



## Literary Analysis of Deuteronomy 1:19-46

- A Geographical note: the people went from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea (1:19)
- B The Command: “Go up, take possession” of the Promised Land and “Do not fear or be dismayed” (1:20-21)
- C Twelve spies are sent out and bring back fruit from the land (1:22-25)
- D The people are rebellious and not willing to fight (1:26-28)
  - E The LORD states that He will be with them when the people go up to possess the land (1:29-31)
  - F The people did not trust the LORD (1:32-33)
    - G None of these shall see the Promised Land (1:34-35)
    - H Caleb will see the land (1:36)
    - X MOSES WILL NOT ENTER THE LAND (1:37)**
    - H’ Joshua will enter the land (1:38)
    - G’ Children shall enter and inherit the Promise Land (1:39)
    - F’ The people go up to fight (1:40-41)
    - E’ The LORD states He will not be with the people if they now go up to possess the land (1:42)
    - D’ The people are rebellious and act presumptuously (43)
    - C’ The people are pursued out of the land and are crushed [like fruit] (44)
    - B’ The Response: the people returned and wept before the LORD, but He did not listen to them (1:45)
- A’ Geographical note: the people dwelled many days in Kadesh[-barnea] (1:46)

At the structural center of Deuteronomy 1:19—2:1 (X) is Moses’ declaration that the LORD was angry with him “for your sake”, resulting that he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. The Hebrew word order places the emphasis on Moses in this verse, so that his statement has the impact to something like “even me, the LORD was angry for your sakes”.

The wording in the English seems to imply that Moses blamed his predicament on the people. However, as other occurrences of the adverb “for your sake” indicate, this may not be the proper way of understanding what Moses meant. For example, Laban was aware that the LORD had blessed him because of Jacob, for Jacob was the occasion of blessing, and not its cause (Gen. 30:27, 30). Likewise, Moses attributed his discipline to none other than

his own disobedience, though that act of defiance was occasioned by the people or by his desire to address their needs.

The incident of Moses' presumptuous sin of smiting the rock is an allusion to Numbers 20:10-13. The LORD had told him to speak to the rock so that it might yield water for the thirsty multitudes (v. 8). Moses, however, struck it with his rod twice (v. 11), resulting the rebuke by the LORD, who said, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this people into the land I give them" (v. 12). Thus Moses took full responsibility; therefore "because of you" (Deut. 1:37) must be understood as "in your interest". The seriousness of Moses' discipline was in proportion to his function and responsibility as covenant mediator. An underlying spiritual principle is at work here: those who lead the LORD's people must obey more keenly His covenantal stipulations, or possibly suffer severe disciplinary consequences (cf. Ex. 4:24-26; 2 Sam. 12:1-23).

[The crux interestingly divides between both those who "shall not see" (Deut. 1:35) and "see" (Deut. 1:36) their inheritance, and those who "shall not go in" (Deut. 1:37) and "shall go in" (Deut. 1:38) to the Promised Land. Moreover, one should notice the difference between Moses and the people: the former was at least allowed to see the land from a distance, while the latter could not even look upon it.]

Panels flanking either side of X speak of the two individuals who were exceptions to the LORD's oath of those not entering the Land (cf. Num. 14:30, 38), Caleb (H, 1:36) and Joshua (H', 1:38). These two men were the only ones of the twelve spies sent out from Kadesh (Num. 13:6, 8), who, in spite of the dangers in the Land they had explored, advocated immediate attack (Num. 13:30; 14:6-9). By standing alone before a very angry assembly of people, their faith in the LORD and trusting in Moses' leadership was rewarded for their fidelity and steadfastness by surviving the wanderings in the desert and being permitted to enter the Promised Land (Num. 14:10ff.).

The promise expressed to Caleb in Deuteronomy 1:36 expresses that when the Land was possessed, Caleb would be apportioned the good fruit-growing land through which he had traveled as a spy. In Joshua 15:13, Caleb was given land near Hebron. Hebron, as it turns out, ironically had been inhabited by Anakites, "the giants" whom Caleb had said Israel need not fear (cf. Joshua 14:12-15; Num. 13:20, 30, 33). To prove it, the warrior in his old age drove them out of Hebron all by himself (Jdg. 1:20).

The LORD promised Caleb “shall see the land” and “give the land on which he has walked to him, and to his sons”, but to Joshua that he “shall cause Israel to inherit” the Land. Interestingly, the good report was first delivered only by Caleb (Num. 13:30), Joshua’s name being omitted perhaps because Caleb was simply the first one to speak. However, in Numbers 14:6 Joshua’s name is mentioned first. This raises the possibility of Joshua’s name being omitted at first due to literary and structural reasons.

However, what made the difference of attitude between Caleb and Joshua, and the generation that rebelled against the LORD? The people’s vision had been not on the LORD’s promise and the factual evidence of the goodness of the land, but on the difficulty, they would experience in possessing it! Therefore they were rebellious and defiant to go up and possess the land. As they saw the land, its conquest was full of difficulty, but men of vision and faith, Caleb and Joshua saw it as the Promised Land that the LORD was about to give them as He had promised. The facts were the same for both, but those who had trusted in the LORD could minimize the difficulties because of their strong conviction in the LORD’s promise. The people on the other hand, being blind and shortsighted, could not lift their eyes above the formidableness of their opponents.

Therefore, the people’s sin of rebellion thoroughly perverted their understanding of God’s nature. They said “the LORD hates us” (Deut. 1:27), and yet the essence of the covenant was the love of God. They said their God had only brought them out of Egypt to deliver them “into the power of the Amorites” (Deut. 1:27); the truth was that the LORD brought them out of Egypt as “firstborn sons” (Ex. 4:22-23) for the purpose of a great inheritance. They said that God would exterminate them; the purpose of God was to give them life.

The next concentric panels spiraling out from the center speak of two groups in antithetical parallelism that are at the same time historically related. The first group (G, vv. 34-35) represents all the adults who had whispered the words of rebellion in the secrecy of their tents (v. 27) against the LORD. It is against this “evil generation” that the LORD swore in His anger: “Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land, which I have sworn to give to your fathers”.

[The phrase “this evil generation” is missing in the Septuagint, hence several suggest that it is a later gloss to explain that “these men” are not only the spies but also the entire adult generation. However, this phrase occurs also in Numbers 32:13, thus its authenticity should not be doubted here. For structural purposes, this phrase is also important, see below.]

In antithetical parallelism, the second group (G', v. 39) are those who will see the Promised Land. These were those who were twenty years and younger at the time of the provocation. They were also ironically those whom the rebellious generation (G) had predicted would perish as Canaanite prisoners (cf. Num. 14:3, 31). Instead, they would become the seed of the next generation, the foundation upon which the theocratic community would be built in the Promise Land. It is this generation, assembled at Mount Nebo, to whom the words of Deuteronomy are addressed by Moses.

The basis of the LORD's decision to allow those twenty years and younger to enter the land was because they "had no knowledge of good or evil" (v. 39; cf. Jonah 4:11; Isa. 7:16; 8:4). They were deemed morally irresponsible and would not be disciplined for their parents' rebellious acts. The children, having no moral discernment, were therefore not judged faithless and disciplined not to see or enter the land as were their parents; but instead, they to inherit it (Deut. 1:39).

Literarily, G' finds its antithetical parallel in G wherein their parents were called "this evil generation" (v. 35). They had knowledge to discern between good and evil. They had understood the LORD's commandment to possess the land and had heard when the spies returned bringing not only news, but also samples of the fruit of the land, and said "the land which the LORD our God has given us is good" (Deut. 1:25).

The next set of parallel panels (F, vv. 32-33//F', vv. 40-41) describe a cause/effect relationship which occurred over a twenty-four hour period. First in F, despite having experienced both the strength and protection of the LORD in the past, the people's vision of faith did not extend into the future by trusting the LORD regarding possessing the land (v. 32). The Hebrew verb used here for "trust", with its accompanying preposition, means to "make oneself secure" in the LORD. In the context of the exodus deliverance the Israelites were expected to rely completely on their God and His promises; if they did not manifest this kind of trust, they would be severely disciplined for breaking covenant (Ex. 19:1-25).

The verb "to seek out" in verse 33 is ironic. The people sent spies to explore the land and bring back a report. Simultaneously God went ahead of His people **to seek out** a place for them to pitch their tents in that very land, if they would only obey his words. The words **to seek out** introduce an ironic element. With God **seeking out/exploring** the land ahead of them, there was no ground for rebellion and fear. Despite this, the people could not lift their eyes above their fears caused by the reports of their own leaders who **explored** the land ahead of them.

The result of the people not trusting the LORD in verses 32-33 (F) is that they repented and responded to the LORD's earlier command to go in and possess the land (v. 41, F'; cf. Num. 14:40ff.) the next day. However, it was too late. Though they had missed their one chance to fight the LORD's battle in His strength, they decided to advance under their own power.

However, the people had completely missed their opportunity to possess the land, their inheritance; for the LORD had closed that opportunity once and for all. The account in Numbers expressly puts this beyond doubt, for there Moses states, "Because you have turned away from the LORD, He will not be with you" (Num. 14:43). Although the people had expressed repentance, the LORD did not change His mind!

The next set of panels again stand in antithesis with one another (E, vv. 29-31; E', v. 42). In E Moses recollects how he encouraged the people, urging them not to fear the obstacles because "the LORD your God who goes before you shall fight for you" (vv. 29-30; cf. Deut. 3:22; 20:4; Ex. 14:13-14) – it was the LORD's holy war, not theirs (cf. Deut. 20:3; 31:6; Joshua 8:1). That is, it was conflict originated by the LORD, to be carried out under His direction, and guaranteed of success by those who followed His directions. He was the Owner and King. Canaan was the land He had designated as the dwelling place of His people (cf. Gen. 12:1; 13:14-17), and now He was about to use them to overcome and dispossess its inhabitants. Thus, what the LORD did for them in Egypt in times past will be repeated in the future as He continues to wage "Holy War" in their behalf (v. 30).

The reference to Israel as God's son is covenantally significant (v. 31). When the LORD instructed Moses to return to Egypt from Midian to lead Israel from bondage, He referred to the slave people as His "firstborn son" (Ex. 4:22). Such language was common in ancient Near Eastern treaty texts where the maker of the covenant would be "father" and the receiver "son".

The promise of "the LORD your God who goes before you shall fight for you, according to all that He did for you in Egypt before your eyes" (v. 30) stands in contrasts to the LORD's words in E' (v. 42): "You shall not go up, nor fight, for I am not in your midst, lest you be struck before your enemies". However, contrary to the LORD's words, "each one girded on his weapons of war, and you thought it easy to go up to the hill country" (Deut. 1:41). No amount of rationalizing about the ease with which the people believed they could accomplish their objective could outweigh the simple fact that the LORD was not with them. Thus, they set out to wage an "unholy war".

The next two panels (D, vv. 26-28; D', v. 43) speak of the people's rebellious acts. The former speaks of how the people were not willing to possess the land at the LORD's commandment, the latter, rebelling against the LORD's warning, they presumptuously went up to the hill country anyway.

For Israel to rebel against the LORD as described in Deuteronomy 1:26-28 and not move forward at His commandment was tantamount to covenant violation. The nature of such arrangements complete compliance and subservience was expected of the vassal partner. The Hebrew verb used in verse 26 to express rebellion, when accompanied by the phrase "against the mouth of the LORD your God", regularly expresses violation of specific commandments of the LORD (cf. Deut. 1:43; 9:23; Joshua 1:18; 1 Sam. 12:14). Rebellion of this kind was nothing short of high treason, hence the apparently extreme measures of discipline that ensued including and culminating in the sentencing of that "evil generation" to die in the desert, never to enter into the Promise Land (Deut. 1:35-36; Num. 14:20-23).

As far as the people's presumptuous act (v. 43), they thought they could take the land under their own ability. The narrative in Numbers is helpful in clarifying the character of their rebellion. "And they presumed to go up to the top of the mountain, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD and Moses did not leave the middle of the camp" (Num. 14:44). Of all the signs or prerequisites of holy war, none was more important than the presence of the ark in battle. It and it alone symbolized the presence of the LORD among His people when its function was fully understood (cf. Joshua 3:3; 6:4, 6; 1 Sam. 4:3-19; Pss. 78:61; 132:8).

The next two parallel panels (C, vv. 22-25; C', v. 44) speak of the people entering the land, however with very different results. Moses begins in verse 22 by quoting the people who decided to send spies to explore the land. Moses approved the plan and appointed twelve leaders, one from each tribe (v. 23; cf. Num. 13:1-16), who set out to spy out the land (v. 24).

The twelve spies made their way up into the hill country of Canaan, arriving at the valley of Eschol. There is a word play here between "Eschol" and the primary fruit brought back by the spies. We are told in Numbers a single cluster of grapes was so large and heavy that it required two men to carry it (Num. 13:23). "Eschol" means "cluster", precisely because of its remarkable production of grapes. There is little wonder that the returning scouts reported to the camp that "it is a good land that the LORD our God is giving us" (v. 25) or, as in Numbers, "it does flow with milk and honey" (Num. 13:27).

Panel C' (v. 44) tells us an opposite result when the people acted presumptuously. When the Israelites met the Amorites, they were defeated and put to flight, because the LORD was not in their midst. The Amorites pursued them "as bees do", a suggestive simile describing the headlong flight of the Israelites from the battle. Reminded of the primary fruit being grapes which the spies in panel C brought back, the people were "stuck down," a term which means to "crush/pulverize". Again, this is ironic. When they went under the LORD's instruction, they brought back the fruit of the land; however, when they rebelled and acted presumptuously, they were crushed like the fruit of the land.

In panel B (vv. 20-21) Moses addressed the people upon their arrival at Kadesh-barnea. He described it as the region "which the LORD our God is giving to us" (v. 21). Kadesh was not literally the land, but the border of the land. They were to **take possession** of the land in obedience to the command of "the LORD God of your fathers". The verbal root translated "take possession" carries the sense of possessing by dispossessing. The land to which they were going was already inhabited, and in order to possess it, the Israelites must first dispossess the former inhabitants. The "dispossessing" of the Canaanites was going to require strength and courage; hence the words of Moses close with a call for courage: "Do not fear or be afraid" (v. 22).

However, the people did not hear (obey) the LORD's words spoken through Moses. Thus, panel B' (v. 45) describes the LORD's like judgement upon His people—even though they wept—"but the LORD did not listen to your voice, nor did He give ear to you" (v. 45). Just as the people did not listen to the LORD (vv. 20-21), so the LORD does not listen to them.

Panels A (v. 19) and A' (v. 46) form the frame around the episode of Israel's "unholy war". The former serves as both a connecting link between the previous geographical note concerning Mount Horeb in Deuteronomy 1:6-7 and the latter one with their journey from Kadesh-barnea to Moab in Deuteronomy 2:1-15.

As verse 46 tells us, the Israelites settled in at Kadesh for many years, thirty-eight as it turned out, until at last of the "evil generation" had died (cf. Deut. 2:14; cf. 1:34-40). The staccato and repetitive way in which the Hebrew refers to this period is designed to show the wearisome monotony of that lost ear of Israel's history. Not a word is found in Deuteronomy about those silent years. In addition, Numbers records by way of narrative the time as negative: the rebellion of Korah (Num. 16:1-40), the complaint of the people (Num. 16:41—17:13), the death of Miriam (Num. 20:1), and the rebellion at Meribah (Num. 20:2-13). All that can be said about the sojourn at Kadesh in Deuteronomy is that they stayed there.

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