

# Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Davrim 5784

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Sefer Devarim commences with Moshe recounting Bnei Yisroel's history.

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּמִדְבַּר בְּעֶרְבָה מִזֶּמֶן  
בְּיַרְדֵּן וּבְיַרְדֵּן וּלְבָנוֹ וְחִצְרֹת וְדֵי זָהָב:

“These are the matters that Moshe spoke to the entire Bnei Yisroel in the Transjordan, in the wilderness, in steppes near Suf, between Paran and Tofel, Lavan, Chatzeiros, and Di-Zahav.” (Davrim 1:1).

There is much to unpack in this pasuk but this *shtikel* will focus on why the sefer commences without a vav. The pasuk starts without a vav, unlike the seforim of Shmos, Vayikra, and Bamidbar. Furthermore, out of the 54 parshios in the Torah, only 5 others commence without the connecting vav prior to Parshas Devarim; and only 11 total, including Devarim do the same. Six out of eleven parshios in Sefer Devarim commence without a vav. Is there a reason or any significance to this?

The fifty-four weekly Torah portions were divided by Chazal or later authorities well after the times of Moshe Rabeinu. While the custom to read a portion of the Torah weekly is attributed to Moshe Rabeinu (see Gemara Bavli Megillah 30b; Rambam Tefillah 12:1) the division into 54 parshios, to complete the Torah on a yearly cycle, was created later. There are actually 669 parshios in the Torah—segments separated by a פ (open) or a o (closed) break. Regardless, the division into the fifty-four weekly portions are significant and were not done in an arbitrary fashion. The subject matter contained within each weekly parsha is purposeful and their connection to the previous subject matter is important. In fact, the Torah's columns, save for five of them, all commence with a vav. Why all these vavs?

Vav means nail. It is a letter that signifies that an idea can be hung on it and it also is a letter that can connect two ideas together. Vav is the prefix “and” in Biblical (and modern) Hebrew. The Torah has so many vavs because the Torah is not meant to be taken in parts. Interpreters make the mistake of reading a single pasuk and then thinking they understand what it means. Any reader of these divrei Torah know how important it is to stress context. No single pasuk or segment in the Torah can be taken by itself. The meaning of its words and phrases are all dependent on its surrounding context and in the context the way that word or phrase is used elsewhere in the Torah. Thus, every single column in the Torah (save for five special ones) commences with the all-important vav. This is the same reason why almost every parsha portion begins with a vav. While one (or a double) is assigned to a week, all the weeks are connected until they lead up to Simchas Torah. The Torah hints to this in the instructions for the Mishkan: וְגַי הָעֲמֻדִים וְגַי הַשְּׁקִיָּהם כֶּסֶף: “Each pillar's hook and post shall be of silver.” (Shmos 27:10 and 11, and

38:10, 11, 12, and 17). It can also mean “every column has a vav” in the Torah. The five exceptions are beyond the scope of this piece.

The five times, prior to Devarim, that a parsha portion commences without a vav are Bereishis (Bereishis 1:1), Noach (ibid 6:9), Pekudei (Shmos 38:21), Bechukosai (Vayikra 26:3), and Masai (Bamidbar 33:1). In Devarim it's Devarim (Devarim 1:1), Re'eh (ibid 11:26), Shoftim (ibid 16:18), Ki Tzeitzei (ibid 21:10), Nitzavim (ibid 29:9), and Ha'azinu (21:1). From Bereishis until the end of sefer Bamidbar, it is one long historical, cultural, and theological narrative of Bnei Yisroel. Hashem created the world, gave certain endowments to Avraham, gave Bnei Yisroel His Torah, and then led them to the doorstep of Eretz Yisroel. It is one continued narrative that builds parsha by parsha. Therefore, for the most part, they all have a vav connection. The narrative ends at the end of Bamidbar. אֵלֶּה הַמִּצְוֹת וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה הַבְּרִיד־מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶרְבַת מוֹאָב עַל יַרְדֵּן יְרִחוֹ. “These are the commandments and statutes that Hashem taught – through the hand of Moshe – to Bnei Yisroel, on the steppes of Moav, beside the Yarden opposite Yericho.” (Bamidbar 36:13). As far as historical narrative, not much happens in sefer Devarim, and the Torah could end there and begin next with Sefer Yehoshua. The death of Moshe was already foretold, as was the transition of leadership to Yehoshua. The narrative basically ends with Bamidbar. That is why Devarim does not have a vav. It is a stand-alone sefer, so to speak, that gives the final mitzvos and brochos to Klal Yisroel.

Contrarily to the biblical scholars who mistakenly claim it is a sefer on its own, or written by a different author than the rest of the Torah, sefer Devarim clearly is the fifth and final portion of the Chumash—all of it written by Moshe through Hashem's command, and given to Bnei Yisroel before entering Eretz Canaan. However, the lack of vav signifies that this sefer is different. It is Moshe's final instruction, without many additional historical narratives.

Bereishis has no vav as Hashem created time in that first pasuk. Noach begins a new narrative, that of man and societies. Pekudei recounts that the Mishkan was made to plan and it begins a new era of Hashem dwelling amongst Bnei Yisroel in the Mishkan. Bechukosai is a stand-alone parsha as well, in that after teaching the basic rules of civil and criminal law, holiness, korbanos, and purity, the Torah gives the reward and punishment for keeping these laws, rules, and statutes. It begins the era of responsibility to keep the Torah. Masei is stand-alone because it summarizes the travels of Bnei Yisroel, and Moshe gives his last instructions on dividing the Land and laws to follow once in it. The era of Moshe is now coming to an end. It is no coincidence that Pekudei, Bechukosai, and Masei are all the last parshios of their respective seforim. Old business completes and new eras begin as each sefer comes to a close. Even though these parshios do not begin with a vav, they are surely connected to the rest of the Torah. No portion of the Torah is truly “stand-alone.”

Devarim commences a new narrative. This is Moshe Rabbeinu giving the final instructions to that last generation in the wilderness, making sure they recall the entire Torah. While these instructions are written outside of the narrative, they are part and parcel of the rest of the Torah and the Torah is incomplete without them.