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CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The commentators always quote the word or phrase on which they will comment from NJPS (the new Jewish Publication Society Bible translation of 1985), with the citation in **bold**. When they quote other biblical phrases, the quotation is either from NJPS, when it is appropriate for the comment, from OJPS (the old JPS translation of 1917), or my own version or revision. When the commentator refers to a particular word in a verse quoted from elsewhere in the Bible, the English translation of that word is *italicized*. In biblical quotations, small caps for LORD (more rarely, GOD) represent the Tetragrammaton (see Glossary). Spellings of biblical names follow NJPS; spellings of other names follow *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

The following conventions are used for biblical references:

- v. 6
- a verse in the chapter currently being commented on
- 23:21
- a verse from another chapter in Deuteronomy
- ch.
- another chapter in Deuteronomy
- Gen. 15:15
- verses from elsewhere in the Bible are identified by book, according to the following abbreviations:

Gen. – Genesis	Ezek. – Ezekiel	Ps. – Psalms
Exod. – Exodus	Hosea	Prov. – Proverbs
Lev. – Leviticus	Joel	Job
Num. – Numbers	Amos	Song – Song of Songs
Deut. – Deuteronomy	Obad. – Obadiah	Ruth
Josh. – Joshua	Jon. – Jonah	Lam. – Lamentations
Judg. – Judges	Mic. – Micah	Eccles. – Ecclesiastes
1 Sam. – 1 Samuel	Nah. – Nahum	Esther
2 Sam. – 2 Samuel	Hab. – Habakkuk	Dan. – Daniel
1 Kings	Zeph. – Zephaniah	Ezra
2 Kings	Hag. – Haggai	Neh. – Nehemiah
Isa. – Isaiah	Zech. – Zechariah	1 Chron. – 1 Chronicles
Jer. – Jeremiah	Mal. – Malachi	2 Chron. – 2 Chronicles

Other Abbreviations:

- b.
- ben or bar, “son of”
- R.
- Rabbi
- B.
- Babylonian Talmud
- Y.
- Jerusalem (Yerushalmi) or Palestinian Talmud
- M.
- Mishnah
- T.
- Tosefta
- NJPS
- New Jewish Publication Society translation (1985)
- OJPS
- Old Jewish Publication Society translation (1917)

Abbreviations for Tractates of Mishnah and Talmuds:

Ar. – Arakhin	Kin. – Kinnim	Sanh. – Sanhedrin
Av. Zar. – Avodah Zarah	Ma’as. – Ma’aserot	Shab. – Shabbat
BB – Bava Batra	Ma’as. Sh. – Ma’aser Sheni	Shek. – Shekalim
Bek. – Bekhorot	Mak. – Makkot	Shev. – Shevi’it
Ber. – Berakhot	Makhsh. – Makhshirin	Shevu. – Shevu’ot
Bik. – Bikkurim	Meg. – Megillah	Sot. – Sotah
BK – Bava Kamma	Me’il. – Me’ilah	Suk. – Sukkah
BM – Bava Metzia	Men. – Menaḥot	Ta’an. – Ta’anit
Dem. – Demai	Mid. – Middot	Tam. – Tamid
Eduy. – Eduyot	Mik. – Mikva’ot	Tem. – Temurah
Er. – Eruvin	MK – Mo’ed Katan	Ter. – Terumah
Git. – Gittin	Naz. – Nazir	Toh. – Tohorot
Hag. – Ḥagigah	Ned. – Nedarim	TY – Tevul Yom
Hal. – Ḥallah	Neg. – Nega’im	Uk. – Uktzin
Hor. – Horayot	Nid. – Niddah	Yad. – Yadayim
Hul. – Ḥullin	Oho. – Oholot	Yev. – Yevamot
Ker. – Keritot	Or. – Orlah	Zav. – Zavin
Ket. – Ketubbot	Par. – Parah	Zev. – Zevaḥim
Kid. – Kiddushin	Pes. – Pesahim	
Kil. – Kilayim	RH – Rosh Ha-Shanah	

*What does “Migra’ot Gedolot” mean?*

*What do you mean “a” Miqra’ot Gedolot? Are there more than one?*

*So what is the Miqra'ot Gedolot format?*

*Which translation is included in this Miqra'ot Gedolot?*

*Why include both?*

*Which commentaries are included?*

xi

The four main commentators have all been translated into English before.

*Then why are you translating them again?*

Previous translations were either made for scholars, assume a high level of Hebrew knowledge, or are literal and difficult to follow.

*So this is a free translation?*

Yes. First of all, remember that in their original work the commentators quote and comment on the Hebrew text. In this version, they quote instead the NJPS translation and, if they disagree with it, supplement it with the OJPS or with their own understanding of the meaning. Also, since most of us today do not have as thorough a grounding in Jewish sources as did the Hebrew readers of the original commentaries, the commentators must explain things a bit more fully when they “write” in English. For similar reasons, they omit grammatical comments and explanations that are both complicated and extraneous. For a more detailed look at this topic, see “Principles of the Translation” below.

*Before I get more involved . . . why should I care about what these medieval commentators think?*

About 900 years ago the commentator Rashi told his grandson that new insights into the Bible were being discovered daily. That's still true, which means that if you want the latest biblical scholarship, a modern commentary will serve you better than the comments in this book. But there are some very good reasons to go back to the older commentators, even if you do not share the assumptions they make about the Bible.

The first reason is that the medieval commentators read the Bible very, very carefully. They will often note connections, contradictions, or difficulties that modern readers of the text, especially casual readers, have missed. It can be difficult to think carefully, or deeply, about stories or sayings that you've known since childhood. But the commentators here will help you look at them from a fresh perspective.

The second reason is that the Bible is not a chemical compound that gives the same result every time it is analyzed, but a book that tells a story and describes a way of life. Its stories and teachings call forth different responses in different ages. By reading the various commentaries on a single page, you can see how attitudes toward the Bible changed over the centuries.

The third reason is that the format and nature of this book are geared toward promoting your *active participation* in learning about the Bible, a process that can offer both intellectual and spiritual rewards. The page is set up as a conversation among the commentators, in which the reader is encouraged to join.

The fourth reason, and the most important, is that *The Commentators' Bible* gives you the chance to spend “quality time” with four of the greatest of all Bible commentators, and with half a dozen of their colleagues. Shortly after I began working on the book, a friend asked,

“Which of the commentators do you like best?” What he really wanted was to tell me which of them *he* liked best. You too are likely to find, as you read through the book of Deuteronomy, that the commentators will come alive for you, and that one or another of them will begin to seem less like a historical figure, and more like a companion you can learn with.

*How do I read such a complicated book?*

This is not the kind of book you can pick up and read straight through, because too many things on each page are clamoring simultaneously for your attention. You will want to explore the page and learn what path through it works best for you. Ideally, you should study the text with others and together find your own method of making your way through the different commentaries. Here are some different approaches to try as you get started:

- Compare the two English translations (with the Hebrew, if you can). When the two translations disagree, check to see how the commentators resolve the question.
- Read a whole chapter at a time, in Hebrew or in either translation. Then read Abarbanel’s questions about the chapter and think about them. Read the chapter again—perhaps in the *other* translation—to see whether you can think of answers to his questions.
- Pick a particular commentator as your guide, and follow all of his comments to the text as you read along.
- Read until you find a word or a verse that raises a question in *your* mind. Then check to see what each of the commentators has to say about it. Be sure to check the Additional Comments to see whether there’s another comment on your question there.
- Follow any, or all, of the commentators through an entire subject, or a complete story. Think about the implications of a particular commentator’s approach for interpreting other biblical passages.
- Dip into each page as you like until you find a thread you want to pursue.

**Warning!** The commentator will sometimes continue in the voice that is speaking in the verse itself (God’s, or Moses’, for example). After a dash (—) the commentator continues in his own voice. A dash may also separate different voices if the commentator is reconstructing a conversation or working through the steps of an argument.

## WHAT'S ON THE PAGE?

### *Text:*

The **HEBREW TEXT** of the Bible, based on the Leningrad Codex, the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible. This particular version of the Hebrew text can be found in the 1999 edition of the JPS Hebrew-English TANAKH. This edition is not meant for ritual use, and it thus omits some synagogue-related features. It meets only the traditional rabbinic standards (*halakhah*) for formatting a study Bible, which are less stringent than those for ritual purposes. For a fuller explanation of the difference between the Leningrad Codex and the 1999 JPS edition, see the preface to the latter.

### *Translations:*

The **NJPS** translation of the Hebrew text, prepared in the 1960s by a committee of Jewish Bible scholars from the various movements, under the auspices of The Jewish Publication Society (JPS). This translation attempts to convey the meaning of the text without adhering slavishly to the literal Hebrew.

The **OJPS** translation of the Hebrew text, a revision of the American Standard Version (adapted from the King James Bible) prepared in the years before World War I by a committee of Jewish scholars, again under the auspices of JPS.

### *Questions:*

**ABARBANEL's** questions. These questions, which serve as the basis for the commentary of Isaac Abarbanel (see below), will help the reader understand the *kinds* of questions that the commentators think need answering about the text. (The other commentators do not always make their questions explicit.)

### *Major Commentators:*

**RASHI** – R. Solomon b. Isaac (1040–1105), northern France. Universally known by the acronym of his name, Rashi is the quintessential commentator on both Bible and Talmud. Jewish translations of both works often silently follow Rashi's comments when deciding how to render a difficult passage. Rashi's method, as he himself described it, was to explain the biblical text according to its straightforward sense—what the words mean in plain Hebrew—adding only those midrashic comments that fit the context and explain a linguistic feature of the text. According to his grandson Rashbam, toward the end of his life he admitted that, if he had the time, he would completely rewrite his commentary to take account of the new discoveries about the straightforward sense of the Bible being made on a daily basis. (See also “*Peshat* and *Derash*” under “Special Topics.”)



**RASHBAM** – R. Samuel b. Meir (ca. 1085–ca. 1174), northern France. Rashbam, Rashi’s grandson, claimed that, though rabbinic interpretation of the Torah text was primary, the work of doing that kind of interpretation—the complicated linkage of every aspect of Jewish law to a letter, word, or phrase in the Torah—was finished. The neglected straightforward sense of the text, however, was only now in the process of being discovered. Rashbam, like his grandfather, was a skilled talmudist, but in his biblical commentary he felt free to interpret the text as it reads in plain Hebrew even when this contradicted rabbinic interpretation. (See also “*Peshat* and *Derash*” under “Special Topics.”)

**IBN EZRA** – R. Abraham ibn Ezra (1091/92–1167), b. Spain, d. England. Ibn Ezra was Rashbam’s almost exact contemporary, though scholars continue to disagree on whether they ever met or even knew each other’s work. Ibn Ezra lived the first half-century of his life in Muslim Spain and spent the rest of his days wandering through Christian Europe—first in Italy, then in France, and, in his last years, in England. The twofold basis of his comments, as he explains in the long introduction to his work, is that they must conform to the grammar of the text (a field in which the Jews of the Muslim world were far more advanced than their compatriots in Christian countries) and to the bounds of reason. His attitude toward rabbinic tradition is ambiguous—he was not secure enough to contradict it directly, as did Rashbam, but often hinted at his doubts about one or another aspect of it. (See also “Medieval Jewish Philosophy” under “Special Topics.”)

**NAHMANIDES** – R. Moses b. Nahman (1195–ca. 1270), b. Spain, d. Israel. Also known by the acronym “Ramban,” Nahmanides was advised to flee Spain after his victory in a “disputation” over the truth of Judaism and Christianity in which he was forced to participate. His careful analysis of the comments of his predecessors Rashi and Ibn Ezra makes him largely responsible for defining the contents of the standard Miqra’ot Gedolot page. (Rashbam is a 20<sup>th</sup>-century addition to the standard page.) In addition to his biblical and rabbinic scholarship, he was immersed in mystical learning. He sometimes explains the straightforward sense of the text and then adds an additional comment, often obscure, giving the meaning of the text “according to the way of Truth” or “the True interpretation”—a reference to mystical interpretation. (See also “Nahmanides’ Mysticism” under “Special Topics.”)

*Editor’s Annotations:*

I have added notes to the text of the major commentators whenever I thought their comments needed some elucidation, or when there is a difficulty that might not be apparent to the reader. I have not generally supplied the rabbinic sources for their comments unless they do so themselves. Nor have I pointed out the reasons for their comments, unless I think the reader would find the comment puzzling without this information. I have generally left it to the reader to discover when the commentators are disputing with each other.

*Additional Commentators:*

The **MASORAH** – (ca. 1000) The comments labeled Masorah (“tradition”), dating from the second half of the first millennium C.E., generally catalogue unusual spellings or



word choices in the text, to give scribes assistance in recreating it exactly. Occasional comments were added to the Masorah at the time of the “Second Rabbinic Bible” (1525) by its editor, **Jacob b. Hayyim**, a kabbalist; these comments are not identified as coming from the Masorah, but from him personally.

**BEKHOR SHOR** – Joseph b. Isaac Bekhor Shor (12<sup>th</sup> c.), northern France. As a younger contemporary and student of Rashbam, his comments, like those of his teacher, focus on the straightforward sense of the text.

**KIMHI** – R. David Kimhi (1160?–1235?), Provence. Known by the acronym “Radak,” he belonged to a family of illustrious scholars. Particularly known as a Hebrew grammarian, he is a major commentator to Genesis. (In our Genesis volume, he will be promoted to the main part of the page.) His comments on the rest of the Torah, however, are relatively sparse, since they are abstracted from his works on language.

**HIZKUNI** – R. Hezekiah b. Manoah (mid-13<sup>th</sup> c.), France. He wrote a commentary that is largely an anthology of earlier comments (many now otherwise lost) as well as an analysis of Rashi’s commentary.

**GERSONIDES** – R. Levi b. Gershom (1288–1344), Provence. Known also by the acronym “Ralbag,” he viewed the biblical text largely through the lens of philosophy.

**ABARBANEL** – Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508), b. Portugal, fled Spain, d. Italy. He was a prominent politician and financier in the Iberian Peninsula until the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. His writings mostly date from his Italian period.

**SFORNO** – Obadiah b. Jacob Sforno (1470–1550), Italy. Trained in Jewish learning, humanistic studies, and medicine, he was both literally and metaphorically a Renaissance man.

# PRINCIPLES OF THE TRANSLATION

A basic assumption of the translation is that **the commentators are rewriting their original comments today, in contemporary English, for readers who do not know Hebrew**. This solves a number of the difficulties inherent in turning a Hebrew commentary on a Hebrew text into an English commentary without making the translator look as if he is constantly elbowing his way in between the reader and the commentator. So: **When an added word, phrase, or clause will make the commentator's meaning clear, I add it as if it had been written by the commentator**. When this technique does not suffice, I add a note in my own voice.

**The following kinds of comments are regularly omitted from the translation:**

- 1 The commentator gives a straightforward explanation of the sense of the text when the translation already follows it or makes it unnecessary.
- 2 The commentator gives another Hebrew word synonymous with the one used in the verse.
- 3 The commentator identifies a form grammatically (when there is no disagreement about it).
- 4 Rashbam or Ibn Ezra offers essentially the same comment as Rashi.
- 5 Rashbam offers a different verse than Rashi that explains the same phenomenon in the same way.
- 6 Nahmanides cites an explanation of Rashi or Ibn Ezra in full.
- 7 In his explanation, a commentator uses another biblical example, or a rabbinic citation, that would require more explanation than the biblical verse itself
- 8 A commentator quotes a biblical verse in full when that verse is close enough to the verse being explicated for the reader to find it easily.

In addition, certain extended discussions in the commentaries of Ibn Ezra and Nahmanides have been condensed, summarized in a note, or (in some cases) omitted entirely.

**The following kinds of comments are nonetheless retained in the translation:**

- 1 The comment includes a straightforward explanation of the sense of the text when the translation already follows it or makes it unnecessary, if one of the other commentators disagrees with it.

- 2 The comment includes grammatical remarks that can be easily explained, that give some of the commentator's flavor, or that other commentators disagree with.
- 3 Nahmanides for stylistic reasons includes citations from other biblical books, which are not themselves necessarily relevant but can be integrated smoothly into the translation.

**The following kinds of comments are regularly *changed*:**

- 1 Discursive comments explaining more than one verse at a time are changed to fit the citation-comment pattern, when this is possible.
- 2 When the comment to one verse adds an explanation of a verse elsewhere in the text, I move that comment to the appropriate place.
- 3 When the English translation changes the order of the Hebrew text for clarity, I rearrange the comments to follow the English order and rephrase them if necessary.
- 4 When Nahmanides apparently had a different version of the commentary of Rashi or Ibn Ezra than we do, I reconcile the difference and/or explain it in a note.

## דברים

**OJPS** These are the words which Moses spoke unto all Israel beyond the Jordan; in the wilderness, in the Arabah, over against

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־  
כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּעֲבֹר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּמִדְבַּר בַּעֲרָבָה

**RASHBAM** 1 These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel. The straightforward sense of the verse is that these are all simply place names. We often find biblical texts giving multiple place names in order to explain the precise location of a particular place that they wish to talk about: “the hill country east of Bethel ...with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east” (Gen. 12:8); “before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baalzephon” (Exod. 14:2); see also Judg. 21:19. The text, of course, takes even more care to explain where the various commandments were given, e.g., “in the land of Egypt” (Exod. 12:1); “on Mount Sinai” (Lev. 25:1); “in the wilderness of Sinai” (Num. 9:1); “in the steppes of Moab at the Jordan near Jericho” (Num. 35:1). And that is precisely what is happening here as well. For following our

**IBN EZRA** If you understand the secret of the “12” [A], of “Moses wrote” (31:22), of “the Canaanites were then in the land” (Gen. 12:6), of “on the mount of the LORD there is vision” (Gen. 22:14), and of “His bedstead, an iron bedstead, is now in Rab-bah” (3:9), you will realize the truth about vv. 1–5 as well. [B] Some say, on the basis of the expression “that very day” (32:48), that Moses recited the entire book of Deu-teronomy to the Israelites in a single day and died on that same day. But he did no such thing. See my comment to that verse.

**1** These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan. In my opinion, these “words” are the laws recorded in chs. 12–26. But

[A] Most likely Ibn Ezra means the 12 verses of Deuteronomy 34, describing the death of Moses. But a number of other explanations of this “secret” have been proposed. [B] On the face of it, all these verses must have been written by someone other than Moses, either because they mention him in the third person or because they assume a “now” when the Israelites are in the land and Og is a character from history. Based on Ibn Ezra’s comment to “to this day” (34:6), the “truth” would seem to be that Joshua wrote these verses.

: “Yours is the power to forgive so that You may

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** The question is whether this book is from heaven like the first four books, or whether—since it is all in Moses’ voice—these are the words of Moses and not of God. In fact, Moses told Israel all these things because he was soon to part from them. After he had finished, the Holy One wanted them as part of the Torah, so He dictated them to Moses (perhaps adding a few things) and Moses wrote them into the Torah at the command of the Almighty, who announced, “These—no more and no less—are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel.” The introductory verses, 1:1–5, in the third person, testify that Moses’ words in this book are divine just like the rest of the Torah (Abarbanel).

**1 These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel.** The phrase “these are the words” occurs only five other times: in Exod. 19:6, Exod. 35:1, Isa. 42:16, Zech. 8:16, and (as “*and* these are the words”) Jer. 30:4 (Masorah). When he was close to death, he wished to organize all the commandments for Israel; the names in this verse identify or symbolize the places where the commandments were given



**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** (Bekhor Shor). “These” were words of rebuke, as opposed to those other words, the commandments that he had previously given them. Addressing them to “all” Israel shows that Moses’ voice reached the far extent of the Israelite camp (Hizkuni). Since v. 3 tells us this happened “in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month,” we must not lose sight of the fact that it is impossible for our verse to mean that Moses addressed these words to all Israel “in” the following places, as the literal Hebrew seems to say; rather, he is reminding them of the things that *happened* to them in these places (Gersonides). If the point of these words was to rebuke Israel, wouldn’t Moses have begun with the Golden Calf, the first and worst of their rebellions? Instead, all the incidents—if that is what they are—are totally mixed up. Nor could the supposedly “new” commandments some think he is introducing be called Moses’ own words. In fact, his only purpose was to clarify the laws that had already been given. It would have been pointless to berate the children over what their parents’ generation had done (Abarbanel). **The wilderness.** It was variously called “the wilderness of the peoples” or of Shur, Etham, Sin, Sinai, Paran, Kadesh, Zin, Kedemoth, or Moab, all of these being located near that wilderness (Hizkuni). **Tophel.** “Nonsense”—a reference to their attaching themselves to Baal-peor at Shittim; idol worship is obviously senseless (Gersonides). **Laban.** This is Libnah of Num. 33:20; I think the Korah episode must have taken place there (Gersonides). **Hazeroth.** See Rashi’s comment. He certainly knew that the Korah rebellion took place in the wilderness of Paran, but as I have said that was a large wilderness; the text identifies the site of the Korah rebellion by naming a well-known place near this wilderness (Hizkuni). This is where the sin of Aaron and Miriam (Numbers 12) took place (Gersonides). **Di-zahab.** “Zahab” is gold; this is a reference to the Golden Calf episode

**NUMBERS 33:10** Hazeroth, and Di-zahab. <sup>2</sup>It is eleven days journey from Horeb unto Kadesh-barnea by the way of mount Seir. <sup>3</sup>And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spoke unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment

וַיַּחֲזִירַת וַיִּי זָהָב: 2 אֶחָד עֶשְׂרֵי יוֹם מִחֹדֶשׁ  
דֶּרֶךְ הָרֶשְׁעִיר עַד קֹדֶשׁ בְּרִנֵּעַ: 3 וַיְהִי  
בְּאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בַּעֲשֵׁתֵי עֶשְׂרֵי חֹדֶשׁ  
בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ דֶּרֶךְ מִשְׁהָ אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

**route.** Moses said, “Do you see what you have done? This is the shortest route from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea, and it still takes eleven days. Yet you got there in *three days!*” For according to Num. 10:11, they left Horeb “on the twentieth day of the second month,” and they sent the spies from Kadesh-barnea on the 29<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, the third month. **[C]** They spent “a whole month” (Num. 11:20) of this time at Kibroth-hattaavah, so subtract 30 days from the total, along with the seven days they waited at Hazeroth while “Miriam was shut out of camp” (Num. 12:15). You are left with the result that the actual time of travel all the way from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea was just three days. Moses continued, “That is how eager the Shekhinah was to get you into the land. But because you acted so badly, God had you skirt the hill country of Seir for 40 years.”

**RASHBAM** **Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab.** These too, according to the straightforward sense of the text, are all simply place names. For Di-zahab as a name, compare Me-zahab of Gen. 36:39.

**2 It is eleven days from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea.** “He who is wise will understand” (Hosea 14:10) that this verse was only written to set the stage for what Moses is about to say in v. 19. Kadesh-barnea is next to the land of Israel; that is where they sent the spies from. Moses mentions it here because the Israelites spent 40 years there. **By the Mount Seir route.** They left Horeb heading for Israel by the most direct route, and could have entered the land (via Kadesh-barnea) in just 11 days. But because they sinned, they “skirted the hill country of Seir a long time” (2:1)—40 years in all. So all of v. 19 took place within just 11 days, but “from there [says Moses] I sent the spies and you had to spend 40 years there, for your sins.”

**IBN EZRA** under other names. After all, we know from 3:9 that Senir has more than one name, and many other places mentioned in the Bible do too.

**2 It is eleven days from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea.** Rather, these are the words Moses had addressed to Israel “during the eleven-day journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea.” As I’ve explained, it was from Kadesh-barnea that they sent out the spies. [C] After the Lord swore that they would not enter the land, we find no commandments being given to them until the 40<sup>th</sup> year. Notice that in v. 5 Moses is not giving them new laws but “expounding” the ones he had already given them “between Paran and Tophel” and so forth—even though most of those commandments are recorded only here in Deuteronomy. V. 3 makes clear that the commandments recorded here are those that “that the LORD had [already] given him” in the places mentioned in v. 1.

**3 It was in the fortieth year.** Some say this is meant as a contrast with v. 2—it should have taken just 11 days to get to Kadesh-barnea, but they got there only in the fortieth year. These people are mistaken, though, for they got to Kadesh-barnea in the *second* year. The translations (correctly) make clear that “it was in the fortieth year” **that Moses addressed the Israelites.** See my comment to v. 1. **The eleventh month.** See my comment to Num. 7:72.

[C] See B. Ta'an. 29a.

**NAHMANIDES** days" (v. 2), reminding them what they did wrong in each of these places. In the *Sifrei*, R. Judah explains it this way as well, but R. Yose b. Durmaskit understands them as actual place names.

**2 It is eleven days from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the Mount Seir route.** The text is telling us the extent of the wilderness. Kadesh-barnea was at the far end of the wilderness, on the border of “the hill country of the Amorites” (v. 7), which was the inheritance of Israel. Here too were the lands of Sihon and Og (see again 4:46). The text will explain the complications introduced at that point by their sending the spies, from v. 19 through the end of the chapter. On “Horeb,” see my comment to v. 6.

**3 Moses addressed the Israelites in accordance with the instructions that the LORD had given him for them.** What we are being told here is two things: first, that he told them the commandments that are found only in this book and not earlier; and, second, that these commandments were precisely “in accordance with the instructions” given him by the Lord. He himself had neither added to nor taken away from what the Lord had commanded. Since none of the “new” commandments are introduced with the words “The LORD spoke to Moses,” this statement clarifies in advance that all of them were indeed spoken by the mouth of the Holy One.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** (Gersonides). All of these are places where Moses *had* rebuked the people, as they deserved (Abarbanel).

**2 It is eleven days from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the Mount Seir route.** All the evil doings recounted by Moses took place during those 11 days (Gersonides). They took place along this route, as well as in Kadesh itself. For Moses had fearlessly rebuked those who actually deserved it (Abarbanel).

**3 On the first day of the eleventh month.** The 1<sup>st</sup> of Shevat, 37 days before Moses' death on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Adar (Bekhor Shor). It is not that Moses recited all of the commandments to Israel on this one day. But some of the commandments are quite terse, and Moses was under pressure to clarify them because of his approaching death (Abarbanel).



**NJPS** them, <sup>4</sup>after he had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtaroth [and] Edrei. <sup>5</sup>On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this Teaching. He said:

<sup>6</sup>The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying: You have stayed long

**RASHI 4 After he had defeated Sihon.** Moses thought, “If I rebuke them before they have taken possession of even the slightest bit of the land, they will just say, ‘What’s his problem? What good is he anyway? He is only reprimanding us to give him an alibi for not being able to bring us into the land.’” That is why he waited to rebuke them until he had beaten Sihon and Og and given them possession of the lands of those two kings. **Who dwelt in Heshbon.** Even if Sihon had not been such a tough nut to crack, had he been entrenched in Heshbon, a tough city, he would have been tough to beat. Had he been entrenched in any other city, it would have been tough to conquer because he, its king, was so tough. Just imagine how difficult it was when the king and the city were both tough to conquer. **Who dwelt at Ashtaroth.** Here too, the king was tough and the city was tough. “Ashtaroth” is a word meaning “rugged precipices”; it is the same as Ashteroth-karnaim, “Ashtaroth of the horns,” where “Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim” (Gen. 14:5). The “fugitive” from that battle mentioned in Gen. 14:13 was actually Og: “Only King Og of Bashan was left of the remaining Rephaim” (3:11). **Edrei.** This was the name of the kingdom. **5 Undertook.** That is, “began”: “Here I venture to speak to my Lord” (Gen. 18:27). **To expound this Teaching.** He explained it to them in all 70 languages.

**6 You have stayed long enough.** This is straightforward enough. But the word translated “enough” really means “much.” So a midrash adds another reading: You have “much” greatness and reward for “staying” at this mountain. You have made a tabernacle,

**NAHMANIDES 4 Who dwelt in Heshbon.** Which was not his; he had conquered it from the king of Moab and built it to be his royal capital. **Who dwelt at Ashtaroth and Edrei.** The same thing applies here. This was Rephaim country, and Og (like Sihon) was one of the kings of the Amorites, as I will explain (God willing) in my comment to 3:11. But the Hebrew really says “in Ashtaroth, at Edrei” (OJPS), which tells us that Ashtaroth was the name of a region in which there was a town called Edrei. I don’t know where Rashi got the idea that “Ashtaroth” has to do with “rugged precipices,” though it’s true that there were rock fortresses at Ashteroth-karnaim, which the text likens to *karnaim*, animal horns. (Compare the similar metaphor in Job 39:28, where the eagle lodges “upon the tooth of the rock.”) Rashi also adds (in his comment to 7:13) a reference to Ashtaroth as meaning “riches,” based on the link with *osher* (“wealth”) noted by the Sages. What the word literally means is “sheep.” Note that sheep and goats climb up on the crags; this is responsible for the connection with “horns” that gives us the name “Ashteroth-karnaim,” the Sheep Horn Mountains. On the lower slopes of these mountains they built a city they called Edrei (see 3:1). There Og gathered his forces, at the city where he had built his royal palace and established his capital. What the Sifrei means (misunderstood by Rashi) is that Edrei was *like* Ashtaroth(-karnaim, where Og and his family came from)—tough to conquer. But Edrei was the name of his current capital, for the name of the kingdom was Bashan.

**5 Moses undertook to expound this Teaching.** This implies that he was also repeating the commandments already given and adding certain details. Saying that he “undertook” to do so meant that he had not been commanded to do so by God—it was his own idea. The Hebrew verb really means that he “wanted” to do so: “*Won’t you stay overnight and enjoy yourself?*” (Judg. 19:6); “*If only we had been content to remain on the other side of the Jordan!*” (Josh. 7:7)—to cite just a few of the numerous examples.

**6 The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying.** In my opinion, Horeb is the name of a place near Mount Sinai, where the Israelites stayed during that year. The wilderness, after all, was large; and in it was “the mountain God desired” (Ps. 68:17), which was called Sinai. That is why the wilderness itself was called Sinai—as if to say “the wilderness of Mount Sinai.” When Exod. 19:2 tells us, “they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain,” we must understand that this place in front of the mountain was called Horeb. It may be that both the mountain and the wilderness were named Sinai from *sneh*, the word for the many thornbushes found in that area. In that region, near the mountain, there was a place, perhaps a settlement,

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 4 After he had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites . . . and King Og of Bashan.** Once the Israelites saw that these two mighty kings had fallen, they understood that it was for nothing that their forefathers had abandoned the conquest of the land. When they understood this, Moses began to rebuke them (Bekhor Shor). Moses’ point was that, now that the Israelites were done with the sins for which they had been forced to spend 40 years in the wilderness, they had easily defeated these two mighty kings despite their fortifications (Gersonides). Moses wanted to make sure they understood that all this had not happened naturally, but miraculously (Abarbanel). Moses waited to say these things to the Israelites until they had reached a secure place in a settled land (Sforno).

**6 The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb.** Moses only said this in order to start his speech with a joke; God had spoken only to him, not to them all (Hizkuni).

**OJPS** unto them; <sup>4</sup>after he had smitten Sihon the king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who dwelt in Ashtaroth, at Edrei; <sup>5</sup>beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, took Moses upon him to expound this law, saying: <sup>6</sup>The LORD our God spoke unto us in Horeb, saying: “Ye have dwelt long

כָּל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים: 4 אַחֲרֵי הִכּוּ אֶת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֱמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב בְּחֶשְׁבֹּן וְאֶת עֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבְּשָׁן אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב בְּעֶשְׂתָּרֶת בְּאֶדְרֵי: 5 בְּעֶבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב הוּאֵיל מִשָּׁה בְּאֶר אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת לֵאמֹר: 6 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ דִּבֶּר אֵלֵינוּ בְּחֶרֶב לֵאמֹר

**ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS** ♦ Most importantly—is Deuteronomy a divine Teaching like the rest of the Torah, or is it the words of Moses when he “undertook to expound this Teaching” (v. 5)? ♦ How can it be correct to say that Moses was merely “expounding” the Teaching, when there are so many new commandments in this book? ♦ Shouldn’t Moses have told the story of receiving the Torah (which he does in ch. 5) before repeating what “the LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb” (v. 6) after that event? But in fact by the end of ch. 3 he will have brought the story right up to the 40<sup>th</sup> year before going back to the giving of the Torah!

**IBN EZRA 5 Moses undertook to expound.** That is, he began to explain to the Israelites’ children, who had been born in the wilderness, what had happened to their parents. He also repeated to them all the laws, including the Ten Commandments. Their parents had heard these directly from the mouth of the Lord, and now they too must hear them, from “a trusty messenger” (Prov. 25:13). Note that the verse literally says that he “undertook [it and] expounded [it].” For a similar sequence of two verbs that are linked without the Hebrew using “and,” compare “my beloved had turned, gone” (Song 5:6).

**6 Horeb.** This is Sinai. See my comment to Exod. 3:1.



“I cannot *carry* the burden of you to the land  
be able to rule you there as I can here, where

**OJPS** alone; <sup>10</sup>the LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude.—<sup>11</sup>The LORD, the God of your fathers, make you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you, as He hath promised you!—<sup>12</sup>How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife? <sup>13</sup>Get you, from each one of your tribes, wise men, and understanding,

אֹכֵל לְבִדִּי שְׂאֵת אֶתְכֶם: <sup>10</sup> יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הִרְבֵּה אֶתְכֶם וְהִנֵּם הַיּוֹם  
כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם לִרְבֹּ: <sup>11</sup> יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי  
אֲבוֹתְכֶם יִסֶּף עֲלֵיכֶם כְּכֶם אֵלֶּף פַּעֲמִים  
וַיִּבְרַךְ אֶתְכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָכֶם: <sup>12</sup> אֵיכָה  
אֶשָּׂא לְבִדִּי טֶרְחָכְךָ וּמִשְׁאָכְךָ וְרִיבְכֶם:  
<sup>13</sup> הִבּוּ לָכֶם אֲנָשִׁים חֲכָמִים וּבְנִים

**IBN EZRA 10 The LORD your God has multiplied you.** In Egypt, as he swore to your ancestor Jacob. **[D] As numerous as the stars in the sky.** This is meant to be a rhetorical image, not a precise number.

**11 A thousandfold.** Literally, “a thousand times.” In Arabic one would say the reverse, “times thousand,” just as one says “two thousand” or “three thousand.”

**12 The trouble.** Compare “They are become a *burden* to Me, I cannot endure them” (Isa. 1:14). The “trouble” Moses is referring to is his difficulty in getting fools to understand the commandments. **The burden.** “Why have You dealt ill with Your servant, and why have I not enjoyed Your favor, that You have laid the burden of all this people upon me?” (Num. 11:11)—their asking for bread, water, and meat. **The bickering.** With each other.

**13 Pick.** This verb is grammatically strange; one would expect the vowel under [D] See Gen. 46:3.

**12 The trouble of you, and the burden, and the bickering!** The straightforward explanation of this phrase is that Moses is alluding to the three things he told Jethro (in Exod. 18:15–16) that he did for the people; see my comment to Exod. 18:15. **The trouble of you** refers to “I make known the laws and teachings of God” (Exod. 18:16). For Moses took great trouble to teach those who left Egypt all the intricacies of the various laws and teachings. **The burden** refers to “the people come to me to inquire of God,” a reference to all the prayers Moses offered up on their behalf. For the Hebrew noun comes from a root meaning “to lift up,” which is also used with prayer: “if you will *offer up* prayer for the surviving remnant” (2 Kings 19:4); “do not *raise* a cry of prayer on their behalf” (Jer. 7:16). **The bickering** is straightforward; it refers to the legal disputes they brought to him. Rashi (following the Sifrei) thinks this falls into the category of “the burden,” but I do not know what he could possibly mean by the suggestion that a disputant might say, “I want to add more judges to the case!” One might renege after agreeing to let the case be tried before judges who should technically be disqualified, but if the judges are qualified he cannot reject them just because they rule against him. We do encourage litigants who wish to add additional (and better qualified) judges to hear a case, and finding these extra judges can sometimes be a difficulty. But in the wilderness they had all the sages of Israel right there with them, and they could easily say, “Let’s go before the chiefs of thousands.”

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** 11 May the LORD, the God of your fathers, increase your numbers a thousandfold. Rather, “[I know that] the LORD, the God of your fathers, will increase your numbers a thousandfold, and bless you as He promised you.” How much more difficult it will be for me then to “bear unaided the trouble of you” (v. 12)! (Bekhor Shor). With the two halves of v. 10, this verse combines to illustrate their increase in past, present, and future (Abarbanel).

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**NJPS** stranger. <sup>17</sup>You shall not be partial in judgment: hear out low and high alike. Fear no man, for judgment is God's. And any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me and I will hear it.”  
<sup>18</sup>Thus I instructed you, at that time, about the various things that you should do.  
<sup>19</sup>We set out from Horeb and traveled the great and terrible wilderness that you

**OJPS** him. <sup>17</sup>Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; ye shall hear the small and the great alike; ye shall not be afraid of the face of any man; for the judgment is God's; and the cause that is too hard for you ye shall bring unto me, and I will hear it.” <sup>18</sup>And I commanded you at that time all the things which ye should do.  
<sup>19</sup>And we journeyed from Horeb, and went through all that great and dreadful

**RASHI** 17 You shall not be partial in judgment. This is directed at the person who appoints the judges. He must not say, “So-and-So is powerful (or simply pleasant); let me appoint him as judge. So-and-So is my relative; I will appoint him to the municipal court”—he must not say this if the person is not qualified to be a judge. Such a judge might end up convicting the innocent and acquitting the guilty. So I consider the person who appointed the judge as if he himself had been “partial in judgment.” **Hear out low and high alike.** Rather, “the small and the great” matter (see OJPS). You must consider a case involving one perutah to be as significant as one involving 100 minas. If the perutah case comes before you first, you must not postpone it until after the 100-mina case. Another reading: Understand it, indeed, to mean “low and high” (as did Onkelos). You must not say, “This man is poor and the other one is rich and commanded to provide for him anyway; I will rule in favor of the poor man, and he can get his support without embarrassment.” Another reading: You must not say, “How can I tarnish this rich man's reputation for the sake of a single dinar? I will rule in his favor, but on his way out I will say to him, ‘Give the man his money—you really do owe it to him.’” **Fear no man.** Another reading takes *taguru* as a form of *ta'aguru*: “He who *lays in* stores during the summer” (Prov. 10:5). Do not keep your own words in for fear of another man. **For judgment is God's.** What you take unjustly from this man you compel Me to give back to him. Thus you end up directing your unfair judgment against Me. **You shall bring to me.** For saying this, Moses was punished by being unable to judge the case of the daughters of Zelophehad. [G] The same thing happened when Samuel told Saul, “I am the seer” (1 Sam. 9:19). The Holy One said to him, “I am going to make you realize that you are no seer! I guarantee it.” And when did He do so? When Samuel went to anoint David. “When . . . he saw Eliab, he thought: ‘Surely the LORD's anointed stands before Him.’” The Holy One said to him, “I thought you were the one who said, ‘I am the seer!’ ‘Pay no attention to his appearance or his stature, for I have rejected him. For not as man sees does the LORD see; man sees only what is visible, but the LORD sees into the heart’ [1 Sam. 16:6-7].”  
**18 I instructed you, at that time, about the various things that you should do.** Literally, “*all* the things.” This refers to the 10 things that distinguish civil cases from criminal ones. [H]  
**19 The great and terrible wilderness.** In which there were snakes as big as a wooden beam and scorpions the size of a longbow.  
[G] See Numbers 27. [H] See M. Sanh. 4:1-2.

**IBN EZRA** 17 You shall not be partial. Literally, “you shall not recognize a face,” that is, you must not force the outcome to go in favor of someone just because he is an acquaintance of yours.  
**18 The various things that you should do.** The laws and rules that he had taught them.  
**19 The great and terrible wilderness.** This is a reference to the eleven-day journey

**NAHMANIDES** 17 For judgment is God's. “Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of man, but on behalf of the LORD, and He is with you when you pass judgment” (2 Chron. 19:6). It is God's responsibility to deal justly with His creatures; He created them with the intent that there be honesty and righteousness among them and that they “rescue him who is robbed from him who defrauded him” (Jer. 21:12). He has put you in His place to perform these tasks, so if you scheme to pervert justice, you will have sinned against the Lord. For you will have broken faith with the task He assigned you.  
**18 Thus I instructed you, at that time, about the various things that you should do.** See Rashi's comment (which follows the Sifrei). If he is correct, our verse would be continuing the instructions to the judges in vv. 16-17. (The reason for simply mentioning the 10 differences rather than listing them would be that all of them can be derived from the text.) The straightforward sense, though, is that Moses is referring to “the laws and the teachings . . . the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow” (Exod. 18:20). For everything was told to all Israel directly from the mouth of Moses. He mentions this for the following reason. Everyone knows that Moses here is describing the advice Jethro gave to him in Exodus 18. As I explained in my comment to Exod. 18:20, it was only with regard to disputes that Jethro suggested he name judges to assist him, not with regard to prayer or instruction. Our verse, then, is making clear that the “chiefs of thousands” (v. 15) and so on were solely judicial appointments, for “Moses heeded his father-in-law and did *just* as he had said” (Exod. 18:24). He himself retained the task of instructing them in what they should do.  
As to why Moses makes no reference here to Jethro, in my opinion he did not want to refer to him in front of all Israel out of modesty. [C] Or perhaps he thought that this generation would think it dishonorable if he were to remind them that he had married a Cushite woman. Or it may simply be that Moses had in fact consulted with the Shekhinah and taken Jethro's advice on God's orders.  
[C] This would seem to mean modesty on *Jethro's* behalf. Another reading of Nahmanides' comment—very similar in Hebrew—suggests that Moses did not want to embarrass the Israelites (by reminding them that Jethro had found them excessively quarrelsome).

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** 17 **Hear out low and high alike.** That is, rich and poor alike. They must tell the rich man, “Either dress like him or dress him like you”—so that the arguments of the poor man are not automatically silenced by the difference in their clothing (Bekhor Shor). **Fear no man, for judgment is God's.** The judges must simply tell those they punish, “It is not me who has judged you, but God” (Hizkuni).  
**18 Thus I instructed you, at that time, about the various things that you should do.** You therefore realize that it was not so that you might learn Torah that you remained in the wilderness for 40 years, but for your sins; when the time came, I taught you everything rather quickly (Hizkuni).  
**19 The great and terrible wilderness.** Where no one had gone before; God wanted their journey to be as short as possible so they could enter the land immediately (Sforno).



**NJPS** saw, along the road to the hill country of the Amorites, as the LORD our God had commanded us. When we reached Kadesh-barnea, <sup>20</sup>I said to you, “You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the LORD our God is giving to us. <sup>21</sup>See, the LORD your God has placed the land at your disposal. Go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. Fear not and be not dismayed.”

<sup>22</sup>Then all of you came to me and said, “Let us send men ahead to reconnoiter the land for us and bring back word on the route we shall follow and the cities we shall come to.” <sup>23</sup>I approved of the plan, and so I selected twelve of your men, one from each tribe. <sup>24</sup>They made for the hill country, came to the wadi Eshcol, and spied it out. <sup>25</sup>They took some of the fruit of the land with them and brought it down

**RASHI** 22 Then all of you came to me. All mixed together. But later Moses says, “You came up to me, all your tribal heads and elders” (5:20). That time, they came properly, with the younger ones respecting their elders by letting them go first, and the elders respecting the tribal heads by letting *them* go first. But here “all of you” came at once—with the youngsters shoving the elders and the elders shoving the tribal heads. **Bring back word.** Rather, “bring back speech.” Let us know what language they speak there. **The route we shall follow.** For there is no road without its twists and turns. **The cities we shall come to.** Which ones we should conquer first.

**23 I approved of the plan.** But the Holy One did not. If Moses approved of it, though, why is he reproaching the Israelites for it? It is like a man who says to someone else, “Sell me this donkey of yours.” The other man says, “All right.” “Let me take him out for a test ride first.” “All right.” “In the mountains.” “All right.” When the purchaser sees that the seller is willing to agree to anything he suggests, he thinks, “He’s sure I will not find anything wrong.” So he immediately tells him, “Take the money—I don’t need to test him.” Moses was doing the same thing as the donkey seller in the parable. “I agreed to everything you said, hoping this would convince you to drop the plan. But you didn’t.” **So I selected.** From the “select,” the finest, among you. **Twelve of your men, one from each tribe.** “Twelve of your men” tells us that Moses’ own tribe, the tribe of Levi, was not represented among them.

**24 They . . . came to the wadi Eshcol.** It was not called this when they came there, of course; the place was named after the *eshcol*, the cluster of grapes, that the spies would cut down there. **And spied it out.** The Hebrew word for “spied” implies that they went on foot. This tells us that they ended up walking through it in all four directions, covering it warp and woof.

**25 Brought it down to us.** This tells us that Israel is higher than all other countries. **They gave us this report: “It is a good land.”** Who were “they” who gave this report? Joshua and Caleb.

**NAHMANIDES** 22 The route we shall follow and the cities we shall come to. Again, Rashi’s comment is drawn from the Sifrei. As I explained in my comment to Num. 13:2, the Israelites sent the spies (as Moses says here) to determine the best route to follow.

**23 I selected twelve of your men.** He does not praise them (as he originally did in Num. 13:2–3) as “chieftains” or “leaders of the Israelites”; once they had done wrong, they no longer deserved this praise.

**25 It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving to us.** Rashi, quoting the Sifrei, says it was only Joshua and Caleb who said this. If so, I must ask, what is his complaint against the Israelites? Was it not reasonable for them to believe something reported by ten

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** 22 Let us send men ahead. But the Holy One did not agree; in Num. 13:2, He told Moses, “You send men” (Sforno). **The route we shall follow.** For some mountain roads are so narrow and convoluted that a single man can block the pass and kill a huge army (Abarbanel). **The cities we shall come to.** They wanted to find a city weak enough to capture quickly, to frighten the Canaanites and to have a place where they could establish their wives and children while they undertook the long task of conquering the rest of the country (Abarbanel).

**23 I approved of the plan.** There was no intrinsic element of rebellion against God in it; if there had been, God would certainly not have agreed to let them go ahead with it (Gersonides). I never dreamed that you doubted God’s promise; I simply thought you wanted to know which part of the land was best to conquer first, since it obviously could not all be conquered in a single year (Sforno).

**OJPS** wilderness which ye saw, by the way to the hill-country of the Amorites, as the LORD our God commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea. <sup>20</sup>And I said unto you: “Ye are come unto the hill-country of the Amorites, which the LORD our God giveth unto us. <sup>21</sup>Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee; go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of thy fathers, hath spoken unto thee; fear not, neither be dismayed.”

<sup>22</sup>And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said: “Let us send men before us, that they may search the land for us, and bring us back word of the way by which we must go up, and the cities unto which we shall come.” <sup>23</sup>And the thing pleased me well; and I took twelve men of you, one man for every tribe; <sup>24</sup>and they turned and went up into the mountains, and came unto the valley of Eshcol, and spied it out. <sup>25</sup>And they took of the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought it

**IBN EZRA** of v. 2. Along the road to the hill country of the Amorites. See v. 44. They were to travel in that direction.

**22 To reconnoiter.** Literally, “to dig”; compare “they have come to spy out the whole country” (Josh. 2:3). “Digging” is a metaphor for seeking something that is hidden. **The cities we shall come to.** The first cities we shall come to.

**23 I approved of the plan.** Since all of you agreed with it.

**25 Brought it down.** This would make sense if it referred to bringing it down from the top of the tree; but the truth is that it

הַר הָאֲמֹרִי בְּאֶשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
אֶתְנוּ וְנָבֵא עַד קֶדֶשׁ בַּרנֶּעַ: <sup>20</sup> וְאָמַר  
אֲלֵכֶם בָּאתֶם עַד-הַר הָאֲמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ נָתַן לָנוּ: <sup>21</sup> רְאֵה נָתַן יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ  
לְפָנֶיךָ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ עֲלֶה רֵשׁ בְּאֶשֶׁר דָּבַר  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֶיךָ לְךָ אֶל-תִּירָא וְאַל-  
תַּחַת:   
<sup>22</sup> וְתִקְרְבוּן אֵלַי בְּלָכֶם וְתֹאמְרוּ נִשְׁלַח  
אֲנָשִׁים לְפָנֵינוּ וְיַחְפְּרוּ-לָנוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ  
וְיָשְׁבוּ אֵתְנוּ דָּבָר אֶת-הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר נֵעֲלֶה-  
בָּהּ וְאֵת הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר נָבֵא אֱלֹהֵינוּ:  
<sup>23</sup> וַיִּיטֹב בְּעֵינֵי הַדָּבָר וְאָקַח מִכֶּם שְׁנַיִם  
עֶשֶׂר אֲנָשִׁים אִישׁ אֶחָד לְשִׁבְטוֹ: <sup>24</sup> וַיִּפְּנוּ  
וַיַּעֲלוּ הָהָרָה וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד-נַחַל אֲשַׁכּוֹל  
וַיִּרְגְּלוּ אֹתָהּ: <sup>25</sup> וַיִּקְחוּ בִידֵם מִפְּרִי הָאָרֶץ  
וַיֹּרְדוּ אֵלֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁבוּ אֵתְנוּ דָּבָר וַיֹּאמְרוּ

**ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS** ♦ If Moses’ intent was indeed to reproach the Israelites, why begin with the spies (v. 22)? Shouldn’t he have mentioned the Golden Calf episode and the stories of Numbers 11? (Note that he will finally get around to mentioning all these in ch. 9.) ♦ How could Moses omit the following three essential facts: (1) that God had commanded him to send the spies (Num. 13:2); (2) that he himself had given the spies a long list of information to gather (Num. 13:17–20); and (3) that the spies reported that the country was “one that devours its settlers” (Num. 13:32)—the opposite of what Moses says in v. 25 here!