. Once again, relate this to the primary theme of this speech. [See also Chizkuni on 2:25!]

11. 3. On the web site [www.tanach.org] - there is a link to an informative '3D' map of Israel, highlighting its key cities and mountain ranges. You can view it, or download it at www.tanach.org/pics/map3Disr.gif.

Use that map (or any map of Israel), to help you follow the details of Bnei Yisrael's journeys and battles, as described in Devarim chapters 2 & 3.

12. The story of the spies in Sefer Devarim (see 1:22-45) is in many ways similar, yet also in many ways different that the parallel story in Sefer Bamidbar (see chapters 13-14). After summarizing the primary differences between these two accounts, attempt to resolve the reason for those differences based on the primary theme of this speech in Sefer Devarim in contrast to the underlying theme of leadership that develops in Sefer Bamidbar.

Note, that once the reader understands that the purpose of Sefer Devarim is not to provide a summary of the events of Chumash, but rather it has its own theme and purpose; it becomes much easier to resolve the discrepancies between the historical accounts in Sefer Devarim and how those events were recorded in Sefer Shmot and Bamidbar.

be-hatzlacha,
menachem