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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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v. 6</td>
<td>a verse in the chapter currently being commented on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23:21</td>
<td>a verse from another chapter in Deuteronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch.</td>
<td>another chapter in Deuteronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. 15:15</td>
<td>verses from elsewhere in the Bible are identified by book, according to the following abbreviations:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Abbreviation</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>Genesis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exod.</td>
<td>Exodus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lev.</td>
<td>Leviticus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num.</td>
<td>Numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut.</td>
<td>Deuteronomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Josh.</td>
<td>Joshua</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judg.</td>
<td>Judges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Sam.</td>
<td>1 Samuel</td>
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<td>2 Sam.</td>
<td>2 Samuel</td>
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<td>1 Kings</td>
<td>1 Kings</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Kings</td>
<td>2 Kings</td>
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<td>Isa.</td>
<td>Isaiah</td>
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<td>Jer.</td>
<td>Jeremiah</td>
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<td>Ezek.</td>
<td>Ezekiel</td>
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<td>Hosea</td>
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<td>Joel</td>
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<td>Amos</td>
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<td>Obad.</td>
<td>Obadiah</td>
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<td>Jon.</td>
<td>Jonah</td>
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<td>Mic.</td>
<td>Micah</td>
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<td>Nah.</td>
<td>Nahum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hab.</td>
<td>Habakkuk</td>
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<td>Zeph.</td>
<td>Zephaniah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hag.</td>
<td>Haggai</td>
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<td>Zech.</td>
<td>Zechariah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ps.</td>
<td>Psalms</td>
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<td>Prov.</td>
<td>Proverbs</td>
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<td>Job</td>
<td>Job</td>
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<tr>
<td>Song</td>
<td>Song of Songs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Ruth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lam.</td>
<td>Lamentations</td>
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<td>Eccles.</td>
<td>Ecclesiastes</td>
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<td>Esther</td>
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<td>Dan.</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
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<td>Ezra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neh.</td>
<td>Nehemiah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chron.</td>
<td>1 Chronicles</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Chron.</td>
<td>2 Chronicles</td>
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**Other Abbreviations:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td><em>ben</em> or <em>bar</em>, “son of”</td>
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<tr>
<td>R.</td>
<td>Rabbi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Babylonian Talmud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y.</td>
<td>Jerusalem (Yerushalmi) or Palestinian Talmud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.</td>
<td>Mishnah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.</td>
<td>Tosefta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJPS</td>
<td>New Jewish Publication Society translation (1985)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OJPS</td>
<td>Old Jewish Publication Society translation (1917)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations for Tractates of Mishnah and Talmuds:

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

What does “Miqra’ot Gedolot” mean?
“Miqra’ot Gedolot” is a Hebrew expression meaning something like “Large-Format Bible” or, more colloquially, “The Big Book of Bible.” The famous “Second Rabbinic Bible” of R. Jacob b. Hayyim (1525) was a Miqra’ot Gedolot.

What do you mean “a” Miqra’ot Gedolot? Are there more than one?
Absolutely. There are ‘Miqra’ot Gedolot’ to the Torah or Pentateuch, to the Megillot (the Five Scrolls), and to the other biblical books as well. Moreover, the same biblical book can appear in different versions: “Miqra’ot Gedolot” refers to the format, not the contents.

So what is the Miqra’ot Gedolot format?
It consists of the Hebrew biblical text in large print; a “Targum” or translation of the text (in rare cases more than one); and commentaries on the text, often accompanied by explanatory notes. That’s why we have titled this English version The Commentators’ Bible.

Which translation is included in this Miqra’ot Gedolot?
We have included two translations: the old Jewish Publication Society translation of 1917 and the new JPS translation of 1985.

Why include both?
Both were translated by the preeminent Jewish biblical scholars of their day, but the OJPS is more literal and the NJPS freer and more readable. More importantly, the purpose of the Miqra’ot Gedolot is to help explain difficulties in the biblical text. Because translators are often forced to pick a single one of several possible explanations of what the Hebrew text means, comparing two different translations is the best way for someone who doesn’t know Hebrew to judge whether there is a difficulty in the original text. Having two translations should also remind you that it is the Hebrew text that is the “real” Bible, not any particular English version.

Which commentaries are included?
We have included the most prominent commentaries of the medieval period—those of Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Nahmanides—with explanatory notes as well as selected additional comments from other commentators of that era. See “What’s on the Page?” below for biographical information about all the commentators.
Is this the first time these commentators have been translated into English?  
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 “Ramab,” 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 20th-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 (12th 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-13th 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.
DEVARIM

NIPS These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan.—Through the wilderness, in the OIPS These are the words which Moses spoke unto all Israel beyond the Jordan; in the wilderness, in the Arabah, over against

RASHI 1 These are the words. The Hebrew expression denotes words of rebuke. The rest of the verse mentions all the places where Israel had angered God, but out of respect for Israel the verse merely hints at these events. To all Israel. Had he rebuked only some of them, those who had been busy in the marketplace would have said to them, "You just listened to the son of Amram and never said a word! If we had been there, we would have given him what for!" That is why Moses gathered them all together. He said to them, "All right, everyone is here.

NAHMANIDES The subject of this book is well known: It is a repetition of the Torah, in which Moses explains to the generation that will enter the land most of the commandments that the Jews will need. He does not mention things that concern only the priests—the sacrifices and the laws of purity—which he has already explained to them; the priests were alert and conscientious and would need such things explained to them over and over again. But Moses does issue the same commandments to the Israelites time after time, whether to clarify details of the law or simply to emphasize them by repetition. In this book, for example, one may point to the repeated admonishments not to commit idolatry and the many times he rebukes and even threatens them with severe punishments for sin.

There are, it is true, a few commandments in Deuteronomy that have not been previously mentioned: e.g., leviathan marriage, defamation of a virgin, divorce, false testimony, and the like. All these were told him at Sinai or in the Tent of Meeting, in the first year, before the incident with the spies. Nothing new is given to Moses here in the steps of Moab except for "the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to conclude with the Israelites in the land of Moab" (28:69). That is why we do not find in this book the expression "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the Israelite people, and say to them" or "Instruct the Israelites to do" such-and-such a commandment.

The reason the "new" commandments were not mentioned in earlier books for Moses to tell those who left Egypt is perhaps that these commandments, though incumbent on the individual wherever he might be, were not actually practiced until they entered the land. (Note that this is explicitly mentioned in Num. 15:2 with regard to the libations.) Or perhaps it is because these commandments are not everyday occurrences that Moses did not mention them until it was time for the generation of the children of those who left Egypt to take possession of the land.

Before he begins his explanation of the Torah, Moses rebukes the Israelites and reminds them of their transgressions—how often they rebelled in the wilderness, and how compassionately the Holy One nevertheless treated them. All this is to make them realize how great is His loyalty to them, and to emphasize that they must not return to their misbehavior lest they be wiped out for their sins. He also wanted to encourage them by assuring them that they could always count on God to be compassionate to them. That way, no one could say that it would be impossible to take possession of the land—for there is no man who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46), and when he sinned he would expect to have God's aspect of judgment bear down him immediately, so that he would perish. That is why our master Moses told them that the Holy One was compassionate and merciful. His forgiveness and clemency are indeed of great help and assistance to humanity in serving Him: "Yours is the power to forgive so that You may be held in awe" (Ps. 130:4).

1 These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel. This phrase refers to the commandments written throughout the book, from the beginning of the Ten Commandments in 5:6. "These words" are the Teaching that "Moses undertook to expound" (v. 5). (Though v. 6 lacks the expression "he said" to introduce the parenthetical material of Deuteronomy 1–4, it must be understood, as for

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 (Abarbal).

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.
NJPS  Arabah near Suhp, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, OJPS  Suhp, between Paran and Tophel, and Laban, and

RASHI  If you have anything to say, say it now." Through the wilderness. The Hebrew literally says "in the wilderness" (OJPS), but of course they were not in the wilderness but in the steppes of Moab. What it really means is "with regard to the wilderness"—with regard to the way you angered God in the wilderness when you said, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshtops, when we ate our fill of bread!" (Exod. 16:3). In the Arabah. "With regard to" the Arabah, the steppe, when they sinned with Baal-peor in the steppes of Moab. Near Suhp. At the "Suhp" Sea, the Sea of Reeds, when they said to Moses, "Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness?" (Exod. 14:11), and even after crossing the sea: They did not remember Your abundant love, but rebelled at the sea, at the Sea of Reeds (Ps. 106:7). (See B. Ar. 15a for this interpretation.) Between Paran and Tophel, Laban. The Hebrew makes clear that this expression really means "between Paran" (on the one hand) and "Tophel and Laban" (on the other). Said R. Simmon b. Yehudai: [A] We have gone through the entire Bible and not found a place called "Tophel and Laban." This is an allusion to the way they "dignified" (kaphu) the manna, which was white (laban): "We have come to katha this miserable food" (Num. 21:5). It refers as well to the story of the spies, which took place in the wilderness of Paran. Hazereth. This refers to the Korah rebellion. [B] Another reading: He told them, "You should have learned from what I did to Miriam at Hazereth for uttering harmful speech. And you spoke your harmful words about the Holy One!" Di-zahab. Here he is reproving [A] Some versions of Rashi's comment have "R. Johanan." [B] See the "additional comment" of Hizkuni.

NAHMANNIDES  example in Gen. 41:51 and 52.) Our phrase essentially means, "These are the commandments that Moses addressed to all Israel," on the far side of the Jordan, "in the fortieth year" and so forth (as explained in vv. 1-5). But when he did so, he first uttered the introductory words that begin in v. 6 and continue on to the end of 4:40, explaining that God's original intention had been for them to cross the Jordan and conquer the land immediately. But their sins had prevented this. Then "Moses summoned all the Israelites and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the laws and rules that I proclaim to you this day!" (5:1). Moses therefore begins to expound the Teaching with the Ten Commandments, so that the Israelites might hear them directly from the mouth of the one who received them from the mouth of the Holy One. Next, he informs them of the oneness of God—"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone." (6:4)—followed by the rest of the commandments in the book. That is, the words that Moses addressed to all Israel" are those that he spoke when he "summoned all the Israelites and said to them" (5:1). For expounding the Teaching and completing the sum of the commandments had to be done, just like the original giving of the Torah, in the presence of all Israel. Vv. 4:44-49 had to repeat what we are told here in vv. 1-5 because Moses' introduction to the laws goes on for so long. Remember that "the land of King Sihon of the Amorites" (4:46) is the same as "the land of Moab" mentioned here in v. 5; Israel was not allowed to enter any of the land of Moab except for that part of it that had been legitimized for them to enter by being first conquered by Sihon. (See my comment to Num. 21:26) Through the wilderness. Since the Israelites were not actually "in the wilderness" (as OJPS correctly translates) at this point (having already entered Moab), Onkelos interprets all these place names as implicit rebukes. [A] One must certainly ask what they are doing here; the verse has more place names than a real-estate transaction. Onkelos understands the Hebrew to mean that Moses spoke to the Israelites about the wilderness, the Arabah, and so on—even about the "eleven places that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan were the words that he had addressed to them in the wilderness in the Arabah near Suhp, and so forth, ever since they left Sinai. Between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazereth, and Di-zahab. These places are either not recorded in Numbers 33 or they are recorded there

IBN EZRA  "Moses addressed" has a double function here. These words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan readdressed all Israel in the wilderness. Whether these were words 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 here 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 Lbnah of Num. 33:20; I think the Korah episode must have taken place there (Gersonides). Hazereth. 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

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS  (Beḥaṭar Shai). "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 here 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 Lbnah of Num. 33:20; I think the Korah episode must have taken place there (Gersonides). Hazereth. 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
NJPS  Hazeroth, and Di-zahab. 2It is eleven days from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the Mount Seir route.—It was in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, that Moses addressed the Israelites in accordance with the instructions that the LORD had given him for RASHI  them for the call that they made because of all the gold (zahab) that they had: “It was I...who lavished silver on her and gold—which they used for Baal” (Hosea 2:10).

2 It is eleven days from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the Mount Seir 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 29th 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 Hazereth while “Miral was shut out of camp” (Num. 12:15). You are left with the actual time that it took to 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 skin the hill country of Seir for 40 years.”

3 It was in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month. This teaches us that he did not rebuke them until just before his death. From whom did he learn to do this? From Jacob, who did not rebuke his sons until he was on the point of death. He told Reuben, “Son, I will tell you why I have not rebuked you all these years—so that you would not leave me and attach yourself to my brother, Esau.” There are actually four reasons (says the Sifrei) not to rebuke someone until one is close to death: so as not to have to keep rebuking him over and over; so that your friend does not avoid you out of embarrassment; so that your friend does not hold a grudge against you; and so that the air is cleared when he parts from you at last. Joshua too did not rebuke Israel until he was close to death; nor did Samuel: “Here I am! Testify against me” (1 Sam. 12:3). Even David did not rebuke Solomon until he was on his deathbed.


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. Durmasukit 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  (Gers onionide). All of these are places where Moses had rebuked the people, as they deserved (Abaranbel).

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 (Abaranbel).

3 On the first day of the eleventh month. The 1st of Shevat, 37 days before Moses’ death on the 7th 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 (Abaranbel).
NIPJS them, after he had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtaroth [and] Edrei. On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this Teaching. He said:

"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 "Chedarlaomer and the kings 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" (5:11). 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.

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" (OJP), which tells us that Ashtaroth was the name of a region in which there was a town called Edrei. I don't know where Rashī 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.") Rashī also adds (in his comment to 7:13) a reference to Ashtaroth as meaning "riches," based on the link with other ("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 Rashī) is that Edrei was like Ashteroth-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 "wished" 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. 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 sōn, the word for the many thorny bushes 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 (Gersanes). Moses wanted to make sure they understood that all this had not happened naturally, but miraculously (Abrabanel). Moses waited to say these things to the Israelites until they had reached a secure place in a settled land (Sìmo).

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).
NJPS enough at this mountain. 8Start out and make your way to the hill-country of the Amorites and to all their neighbors in the Arakah, the hill-country, the Negev, the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and the Lebanon, as far as the Great River, the river Euphrates. 9See, I place the land at your disposal. Go, take possession of the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to assign to them and to their heirs after them.

RASHI a lampstand, and sacred utensils; you have received the Torah; and you have appointed for yourselves a Sanhedrin as well as chiefs of thousands and chiefs of hundreds.

7 Start out and make your way. To Arad and Hormah. [D] To the hill country of the Amorites and to all their neighbors. The Amorites are mentioned explicitly; the "neighbors" are Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir. In the Arakah. The "steppe," referring here to the flat, forested country. The hill country. This is what is referred to in rabbinic literature as "the royal mountain," that is, the central hill country, The Shephelah. The low country of the south. The Negev, the seacoast. Ashkelon, Gaza, Caesarea, and the like. All this is explained in the Sifrei. As far as the Great River, the river Euphrates. Though it was the smallest of the four rivers of Gen. 2:10-14 (being listed last), it is called "great" here by virtue of being mentioned in association with the land of Israel. As the saying goes, "The King's king is a king himself." Stick close to the powerful and people will bow down to you; touch one who is anointed with fragrant oil and some of it will rub off on you.

8 See, I place the land at your disposal. You see it with your own eyes. I am not telling you this by hearsay. Go, take possession of the land. There is no one to object; you will not have to fight. — Had they not sent the spies, they would not even have had to carry weapons. To your fathers. This being said, why must the text specify them as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? To emphasize that even Abraham alone, Isaac alone, or Jacob alone would have deserved this.

9 Thereupon I said to you. More precisely, I said to you "saying" (OJP). Moses said to them, "I am not saying this to you on my own, but on the instructions of the Holy One." I cannot bear the burden of you by myself. Can one imagine that Moses was unable to judge Israel? Could the man who brought them out of Egypt, split the sea for them, brought down the manna, and swept a flock of quail from the sea for them not be able to judge them? What he meant was this: "The Lord your God has made you great" (as v. 10 literally says)—superior to your judges; He has taken your punishment away from you and known, your ears were not opened of old! [Isa. 48:8]—"You had never heard" at Sinai; "you had never known" at Horeb; "your ears were not opened" in the Steppes of Moab." This implies that Horeb was the location of the Tent of Meeting. [B] But Ibn Ezra thinks Horeb is simply an alternative name for Sinai (see his comment to Exodus 3:1), both names referring to the climate of the location, its dryness and its thorns.

7 Start out and make your way. The verse continues with the location where they were to go and the route they were to follow.

8 See, I place the land at your disposal. Go, take possession of the land. The latter phrase shows that this is not a promise, but a command; see my comment to Num. 33:53. That the Lord swore to your fathers. Here the Lord refers to Himself in the third person; see my comment to "Come up to the Lord" of Exodus 24:1.

9 Thereupon. Rather, "at that time" (OJP), before the Lord told us to start out—this, at least, is the opinion of those who say that Jethro came to the Israelites (see Exodus 18) before the giving of the Torah (Exodus 19-20). That is, this all happened "at the time" we

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 9 I cannot bear the burden of you by myself. Rather, "I cannot carry the burden of you to the land all by myself"; see Num. 1:12, where the verb is used this way. "And I certainly would not be able to rule you there as I can here, where you all dwell in the one camp" (Abirabanel).
Nahmanides were dwelling in Horeb. Moses mentions it now, after saying that they had been told to "take possession of the land" (v. 8), in order to tell the Israelites: "Look, we had received the Torah, and you had magistrates and officials to govern you and lead you. We were ready to enter the land, and we left Horeb in military formation, with our magistrates and our elders. But you all came to me with your sages and your tribal elders and demanded that we send the spies—which ruined everything."

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 Sifre) 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 retrace 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 roused 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."

13 Pick from each of your tribes men who are wise, discerning, and experienced, and I will appoint them as your heads. Moses was referring to the judges who would settle the legal disputes, not to the other two categories; he said he would "appoint them as
Nahmanides: your heads,” implying that they would teach and pray for the people too, out of modesty. Rashi’s comment that the judges must be “experienced with your tribes” (which he took from the Sifrei) goes against the straightforward sense, which is given by the translations. The Hebrew word means “experienced” but “known,” and in my opinion it is to be taken literally. In order for them to be appointed as judges, they must be well known as men of judicial temperament. The word encompasses all the qualities enumerated by jethro: “capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain” (Exod. 16:21). Moses was telling them to pick people of whom everyone would say, “Yes, he deserves to be a judge.”

Additional Comments 15 Chiefs of thousands, chiefs of hundreds, chiefs of fifties, and chiefs of tens. The same four levels of government that exist in Venice today (Abarbanel). The Israelites were so quarrelsome that each group of 10 of them needed its own private judge (Sifra). Officials for your tribes. One for each (Abarbanel).

16 A stranger. What Rashi means is not that one should be given the oven and the other the stove, but that the judge must appraise them precisely and have one give money to the other to make the values come out precisely even (Bekhor Shu”a).
NIPS stranger. 17 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. 18 Thus I instructed you, at that time, about the various things that you should do. 19 We set out from Horeb and traveled the great and terrible wilderness that you

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 OJS). You must consider a case involving one peruth as to be as significant as one involving 100 minas. If the peruth 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 owe it to him.'" Fear no man. Another reading takes tagrura as a form of to'agur: "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 should be anointed, '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 that which 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. [I]

19 The great and terrible wilderness. In which there were snakes as big as a wooden beam and scorpions the size of a longbow.

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. 22:12). 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 Shekinah and taken Jethro's advice on God's orders.

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 who 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 (Sifrim).
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. 20I said to you, “You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the LORD our God is giving to us. 21See, 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.” 22Then 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.” 23I approved of the plan, and so I selected twelve of your men, one from each tribe. 24They made for the hill country, came to the wadi Eshcol, and spied it out. 25They took some of the fruit of the land with them and brought it down to the camp.

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 younger ones showing the elders and the elders showing 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 won’t 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 eschol, 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. 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 the report they received from the spies?

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” (Sforano). 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 (Abbaranel). 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 (Abbaranel).

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 (Sforano).