

# Parsha Q&A



## Parshas Devarim

For the week ending 9 Av 5758  
31 July & 1 August 1998

### Parsha Questions

1. Why does the Torah say Moshe spoke *bamidbar* — “in the desert?”
2. Why did Moshe mention only the names of the places that the Jewish People sinned, while not mentioning the sins themselves?
3. How much time elapsed between departing from Mt. Sinai and sending the spies?
4. Moshe rebuked the Jewish People shortly before his death. From whom did he learn this?
5. Why did Moshe wait until he had smitten the Amorite kings before rebuking the Jewish People?
6. What were some of the achievements that resulted from the Jewish People “dwelling” at Mt. Sinai?
7. Why does the Torah single out the names of the Avos in connection with the giving of the Land?
8. What did Moshe convey to the Jewish People by saying: “You today are like the stars of the Heavens?”
9. Moshe was looking for several qualities in the judges he chose. Which quality couldn’t he find?
10. Moshe told the judges, “the case that is too hard for you, bring it to me.” How was he punished for this statement?
11. Why did Moshe describe the desert as *great and frightful*?
12. Which tribe was not represented among the spies?
13. Which city did Calev inherit?
14. How many kingdoms was Avraham promised? How many were conquered by Yehoshua?
15. Why were the Jewish People forbidden to provoke Ammon?
16. Why were the Jewish People not permitted to conquer the Philistines?
17. How did Hashem instill the dread of the Jewish People into the nations of the world?
18. Why did Moshe fear Og?
19. Who was instrumental in destroying the *refa'im*?
20. What was the advantage of Reuven and Gad leading the way into battle?

### Sherlox Holmes

“The key to a successful investigation,” said world famous detective Sherlock Holmes, “lies in the questions asked. As the saying goes, the question of a wise man is half the answer.”

“If I were a wise man,” said Watstein, “perhaps I could understand Rashi’s comment on the following verse. The verse says: We traveled all that big and frightening desert (Devarim 1:19). Rashi explains that it was a ‘frightening dessert’ because: It had snakes like beams and scorpions like archer’s bows (Rashi *ibid.*).”

“Horrid!” said Sherlox.

“But what compels Rashi to give this explanation?” asked Watstein. “Why must Rashi resort to a midrash about extraordinarily giant snakes and scorpions in order to explain why the desert was frightening? Isn’t a desert frightening enough by itself? The desert provides neither food nor water, nor protection from the burning sun. That alone would frighten any sane man.”

“Yes, but those needs were provided for the Jews in the desert: Food fell from the sky, and water emerged from a rock. Special clouds provided protection from the sun. So they had nothing to fear in that regard,” said Sherlox.

“But the same is true of the giant snakes and scorpions!” said Watstein. “According to the midrash, the Jews were provided with miraculous protection from these snakes and scorpions as well; these exceptionally large monsters died before the Jews ever even saw them. Therefore, the description ‘frightening’ must mean that for other people the desert was essentially a frightening place, even though for the Jews there was no true reason to fear. So my question remains, isn’t a desert frightening enough by itself without resorting to a midrash about creatures scary beyond the ordinary?”

“The question of a wise man is half the answer,” said Sherlox.

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Parshas **Devarim** — 9 Av 5758, 31 July & 1 August 1998

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## Answer

“You’ve answered your own question, Watstein,” said Sherlock.

“How so?” asked Watstein.

“Indeed, as you explained, a desert is frightening by very definition: It lacks food, water, and protection from the elements. No one who enters a desert is sure to emerge alive.”

“Hence my question,” said Watstein. “Why does Rashi need to resort to the midrash about unusually giant snakes and scorpions?”

“For exactly that reason!” said Sherlock. “Since a desert is frightening by definition, therefore the word ‘frightening’ in the verse seems totally superfluous. Why does the verse need to say ‘a frightening desert?’”

“Yes!” cried Watstein. “How could I have overlooked something so obvious? Every desert is ‘frightening.’ Therefore, the word ‘frightening’ must refer to something unusually frightening, some terror that the average desert doesn’t have. Hence, Rashi explains with a midrash describing creatures scary beyond the ordinary.”

“Frightfully clever,” said Sherlock.

*“Sherlock” is created by Reuven Subar*

## ***I Did Not Know That!***

***“These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Bnei Yisrael...” (1:1)***

Rashi: ***These words were harsh words of rebuke.***

Moshe only spoke harshly when speaking to Bnei Yisrael. When speaking to Hashem, however, he only

spoke good about Bnei Yisrael. Because he was the leader, he always came to his people’s defense even under the most trying circumstances.

*Kedushas Levi*

## ***Recommended Reading List***

### ***Ramban***

1:1	Overview of <i>Devarim</i>
1:12	Judging the Jewish People
1:25	The <i>Meraglim</i>
1:37	Moshe’s Punishment
2:4	Brother Esav
2:7	Blessings
2:25	Fear of the Jewish People

### ***Sefer Hachinuch***

414	Appointing Judges
415	Responsibility of Judges

### ***Ba’al Haturim***

3:25	The 51st <i>Amah</i>
3:25	The Missing Letter “Vav”
3:25	Order of Prayer

### ***Sforno***

	Introduction To <i>Devarim</i>
1:5	The Reason for Moshe’s Rebuke
1:22	The Choice of the <i>Meraglim</i>
1:23	Moshe’s Reason for Sending <i>Meraglim</i>
1:27	The Sin of the <i>Meraglim</i>
1:37	The Limits of Repentance
3:11	The <i>Refa’im</i>

## **Answers to this Week's Questions**

**All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated**

1. 1:1 - Here the word *bamidbar* does not mean "in the desert" — rather, it means "on account of the desert." The Book of *Devarim* contains a rebuke of the Jewish People for the sins committed while in the desert.
2. 1:1 - In order to guard the honor of the Jewish People by not mentioning their sins explicitly.
3. 1:2 - 40 days.
4. 1:3 - From Yaakov, who rebuked his sons shortly before his death.
5. 1:4 - Now it was easier to admonish the Jewish People, since no one could now say, "What right has he to rebuke us; has he brought us into any part of the land as he promised?"
6. 1:6 - They received the Torah, built the *Mishkan* and all of its vessels, appointed a Sanhedrin, and appointed officers.
7. 1:8 - Each one of the *Avos* possessed sufficient merit for the Jewish People to inherit the Land.
8. 1:10 - They are an eternal people, just as the sun, moon and the stars are eternal.
9. 1:15 - Men of understanding.
10. 1:17 - When the daughters of Tzafchad approached him with a halachic question, the law was concealed from him.
11. 1:19 - Because the Jewish People saw huge, frightening snakes and scorpions in the desert.
12. 1:23 - Levi.
13. 1:36 - Hebron.
14. 2:5 - Avraham was promised the land of ten kingdoms. Yehoshua conquered seven. The lands of Moav, Ammon and Esav, will be received in the time of the *Mashiach*.
15. 2:9 - This was a reward for Lot's younger daughter, the mother of Ammon, for concealing her father's improper conduct.
16. 2:23 - Because Avraham had made a peace treaty with Avimelech, King of the Philistines.
17. 2:25 - During the battle against Og, the sun stood still for the sake of the Jewish People, and the whole world saw this.
18. 3:2 - Og possessed merit for having once helped Avraham.
19. 3:11 - Amrafel.
20. 3:18 - They were mighty men, and the enemy would succumb to them.