



# Shabbat Shalom

## Ekev

*Deuteronomy 7:12 – 11:25*

As the Bible makes clear, man often fails in life's challenges, but in giving us the Scriptures, God has provided us with the tools we need in every circumstance.

This week's portion is part of Moses' second long speech to the nation, referred to as the speech of the commandments. It includes a great deal of instruction, both with regard to specific commandments and with regard to the overall obligation to follow God's word and obey His commandments. The first verses of Chapter 8 are particularly interesting, however, as they refer to the experience of the Children of Israel in the desert and contrast that experience with what they will be experiencing once they enter the Land of Israel. This entire section, however, tells a very different story about the desert experience than what we have heard until now.

*And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)*

For the first time, we learn that the Children of Israel have actually suffered in the Wilderness, or more accurately, Moses gives credence to their prior complaints for the first time.

When the Children of Israel complained about the Manna and the lack of food, the response was critical indeed: *"Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent. And the anger of the Lord blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased."* (Numbers 11:10) The assumption is that the Children of Israel are being petty, complaining about their lack of food variety when they should be grateful that they are eating well and not going hungry. And yet, in this section of Deuteronomy, Moses admits that they were hungry and that Manna was not able to satisfy them.

Another interesting element in this section is Moses' assertion that the purpose of their sojourn in the desert was as a test, to determine whether they were sufficiently committed to God and His commandments. There is no mention of the fact that the Children of Israel were punished for their sins, having listened to the slanderous words of the spies against the Land of Israel.

The context of this speech, however, is quite different from the previous descriptions of similar events in the Book of Numbers. The Children of Israel are just weeks away from entering the Land of Israel. Moses is addressing the nation and his perspective is forward-looking. Although he does refer to events of the past, his purpose is to prepare the nation for the challenges they will face when they enter the Land.

And the most significant challenge of all is the potential influence of the Canaanite nations residing there and, in particular, their pagan beliefs. It is, therefore, critical that Moses stress those aspects of the past forty years that will best equip them for their newest challenge. Throughout their desert experience, the Children of Israel felt the pull to return to Egypt, and Moses needed to enable them to understand the advantages of freedom, which is accompanied by servitude to God. Therefore, it was critical that the Children of Israel be

reliant upon God for their food and water and understand that simple food and water from God as free persons is preferable to watermelon and fish in Egypt as slaves.

Now, as they approach the Land of Canaan, their suffering is acknowledged because the benefits of the Land of Israel derive from its fertility and the wealth of its produce. *“For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing.”* (Deuteronomy 8:7-9)

It is critical for the Children of Israel to understand the advantages of the Land of Israel over the desert as they enter that land and become ready for its unique challenges. However, the richness of the land presents its own challenges: *“Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today... Beware lest you say in your heart, My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.”* (Deuteronomy 8:11,17).

While this speech presents a different perspective on the events recorded initially in Exodus and Numbers, it is serving a different purpose. On the eve of their entrance into the Land of Israel, the Children of Israel must adjust their faith commitment to accommodate wealth and the temptations of idolatry, to strengthen their commitment to God, despite the change in their circumstances. As the Bible makes clear, they often fail at this challenge. But in giving us all of these Scriptures, God has provided us with the tools we need in every circumstance.