



## Torah Summary: **Deuteronomy**

By Rabbi Shana, inspired by the Gunther Plaut Commentary

**NOTE:** In some congregations, most of this week's Haftarah is delivered in the distinctive nusach (liturgical melody) associated with Lamentations.

The Book of Deuteronomy takes its name from the Greek "deuteronomos," meaning "second law." "D'varim" means "words," and the book is a series of Moses' farewell speeches. The book is first referred to in the stories of the Judean King Josiah (reign: 640 to 608 BCE). In the Second Book of Kings, Josiah, in the year 621, instituted a radical religious reformation based on a "Book of Teachings" discovered by the High Priest Hilkiah during a repair project on the First Temple. Scholars think this book was a version of what would become Deuteronomy.

Among Josiah's reforms were: abolishing the ancient practice of worshiping and offering sacrifices at "high places" around the country and establishing the Temple in Jerusalem as the only sanctuary where sacrifices could be brought. Deuteronomy is the only place in the Torah where such legislation exists. Deuteronomy also requires Passover to be celebrated in Jerusalem, but Exodus teaches that it must be observed at home (there are numerous discrepancies and adjustments in Deuteronomy of laws and stories given and told earlier in the Torah). Josiah arranged for a massive Passover to be carried out in Jerusalem, and 2Kings chapter 23 describes that year's holiday as unlike any that had been held in nearly four hundred years. Aside from the question of "centralization of the Temple cult" in Jerusalem and emphasizing the authority of the Aaronide priesthood, Deuteronomy preaches a consistently strong, exhorting voice calling the people to the worship of the One G\*d.

Moses begins his oration on the Rosh Chodesh of the 11<sup>th</sup> month, Sh'vat, and is said to have concluded his speeches 36 days later. He remembers the emotionally taxing job of leaving the mountain from which G\*d had spoken to the people directly, and some of the difficulty he has had with them as a massive crowd, with their manifold complaints and demands. He retells the episode of the spies, and how the (now-gone) generation of that time was condemned to perish in the wilderness. He reminds the people that he, too, has been barred from entry into the Land (though he does not give a reason for that here), and that Joshua is his successor. And as is common with "old soldiers," Moses recounts many of the battles that the Israelites fought on their way to the Promised Land, where many conflicts and difficulties still await.



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**Devarim: Week of 9 Av 5778 – July 20 – 26, 2018**

**Shabbat Hazon – Third Haftarah of Admonition**



This I recall to my mind, therefore I  
have hope. Through the L\*rd's  
mercies we are not consumed,  
Because His compassions fail not.  
They are new every morning.  
Great is Your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:21-23

In the very heart of  
The Book of  
Lamentations, which  
we will read July 21,  
this beautiful  
sentiment appears.  
The scenes described  
in Eicha are  
devastating, but even  
in our darkest hour,  
Jews retain the spark  
of hope. As we begin  
the spiritual climb to  
Rosh Hashanah, we  
may safely argue that  
nothing is more  
convincing of the  
triumph of the  
religious spirit than  
the fact of Jewish  
survival, right up to our  
very day.

אהבת עולם!