

Devarim

On the first of Shevat (thirty-seven days before his passing), Moses begins his repetition of the Torah to the assembled Children of Israel, reviewing the events that occurred and the laws that were given in the course of their forty-year journey from Egypt to Sinai to the Promised Land, rebuking the people for their failings and iniquities, and enjoining them to keep the Torah and observe its commandments in the land that G-d is giving them as an eternal heritage, into which they shall cross after his death. (Chabad.org)

Moses recalls his appointment of judges and magistrates to ease his burden of meting out justice to the people and teaching them the word of G-d; the journey from Sinai through the great and fearsome desert; the sending of the spies and the people's subsequent spurning of the Promised Land, so that G-d decreed that the entire generation of the Exodus would die out in the desert. "Also against me," says Moses, "was G-d angry for your sake, saying: You, too, shall not go in there."

Moses also recounts some more recent events: the refusal of the nations of Moab and Ammon to allow the Israelites to pass through their countries; the wars against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og, and the settlement of their lands by the tribes of Reuben and Gad and part of the tribe of Manasseh; and Moses' message to his successor, Joshua, who will take the people into the Land and lead them in the battles for its conquest: "Fear them not, for the L-rd your G-d, He shall fight for you." (Chabad.org)

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Although one might expect the rehashing of the desert story to match the original description of events more or less, upon examining the text carefully, many contradictions to the original accounts present themselves. Here are ten examples:

The Mountain of God

In Deuteronomy (1:5) God tells the Israelites to leave Chorev. However, in Exodus (19:11) the mountain is called Sinai.

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The Court System

According to Deuteronomy (1:9-13), the court system devised in the desert was Moses' idea. However, according to Exodus (18:17-22), the idea was not Moses' but that of his father-in-law Jethro.

The Scouts

According to Deut. 1:22, it was the people's idea to send scouts to get a feel for the land before the invasion. However, according to Numbers 13:1-2 it was God who first commanded that scouts be sent.

The Panic

According to Deut. 1:25-26 the Israelites react with panic at the idea of conquest, even after the scouts say positive things about the land.² However, according to Numbers (13:26-14:3) the panic of the Israelites follows upon the negative report of the scouts.

The Loyal Scout

God references only Caleb in Deuteronomy 1:36 as the loyal scout who survives the punishment of the desert generation due to his loyalty. Although this parallel's Numbers 14:24, it contradicts God's claim in Numbers 14:30.

The Punishment of Moses

Moses claims in Deuteronomy 1:37 that his punishment of not being allowed to enter Israel was guilt by association to the desert-generation Israelites—since they cannot enter neither can he. However, in Numbers 20:9-13, the reason is because of Moses' failure at Mei Meribah, where he hit the rock.

Edomites

According to Deuteronomy 2:4-6, when the Israelites wished to wander past the land of Edom—not to cross it—they are to purchase water and food from them. The story in Deuteronomy continues with the implicit (later, in 2:29, made explicit) assumption that this is what happened. However, in the account in Numbers 20:17-21, the Israelites begin with a request for food and water which elicits a belligerent response from the Edomites. As in Deuteronomy, the Israelites here do not pass through Edom, but the sequence of events and the associated implications about Edom's relationship with Israel is quite different.

Sihon

In Deuteronomy 2:24-25, God tells Moses to pick a fight with Sihon and conquer his land. However, in Numbers 21:23 the war seems to be the accidental consequence of Sihon's own belligerence.

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Moab

In Deuteronomy 2:29, Moses tells Sihon that the Moabites sold the Israelites food and water. Not only does this contradict Deuteronomy 23:5, where the Israelites are forbidden to marry the Moabites because they did not give the Israelites bread and water, but it seems to contradict the account in Numbers 21 which has no record of a request for food and water from Moab (or Ammon).

Furthermore, it contradicts the spirit of Numbers 22:2-7. In this account, Balak expresses fear of the Israelites, claiming to his Midianite allies that the Israelites are living next door to him and will soon gobble up everything in Moab. This speech implies that Israel has yet to enter Moab or converse with them, but that Balak fears for the future.

In fact, the account of Balak in Numbers appears after the conquest of Sihon and Og, which continues to Moab being petrified. This implies an entirely different geographic route / reality, since there would be no need to ask Moab for water or food at this point, as they do in the Deuteronomy account, once Israel conquers the other territory.

Reuven, Gad, and Part of Manasseh

In Deuteronomy 3:18-22, after conquering the Transjordan, Moses suggests that Reuven and Gad can stay there as long as they send their army across to the Cisjordan to help their brothers conquer their own territory. However, in Numbers 32:16-19, this suggestion is first brought up by Reuven and Gad after Moses explodes in anger at their request to remain in the Transjordan permanently. (Rabbi Zev Farber, Ph.D., TheTorah.com)