

Summaries of Torah Portions

5770

(2009-2010)

Bereishit	17 Oct 2009	29 Tishrei 5770	Emor	1 May 2010	17 Iyar 5770
Noah	24 Oct 2009	6 Heshvan 5770	Behar/Behukot.	8 May 2010	24 Iyar 5770
Lech Lecha	31 Oct 2009	13 Heshvan 5770	Bamidbar	15 May 2010	2 Sivan 5770
VaYera	7 Nov 2009	20 Heshvan 5770	Shavuot	19 May 2010	6 Sivan 5770
Chaye Sarah	14 Nov 2009	27 Heshvan 5770	Naso	22 May 2010	9 Sivan 5770
Toldot	21 Nov 2009	4 Kislev 5770	BeHalotecha	29 May 2010	16 Sivan 5770
VaYetzei	28 Nov 2009	11 Kislev 5770	Shelach	5 Jun 2010	23 Sivan 5770
VaYishlach	5 Dec 2009	18 Kislev 5770	Korach	12 Jun 2010	30 Sivan 5770
VaYeshev	12 Dec 2009	25 Kislev 5770	Chukat	19 Jun 2010	7 Tammuz 5770
Miketz	19 Dec 2009	2 Tevet 5770	Balak	26 Jun 2010	14 Tammuz 5770
VaYigash	26 Dec 2009	9 Tevet 5770	Pinchas	3 Jul 2010	21 Tammuz 5770
VaYechi	2 Jan 2010	16 Tevet 5770	Matot /Massei	10 Jul 2010	28 Tammuz 5770
Shemot	9 Jan 2010	23 Tevet 5770	Devarim	17 Jul 2010	6 Av 5770
VaEra	16 Jan 2010	1 Shevat 5770	Vaetchanan	24 Jul 2010	13 Av 5770
Bo	23 Jan 2010	8 Shevat 5770	Ekev	31 Jul 2010	20 Av 5770
Beshalach	30 Jan 2010	15 Shevat 5770	Re'eh	7 Aug 2010	27 Av 5770
Yitro	6 Feb 2010	22 Shevat 5770	Shoftim	14 Aug 2010	4 Elul 5770
Mishpatim	13 Feb 2010	29 Shevat 5770	Ki Tetzei	21 Aug 2010	11 Elul 5770
Terumah	20 Feb 2010	6 Adar 5770	Ki Tavo	28 Aug 2010	18 Elul 5770
Tetzave	27 Feb 2010	13 Adar 5770	Nitzavim/VaYel.	4 Sep 2010	25 Elul 5770
Ki Tisa	6 Mar 2010	20 Adar 5770	Rosh Hashanah	9 Sep 2010	1 Tishrei 5771
VaYakel/Pek.	13 Mar 2010	27 Adar 5770	Ha'azinu	11 Sep 2010	3 Tishrei 5771
VaYikra	20 Mar 2010	5 Nissan 5770	Yom Kippur	18 Sep 2010	10 Tishrei 5771
Tzav	27 Mar 2010	12 Nissan 5770	Sukkot	23 Sep 2010	15 Tishrei 5771
Pesach	3 Apr 2010	19 Nisan 5770	Shemini Atzer.	30 Sep 2010	22 Tishrei 5771
Shemini	10 Apr 2010	26 Nisan 5770	Simchat Torah	1 Oct 2010	23 Tishrei 5771
Tazria/Metzora	17 Apr 2010	3 Iyar 5770	Bereishit	2 Oct 2010	24 Tishrei 5771
Aharei Mot/Ked.	24 Apr 2010	10 Iyar 5770			

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Bereishit
Genesis 1:1-6:8

G-d creates the world in six days. On the first day He makes darkness and light. On the second day He forms the heavens, dividing the "upper waters" from the "lower waters." On the third day He sets the boundaries of land and sea and calls forth trees and greenery from the earth. On the fourth day He fixes the position of the sun, moon and stars as timekeepers and illuminators of the earth. Fish, birds and reptiles are created on the fifth day; land-animals, and then the human being, on the sixth. G-d ceases work on the seventh day, and sanctifies it as a day of rest.

G-d forms the human body from the dust of the earth and blows into his nostrils a "living soul." Originally Man is a single person, but deciding that "it is not good that man be alone," G-d takes a "side" from the man, forms it into a woman, and marries them to each other.

Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden and commanded not to eat from the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." The serpent persuades Eve to violate the command, and she shares the forbidden fruit with her husband. Because of their sin, it is decreed that man will experience death, returning to the soil from which he was formed, and that all gain will come only through struggle and hardship. Man is banished from the Garden.

Eve gives birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain quarrels with Abel and murders him, and becomes a rootless wanderer. A third son is born to Adam, Seth, whose tenth-generation descendant, Noah, is the only righteous man in a corrupt world.

Noach
Genesis 6:9-11:32

G-d instructs Noah -- the only righteous man in a world consumed by violence and corruption -- to build a large wooden teivah ("ark"), coated within and without with pitch. A great deluge, says G-d, will wipe out all life from the face of the earth; but the ark will float upon the water, sheltering Noah and his family, and two members (male and female) of each animal species.

Rain falls for 40 days and nights, and the waters churn for 150 days more before calming and beginning to recede. The ark settles on Mount Ararat, and from its window Noah dispatches a raven, and then a series of doves, "to see if the waters were abated from the face of the earth." When the ground dries completely -- exactly one solar year (365 days) after the onset of the Flood -- G-d commands Noah to exit the teivah and repopulate the earth.

Noah builds an altar and offers sacrifices to G-d. G-d swears never again to destroy all of mankind because of their deeds, and sets the rainbow as a testimony of His new covenant with man. G-d also commands Noah regarding the sacredness of life: murder is deemed a capital offense, and while man is permitted to eat the meat of animals, he is forbidden to eat flesh or blood taken from a living animal.

Noah plants a vineyard and becomes drunk on its produce. Two of Noah's sons, Shem and Japeth, are blessed for covering up their father's nakedness, while his third son, Ham, is cursed for taking advantage of his debasement.

The descendents of Noah remain a single people, with a single language and culture, for ten generations. Then they defy their Creator by building a great tower to symbolize their own invincibility; G-d confuses their language so that "one does not comprehend the tongue of the other," causing them to abandon their project and disperse across the face of the earth, splitting into seventy nations.

The Parshah of Noach concludes with a chronology of the ten generations from Noah to Abram (later Abraham), and the latter's journey from his birthplace of Ur Casdim to Charan, on the way to the Land of Canaan.

Lech-Lecha
Genesis 12:1-17:27

G-d speaks to Abram, commanding him to "Go from your land, from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you." There, G-d says, he will be made into a great nation. Abram and his wife Sarai, accompanied by his nephew Lot, journey to the Land of Canaan, where Abram builds an altar and continues to spread the message of a One G-d.

A famine forces the first Jew to depart for Egypt, where beautiful Sarai is taken to Pharaoh's palace; Abram escapes death because they present themselves as brother and sister. A plague prevents the Egyptian king from touching her and convinces him to return her to Abram and compensate the brother-revealed-as-husband with gold, silver and cattle.

Back in the Land of Canaan, Lot separates from Abram and settles in the evil city of Sodom, where he falls captive when the mighty armies of Chedorlaomer and his three allies conquer the five cities of the Sodom Valley. Abram sets out with a small band to rescue his nephew, defeats the four kings, and is blessed by Malki-Zedek the king of Salem (Jerusalem).

G-d seals the Covenant Between the Parts with Abram, in which the exile and persecution (Galut) of the people of Israel is foretold and the Holy Land is bequeathed to them as their eternal heritage

Still childless ten years after their arrival in the Land, Sarai tells Abram to marry her maidservant Hagar. Hagar conceives, becomes insolent toward her mistress, and then flees when Sarai treats her harshly; an angel convinces her to return and tells her that her son will father a populous nation. Ishmael is born in Abram's 86th year.

Thirteen years later, G-d changes Abram's name to Abraham ("father of multitudes") and Sarai's to Sarah ("princess"), and promises that a son will be born to them; from this child, whom they should call Isaac ("will laugh"), will stem the great nation with which G-d will establish His special bond. Abraham is commanded to circumcise himself and his descendents as a "sign of the covenant between Me and you."

Vayeira
Genesis 18:1-22:24

G-d reveals Himself to Abraham three days after the first Jew's circumcision at age 99; but Abraham rushes off to prepare a meal for three guests who appear in the desert heat. One of the three -- who are angels disguised as men -- announces that, in exactly one year, the barren Sarah will give birth to a son. Sarah laughs.

Abraham pleads with G-d to spare the wicked city of Sodom. Two of the three disguised angels arrive in the doomed city, where Abraham's nephew, Lot, extends his hospitality to them and protects them from the evil intentions of a Sodomite mob. The two guests reveal that they have come to overturn the place, and to save Lot and his family. Lot's wife turns into a pillar of salt when she disobeys the command not to look back at the burning city as they flee.

While taking shelter in a cave, Lot's two daughters (believing that they and their father are the only ones left alive in the world) get their father drunk, lie with him, and become pregnant. The two sons born from this incident father the nations of Moab and Amon.

Abraham moves to Gerar, where the Philistine king Avimelech takes Sarah -- who is presented as Abraham's sister -- to his palace. In a dream, G-d warns Avimelech that he will die unless he returns the woman to her husband. Abraham explains that he feared he would be killed over the beautiful Sarah.

G-d remembers His promise to Sarah and gives her and Abraham a son, who is named Isaac (Yitzchak, meaning "will laugh"). Isaac is circumcised at the age of eight days; Abraham is 100 years old, and Sarah 90, at their child's birth.

Hagar and Ishmael are banished from Abraham's home and wander in the desert; G-d hears the cry of the dying lad and saves his life by showing his mother a well. Avimelech makes a treaty with Abraham at Be'er Sheva, where Abraham gives him seven sheep as a sign of their truce.

G-d tests Abraham's devotion by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah (the Temple Mount) in Jerusalem. Isaac is bound and placed on the altar, and Abraham raises the knife to slaughter his son. A voice from heaven calls to stop him; a ram, caught in the undergrowth by its horns, is offered in Isaac's place. Abraham receives the news of the birth of a daughter, Rebecca, to his nephew Bethuel.

Chayei Sarah
Genesis 23:1-25:18

Sarah dies at age 127 and is buried in the Machpeilah Cave in Hebron, which Abraham purchases from Ephron the Hittite for 400 shekels of silver.

Abraham's servant, Eliezer, is sent laden with gifts to Charan to find a wife for Isaac. At the village well, Eliezer asks G-d for a sign: when the maidens come to the well, he will ask for some water to drink; the woman who will offer to give his camels to drink as well, shall be the one destined for his master's son.

Rebecca, the daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel, appears at the well and passes the "test". Eliezer is invited to their home, where he repeats the story of the day's events. Rebecca returns with Eliezer to the land of Canaan, where they encounter Isaac praying in the field. Isaac marries Rebecca, loves her, and is comforted over the loss of his mother.

Abraham takes a new wife, Keturah (Hagar) and fathers six additional sons, but Isaac is designated as his only heir. Abraham dies at age 175 and is buried beside Sarah by his two eldest sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

Toldot
Genesis 25:19-28:9

Isaac marries Rebecca. After twenty childless years their prayers are answered and Rebecca conceives. She experiences a difficult pregnancy as the "children struggle inside her"; G-d tells her that "there are two nations in your womb," and that the younger will prevail over the elder.

Esau emerges first; Jacob is born clutching Esau's heel. Esau grows up to be "a cunning hunter, a man of the field"; Jacob is "a wholesome man," a dweller in the tents of learning. Isaac favors Esau; Rebecca loves Jacob. Returning exhausted and hungry from the hunt one day, Esau sells his birthright (his rights as the firstborn) to Jacob for a pot of red lentil stew.

In Gerar, in the land of the Philistines, Isaac presents Rebecca as his sister, out of fear that he will be killed by someone coveting her beauty. He farms the land, reopens the wells dug by his father Abraham, and bores a series of his own wells: over the first two there is strife with the Philistines, but the waters of the third well are enjoyed in tranquility.

Esau marries two Hittite women. Isaac grows old and blind, and expresses his desire to bless Esau before he dies. While Esau goes off to hunt for his father's favorite food, Rebecca dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, covers his arms and neck with goatskins to simulate the feel of his hairier brother, prepares a similar dish, and sends Jacob to his father. Jacob receives his father's blessings for "the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land" and mastery over his brother. When Esau returns and the deception is revealed, all Isaac can do for his weeping son is to predict that he will live by his sword, and that when Jacob falters, the younger brother will forfeit his supremacy over the elder.

Jacob leaves home for Charan to flee Esau's wrath and to find a wife in the family of his mother's brother, Laban. Esau marries a third wife -- Machlat, the daughter of Ishmael.

Vayeitzei
Genesis 28:10-32:3

Jacob leaves his hometown Be'er Sheva and journeys to Charan. On the way, he encounters "the place" and sleeps there, dreaming of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels climbing and descending on it; G-d appears and promises that the land upon which he lies will be given to his descendents. In the morning, Jacob raises the stone on which he laid his head as an altar and monument, pledging that it will be made the house of G-d.

In Charan, Jacob stays with and works for his uncle Laban, tending Laban's sheep. Laban agrees to give him his younger daughter Rachel -- whom Jacob loves -- in marriage, in return for seven years' labor. But on the wedding night, Laban gives him his elder daughter, Leah, instead -- a deception Jacob discovers only in the morning. Jacob marries Rachel, too, a week later, after agreeing to work another seven years for Laban.

Leah gives birth to six sons -- Reuben, Shimon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun -- and a daughter, Dinah, while Rachel remains barren. Rachel gives Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, as a wife to bear children in her stead, and two more sons, Dan and Naphtali, are born. Leah does the same with her handmaid, Zilpah, who gives birth to Gad and Asher. Finally, Rachel's prayers are answered and she gives birth to Joseph.

Jacob has now been in Charan for fourteen years and wishes to return home, but Laban persuades him to remain, now offering him sheep in return for his labor. Jacob prospers, despite Laban's repeated attempts to swindle him. After six years, Jacob leaves Charan in stealth, fearing that Laban would prevent him from leaving with the family and property for which he labored. Laban pursues Jacob, but is warned by G-d in a dream not to harm him. Laban and Jacob make a pact on Mount Gal-Ed, attested to by a pile of stones, and Jacob proceeds to the Holy Land, where he is met by angels.

Vayishlach
Genesis 32:4-36:43

Jacob returns to the Holy Land after a 20-year stay in Charan, and sends angel-emissaries to Esau in hope of a reconciliation, but his messengers report that his brother is on the warpath with 400 armed men. Jacob prepares for war, prays, and sends Esau a large gift (consisting of hundreds of heads of sheep and cattle) to appease him.

That night, Jacob ferries his family and possessions across the Yabbok River; he, however, remains behind and encounters the angel that embodies the spirit of Esau, with whom he wrestles until daybreak. Jacob suffers a dislocated hip but vanquishes the supernal creature, who bestows on him the name Israel, which means "He who prevails over the Divine."

Jacob and Esau meet, embrace and kiss, but part ways. Jacob purchases a plot of land near Shechem, whose crown prince -- also called Shechem -- abducts and rapes Jacob's daughter Dinah. Dinah's brothers Simon and Levi avenge the deed by killing all male inhabitants of the city after rendering them vulnerable by convincing them to circumcise themselves.

Jacob journeys on. Rachel dies while giving birth to her second son, Benjamin, and is buried in a roadside grave near Bethlehem. Reuben loses the birthright because he interferes with his father's marital life. Jacob arrives in Hebron, to his father Isaac, who later dies at age 180 (Rebecca has passed away before Jacob's arrival).

Our parshah concludes with a detailed account of Esau's wives, children and grandchildren, and the family histories of the people of Se'ir among whom Esau settled.

Vayeishev
Genesis 37:1–40:23

Jacob settles in Hebron with his twelve sons. His favorite is 17-year-old Joseph, whose brothers are jealous of the preferential treatment he receives from his father, such as a precious many-colored coat that Jacob makes for Joseph. Joseph relates to his brothers two dreams he has which foretell that he is destined to rule over them, increasing their envy and hatred towards him.

Shimon and Levi plot to kill him, but Reuben suggests that they throw him into a pit instead, intending to come back later and save him. While Joseph is in the pit, Judah has him sold to a band of passing Ishmaelites. The brothers dip Joseph's special coat in the blood of a goat and show it to their father, leading him to believe that his most beloved son was devoured by a wild beast.

Judah marries and has three children. The eldest, Er, dies young and childless, and his wife Tamar is given in levirate marriage to the second son, Onan. Onan sins by spilling his seed and he, too, meets an early death. Judah is reluctant to have his third son marry her. Determined to have a child from Judah's family, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute and seduces Judah himself. Judah hears that his daughter-in-law has become pregnant and orders her executed for harlotry, but when Tamar produces some personal effects he left with her as a pledge for payment, he publicly admits that he is the father. Tamar gives birth to twin sons, Peretz (an ancestor of King David) and Zerach.

Joseph is taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, the minister in charge of Pharaoh's slaughterhouses. G-d blesses everything he does, and soon he is made overseer of all his master's property. Potiphar's wife desires the handsome and charismatic lad; when Joseph rejects her advances, she tells her husband that the Hebrew slave tried to force himself on her and has him thrown in prison. Joseph gains the trust and admiration of his jailers, who appoint him to a position of authority in the prison administration.

In prison, Joseph meets Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker, both incarcerated for offending their royal master. Both have disturbing dreams, which Joseph interprets; in three days, he tells them, the butler will be released and the baker hanged. Joseph asks the butler to intercede on his behalf with Pharaoh. Joseph's predictions are fulfilled, but the butler forgets all about Joseph and does nothing for him.

Mikeitz

Genesis 41:1-44:17

Joseph's imprisonment finally ends when Pharaoh dreams of seven fat cows that are swallowed up by seven lean cows, and of seven fat ears of grain swallowed by seven lean ears. Joseph interprets the dreams to mean that seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of hunger, and advises Pharaoh to store grain during the plentiful years. Pharaoh appoints Joseph governor of Egypt. Joseph marries Asenat, daughter of Potiphar, and they have two sons, Menasseh and Ephraim.

Famine spreads throughout the region, and food can be obtained only in Egypt. Ten of Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to purchase grain; the youngest, Benjamin, stays home, for Jacob fears for his safety. Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him; he accuses them of being spies, insists that they bring Benjamin to prove that they are who they say they are, and imprisons Shimon as a hostage. Later, they discover that the money they paid for their provisions has been mysteriously returned to them.

Jacob agrees to send Benjamin only after Judah assumes personal and eternal responsibility for him. This time Joseph receives them kindly, releases Shimon, and invites them to an eventful dinner at his home. But then he plants his silver goblet, purportedly imbued with magic powers, in Benjamin's sack. When the brothers set out for home the next morning they are pursued, searched, and arrested when the goblet is discovered. Joseph offers to set them free and retain only Benjamin as his slave.

Vayigash
Genesis 44:18-47:27

Judah approaches Joseph to plead for the release of Benjamin, offering himself as a slave to the Egyptian ruler in Benjamin's stead. Upon witnessing his brothers' loyalty to one another, Joseph reveals his identity to them. "I am Joseph," he declares. "Is my father still alive?"

The brothers are overcome by shame and remorse, but Joseph comforts them. "It was not you who sent me here," he says to them, "but G-d. It has all been ordained from Above to save us, and the entire region, from famine."

The brothers rush back to Canaan with the news. Jacob comes to Egypt with his sons and their families -- seventy souls in all -- and is reunited with his beloved son after 22 years. On his way to Egypt he receives the Divine promise: "Fear not to go down to Egypt; for I will there make of you a great nation. I will go down with you into Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again."

Joseph gathers the wealth of Egypt by selling food and seed during the famine. Pharaoh gives Jacob's family the fertile county of Goshen to settle, and the children of Israel prosper in their Egyptian exile.

Vayechi
Genesis 47:28-50:26

Jacob lives the final 17 years of his life in Egypt. Before his passing, he asks Joseph to take an oath that he will bury him in the Holy Land. He blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, elevating them to the status of his own sons as progenitors of tribes within the nation of Israel.

The patriarch desires to reveal the end of days to his children, but is prevented from doing so. Jacob blesses his sons, assigning to each his role as a tribe: Judah will produce leaders, legislators and kings; priests will come from Levi, scholars from Issachar, seafarers from Zebulun, schoolteachers from Shimon, soldiers from Gad, judges from Dan, olive growers from Asher, and so on. Reuben is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage"; Shimon and Levi for the massacre of Shechem and the plot against Joseph. Naphtali is granted the swiftness of a deer, Benjamin the ferociousness of a wolf, and Joseph is blessed with beauty and fertility.

A large funeral procession consisting of Jacob's descendants, Pharaoh's ministers, the leading citizens of Egypt and the Egyptian cavalry accompanies Jacob on his final journey to the Holy Land, where he is buried in the Machpeilah Cave in Hebron.

Joseph, too, dies in Egypt, at the age of 110. He, too, instructs that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Holy Land, but this would come to pass only with the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt many years later. Before his passing, Joseph conveys to the Children of Israel the testament from which they will draw their hope and faith in the difficult years to come: "G-d will surely remember you, and bring you up out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Shemot
Exodus 1:1 - 6:1

The Children of Israel multiply in Egypt. Threatened by their growing numbers, Pharaoh enslaves them and orders the Hebrew midwives, Shifrah and Puah, to kill all male babies at birth. When they do not comply, he commands his people to cast the Hebrew babies into the Nile.

A child is born to Jocheved, the daughter of Levi, and her husband, Amram, and placed in a basket on the river, while the baby's sister, Miriam, stands watch from afar. Pharaoh's daughter discovers the boy, raises him as her son, and names him Moses.

As a young man, Moses leaves the palace and discovers the hardship of his brethren. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and kills the Egyptian. The next day he sees two Jews fighting; when he admonishes them, they reveal his deed of the previous day, and Moses is forced to flee to Midian. There he rescues Jethro's daughters, marries one of them - Zipporah - and becomes a shepherd of his father-in-law's flocks.

G-d appears to Moses in a burning bush at the foot of Mount Sinai and instructs him to go to Pharaoh and demand: "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me." Moses' brother, Aaron, is appointed to serve as his spokesman. In Egypt, Moses and Aaron assemble the elders of Israel to tell them that the time of their redemption has come. The people believe; but Pharaoh refuses to let them go, and even intensifies the suffering of Israel.

Moses returns to G-d to protest: "Why have You done evil to this people?" G-d promises that the redemption is close at hand.

Va'eira
Exodus 6:2-9:35

G-d reveals Himself to Moses. Employing the "four expressions of redemption," He promises to take out the Children of Israel from Egypt, deliver them from their enslavement, redeem them and acquire them as His own chosen people at Mount Sinai; He will then bring them to the Land He promised to the Patriarchs as their eternal heritage.

Moses and Aaron repeatedly come before Pharaoh to demand in the name of G-d, "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me in the wilderness." Pharaoh repeatedly refuses. Aaron's staff turns into a snake and swallows the magic sticks of the Egyptian sorcerers. G-d then sends a series of plagues upon the Egyptians.

The waters of the Nile turn to blood; swarms of frogs overrun the land; lice infest all men and beasts. Hordes of wild animals invade the cities, a pestilence kills the domestic animals, painful boils afflict the Egyptians. For the seventh plague, fire and ice combine to descend from the skies as a devastating hail. Still, "the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he would not let the children of Israel go; as G-d had said to Moses."

Bo

Exodus 10:1-13:16

The last three of the Ten Plagues are visited on Egypt: a swarm of locusts devours all the crops and greenery; a thick, palpable darkness envelops the land; and all the firstborn of Egypt are killed at the stroke of midnight of the 15th of the month of Nissan.

G-d commands the first mitzvah to be given to the people of Israel: to establish a calendar based on the monthly rebirth of the moon. The Israelites are also instructed to bring a "Passover offering" to G-d: a lamb or kid is to be slaughtered and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel of every Israelite home, so that G-d should pass over these homes when He comes to kill the Egyptian firstborn. The roasted meat of the offering is to be eaten that night together with matzah (unleavened bread) and bitter herbs.

The death of the firstborn finally breaks Pharaoh's resistance and he literally drives the Children of Israel from his land. So hastily do they depart, there is no time for their dough to rise, and the only provisions they take along are unleavened. Before they go, they ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold, silver and garments, draining Egypt of its wealth.

The Children of Israel are commanded to consecrate all firstborn and to observe the anniversary of the Exodus each year by removing all leaven from their possession for seven days, eating matzah, and telling the story of their redemption to their children. They are also commanded to wear tefillin on the arm and head as a reminder of the Exodus and their resultant commitment to G-d.

Beshalach
Exodus 13:17-17:16

Soon after allowing the Children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. G-d tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the sea splits to allow the Israelites to pass through, and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses and the Children of Israel sing a song of praise and gratitude to G-d.

In the desert, the people suffer thirst and hunger and repeatedly complain to Moses and Aaron. G-d miraculously sweetens the bitter waters of Marah, and later has Moses bring forth water from a rock by striking it with his staff; He causes manna to rain down from the heavens before dawn each morning, and quails to appear in the Israelite camp each evening.

The Children of Israel are instructed to gather a double portion of manna on Friday, as none will descend on Shabbat, the divinely decreed day of rest. Some disobey and go to gather manna on the seventh day, but find nothing. Aaron preserves a small quantity of manna in a jar, as a testimony for future generations.

In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the Amalekites, who are defeated by Moses' prayers and an army raised by Joshua.

Yitro

Exodus 18:1-20:23

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, hears of the great miracles which G-d performed for the people of Israel, and comes from Midian to the Israelite camp, bringing with him Moses' wife and two sons. Jethro advises Moses to appoint a hierarchy of magistrates and judges to assist him in the task of governing and administering justice to the people.

The Children of Israel camp opposite Mount Sinai, where they are told that G-d has chosen them to be His "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation." The people respond by proclaiming, "All that G-d has spoken, we shall do."

On the sixth day of the third month (Sivan), seven weeks after the Exodus, the entire nation of Israel assembles at the foot of Mount Sinai. G-d descends on the mountain amidst thunder, lightning, billows of smoke and the blast of the shofar, and summons Moses to ascend.

G-d proclaims the Ten Commandments, commanding the people of Israel to believe in G-d, not to worship idols or take G-d's name in vain, to keep the Shabbat, honor their parents, and not to murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness or covet another's property. The people cry out to Moses that the revelation is too intense for them to bear, begging him to receive the Torah from G-d and convey it to them.

Mishpatim
Exodus 21:1-24:18

Following the revelation at Sinai, G-d legislates a series of laws for the people of Israel. These include the laws of the indentured servant; the penalties for murder, kidnapping, assault, and theft; civil laws pertaining to redress of damages, the granting of loans, and the responsibilities of the "Four Guardians"; and the rules governing the conduct of justice by courts of law.

Also included are laws warning against mistreatment of foreigners; the observance of the seasonal festivals, and the agricultural gifts that are to be brought to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; the prohibition against cooking meat with milk; and the mitzvah of prayer. Altogether, the Parshah of Mishpatim contains fifty-three mitzvot -- 23 imperative commandments and 30 prohibitions.

G-d promises to bring the people of Israel to the Holy Land, and warns them against assuming the pagan ways of its current inhabitants.

The people of Israel proclaim, "We will do and we will hear all that G-d commands us." Leaving Aaron and Hur in charge in the Israelite camp, Moses ascends Mount Sinai and remains there for forty days and forty nights to receive the Torah from G-d.

Terumah
Exodus 25:1-27:19

The people of Israel are called upon to contribute fifteen materials -- gold, silver and copper; blue, purple and red-dyed wool; flax, goat hair, animal skins, wood, olive oil, spices and gems -- out of which, G-d says to Moses, "They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell amidst them."

On the summit of Mount Sinai, Moses is given detailed instructions on how to construct this dwelling for G-d so that it could be readily dismantled, transported and reassembled as the people journeyed in the desert.

In the Sanctuary's inner chamber, behind an artistically woven curtain, was the Ark containing the Tablets of Testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; on the Ark's cover stood two winged cherubim hammered out of pure gold. In the outer chamber stood the seven-branched Menorah and the Table upon which the "showbread" was arranged.

The Sanctuary's three walls were fitted together from 48 upright wooden boards, each of which was overlaid with gold and held up by a pair of silver foundation sockets. The roof was formed of three layers of coverings: (a) tapestries of multi-colored wool and linen; (b) a covering made of goat-hair; (c) a covering of ram and tachash skins. Across the front of the Sanctuary was an embroidered screen held up by five posts.

Surrounding the Sanctuary and the copper-plated Altar which fronted it was an enclosure of linen hangings, supported by 60 wooden posts with silver hooks and trimmings and reinforced by copper stakes.

Tetzaveh

Exodus 27:20-30:10

G-d tells Moses to receive from the Children of Israel pure olive oil to feed the "everlasting flame" of the menorah, which Aaron is to kindle each day, "from evening till morning."

The priestly garments, to be worn by the Kohanim (priests) while serving in the Sanctuary are described. All Kohanim wore: 1) the ketonet -- a full length linen tunic; 2) michnasayim -- linen breeches; 3) mitznefet or migba'at -- a linen turban; 4) avnet -- a long sash wound above the waist.

In addition, the Kohen Gadol ("high priest") wore: 5) the efod, an apron-like garment made of blue, purple and red-dyed wool, linen and gold thread; 6) the choshen, a breastplate containing twelve precious stones inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; 7) me'il -- a cloak of blue wool, with gold bells and decorative pomegranates on its hem; 8) the tzitz -- a golden plate worn on the forehead bearing the inscription "Holy to G-d".

Tetzaveh also includes G-d's detailed instructions for the seven-day initiation of Aaron and his four sons -- Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Itamar -- into the priesthood, and for the making of the Golden Altar on which the ketoret ("incense") was burned.

Ki Tisa

Exodus 30:11-34:35

The people of Israel are told to each contribute exactly half a shekel of silver to the Sanctuary. Instructions are also given regarding the making of the Sanctuary's water-basin, anointing oil and incense. "Wise hearted" artisans Betzalel and Ahaliav are placed in charge of the Sanctuary's construction, and the people are once again commanded to keep the Shabbat.

When Moses does not return when expected from Mount Sinai, the people make a Golden Calf and worship it. G-d proposes to destroy the errant nation, but Moses intercedes on their behalf. Moses descends from the mountain carrying the Tablets of the Testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; seeing the people dancing about their idol, he breaks the Tablets, destroys the Golden Calf and has the primary culprits put to death. He then returns to G-d to say: "If You do not forgive them, blot me out from the book that You have written."

G-d forgives, but says that the effect of their sin will be felt for many generations. At first G-d proposes to send His angel along with them, but Moses insists that G-d Himself accompany His people to the Promised Land.

Moses prepares a new set of tablets and once more ascends the mountain, where G-d reinscribes the covenant on these Second Tablets. On the mountain Moses is also granted a vision of the divine Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. So radiant is Moses' face upon his return, that he must cover it with a veil, which he removes only to speak with G-d and to teach His laws to the people.

Vayak'hel
Exodus 35:1-38:20

Moses assembles the people of Israel and reiterates to them the commandment to observe the Shabbat. He then conveys G-d's instructions regarding the making of the Mishkan (Tabernacle).

The people donate the required materials in abundance, bringing gold, silver, copper, blue, purple and red-dyed wool, goat hair, spun linen, animal skins, wood, olive oil, herbs and precious stones. Moses has to tell them to stop giving.

A team of wise-hearted artisans make the Mishkan and its furnishings (as detailed in the previous Torah readings of Terumah, Tetzaveh and Ki Tisa): three layers of roof coverings; 48 gold-plated wall panels, and 100 silver foundation sockets; the Parochet (Veil) that separates between the Sanctuary's two chambers and the Masach (Screen) that fronts it; the Ark and its cover with the Cherubim; the Table and its Showbread; the seven-branched Menorah with its specially-prepared oil; and the Golden Altar and the incense burned on it; the Anointing Oil; the outdoor Altar for Burnt Offerings and all its implements; the hangings, posts and foundation sockets for the Courtyard; and the Basin and its pedestal, made out of copper mirrors .

Pekudei
Exodus 38:21-40:38

Moses makes an accounting of the gold, silver and copper donated by the people for the making of the Mishkan. Betzalel, Ahaliav and their assistants make the Eight Priestly Garments -- the Apron, Breastplate, Cloak, Crown, Hat, Tunic, Sash and Breeches -- according to the specifications communicated to Moses in the Parshah of Tetzaveh.

The Mishkan is completed and all its components are brought to Moses, who erects it and anoints it with the holy Anointing Oil, and initiates Aaron and his four sons into the priesthood. A cloud appears over the Mishkan, signifying the Divine Presence that has come to dwell within it.

Vayikra
Leviticus 1:1-5:26

G-d calls to Moses from the Tent of Meeting, and communicates to him the laws of the korbanot, the animal and meal offerings brought in the Sanctuary. These include:

The "ascending offering" (olah) that is wholly raised to G-d by the fire atop the Altar;

Five varieties of "meal offering" (minchah) prepared with fine flour, olive oil and frankincense;

The "peace offering" (shelamim), whose meat was eaten by the one bringing the offering, after parts are burned on the Altar and parts are given to the Kohanim (priests);

The different types of "sin offering" (chatat) brought to atone for transgressions committed erroneously by the High Priest, the entire community, the king, or the ordinary Jew;

The "guilt offering" (asham) brought by one who has appropriated property of the Sanctuary, who is in doubt as to whether he transgressed a divine prohibition, or who has committed a "betrayal against G-d" by swearing falsely to defraud a fellow man.

Tzav

Leviticus 6:1-8:36

G-d instructs Moses to command Aaron and his sons regarding their duties and rights as Kohanim ("priests") who offer the korbanot (animal and meal offerings) in the Sanctuary.

The fire on the Altar must be kept burning at all times. In it are burned the wholly consumed Ascending Offering; veins of fat from the Peace, Sin, and Guilt Offerings; and the "handful" separated from the Meal Offering.

The Kohanim eat the meat of the Sin and Guilt Offerings and the remainder of the Meal Offering. The Peace Offering is eaten by the one who brought it, except for specified portions given to the Kohen. The holy meat of the offerings must be eaten by ritually pure persons, in their designated holy place, and within their specified time.

Aaron and his sons remain within the Sanctuary compound for seven days, during which Moses initiates them into the priesthood.

Shemini

Leviticus 9:1-11:47

On the eighth day following "seven days of inauguration," Aaron and his sons begin to officiate as Kohanim (priests); a fire issues forth from G-d to consume the offerings on the Altar and the Divine Presence comes to dwell in the Sanctuary.

Aaron's two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu, offer a "strange fire before G-d, which He commanded them not" and die before G-d. Aaron is silent in face of his tragedy. Moses and Aaron subsequently disagree as to a point of law regarding the offerings, but Moses concedes to Aaron that Aaron is in the right.

G-d commands the kosher laws, identifying the animal species permissible and forbidden for consumption. Land animals may be eaten only if they have split hooves and also chew their cud; fish must have fins and scales; a list of non-kosher birds is given, and a list of kosher insects (four types of locusts).

Also in Shemini are some of the laws of ritual purity, including the purifying power of the mikvah (a pool of water meeting specified qualifications) and the wellspring. Thus the people of Israel are enjoined to "differentiate between the impure and the pure."

Tazria

Leviticus 12:1-13:59

The Parshah of Tazria continues the discussion of the laws of Tumah v'Taharah, ritual impurity and purity.

A woman giving birth should undergo a process of purification, which includes immersing in a mikvah (a naturally gathered pool of water) and bringing offerings to the Holy Temple. All male infants are to be circumcised on the eighth day of life.

Tzaraat ("leprosy") is a supra-natural plague, which also can afflict garments. If white or pink patches appear on a person's skin (dark red or green in garments), a Kohen is summoned. Judging by various signs, such as an increase in size of the afflicted area after a seven-day quarantine, the Kohen pronounces it tameh (impure) or tahor (pure).

A person afflicted with tzaraat must dwell alone outside of the camp (or city) until he is healed. The afflicted area in a garment is removed; if the tzaraat spreads or recurs, the entire garment must be burned.

Metzora

Leviticus 14:1-15:33

Last week's Parshah described the signs of the metzora ("leper") -- a person afflicted by a spiritual malady which places him or her in a state of ritual impurity. This week's Torah reading begins by detailing how the recovered metzora is purified by the Kohen (priest) with a special procedure involving two birds, spring water in an earthen vessel, a piece of cedar wood, a scarlet thread and a bundle of hyssop.

A home can also be afflicted with "leprosy" by the appearance of dark red or green patches on its walls. In a process lasting as long as nineteen days, a Kohen determines if the house can be purified or it must be demolished.

Ritual impurity is also engendered through a seminal or other discharge in a man, and menstruation or other discharge of blood in a woman, necessitating purification through immersion in a mikvah.

Acharei Mot
Leviticus 16:1-18:30

Following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, G-d warns against unauthorized entry "into the holy." Only one person, the Kohen Gadol ("high priest"), may, but once a year, on Yom Kippur, enter the innermost chamber in the Sanctuary to offer the sacred ketoret to G-d.

Another feature of the Day of Atonement service is the casting of lots over two goats to determine which should be offered to G-d and which should be dispatched to carry off the sins of Israel to the wilderness.

The Parshah of Acharei also warns against bringing korbanot (animal or meal offerings) anywhere but in the Holy Temple, forbids the consumption of blood, and details the laws prohibiting incest and other deviant sexual relations.

Kedoshim

Leviticus 19:1-20:27

The Parshah of Kedoshim begins with the statement: "You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy"; this is followed by dozens of mitzvot (Divine commandments) through which the Jew sanctifies him or herself and relates to the holiness of G-d.

These include: the prohibition against idolatry, the mitzvah of charity, the principle of equality before the law, Shabbat, sexual morality, honesty in business, honor and awe of one's parents, the sacredness of life.

Also in Kedoshim is the dictum which the great sage Rabbi Akiva called a cardinal principle of Torah and of which Hillel said, "This is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary" -- Love your fellow as yourself.

Emor

Leviticus 21:1-24:23

The Torah section of Emor ("Speak") begins with the special laws pertaining to the Kohanim ("priests"), the Kohen Gadol ("High Priest"), and the Temple service: A Kohen may not become ritually impure through contact with a dead body, save on the occasion of the death of a close relative. A Kohen may not marry a divorcee or a woman with a promiscuous past; a Kohen Gadol can marry only a virgin. A Kohen with a physical deformity cannot serve in the Holy Temple, nor can a deformed animal be brought as an offering.

A newborn calf, lamb, or kid must be left with its mother for seven days before being eligible for an offering; one may not slaughter an animal and its offspring on the same day.

The second part of Emor lists the annual Callings of Holiness -- the festivals of the Jewish calendar: the weekly Shabbat; the bringing of the Passover offering on 14 Nissan; the seven-day Passover festival beginning on 15 Nissan; the bringing of the Omer offering from the first barley harvest on the 2nd day of Passover, and the commencement, on that day, of the 49-day Counting of the Omer, culminating in the festival of Shavuot on the 50th day; a "remembrance of shofar blowing" on 1 Tishrei; a solemn fast day on 10 Tishrei; the Sukkot festival -- during which we are to dwell in huts for seven days and take the "Four Kinds" - - beginning on 15 Tishrei; and the immediately following holiday of the "8th day" of Sukkot (Shemini Atzeret).

Next the Torah discusses the lighting of the Menorah in the Temple, and the showbread (Lechem Hapanim) placed weekly on the table there.

Emor concludes with the incident of a man executed for blasphemy, and the penalties for murder (death) and for injuring one's fellow or destroying his property (monetary compensation).

Behar

Leviticus 25:1-26:2

On the mountain of Sinai, G-d communicates to Moses the laws of the sabbatical year. Every seventh year, all work on the land should cease, and its produce becomes free for the taking for all, man and beast.

Seven sabbatical cycles are followed by a fiftieth year -- the jubilee year, on which work on the land ceases, all indentured servants are set free, and all ancestral estates in the Holy Land that have been sold revert to their original owners.

Behar also contains additional laws governing the sale of lands, and the prohibitions against fraud and usury.

Bechukotai

Leviticus 26:3-27:34

G-d promises that if the people of Israel will keep His commandments, they will enjoy material prosperity and dwell secure in their homeland. But He also delivers a harsh "rebuke" warning of the exile, persecution and other evils that will befall them if they abandon their covenant with Him.

Nevertheless, "Even when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away; nor will I ever abhor them, to destroy them and to break My covenant with them; for I am the L-rd their G-d."

The Parshah concludes with the rules on how to calculate the value of different types of pledges made to G-d, and the mitzvah of tithing produce and livestock.

Bamidbar

Numbers 1:1 - 4:20

In the Sinai Desert, G-d says to conduct a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses counts 603,550 men of draftable age (20 to 60 years); the tribe of Levi, numbering 22,300 males age one month and older, is counted separately. The Levites are to serve in the Sanctuary, replacing the firstborn, whose number they approximated, who were disqualified when they participated in the worshipping of the Golden Calf. The 273 firstborn who lacked a Levite to replace them had to pay a five-shekel "ransom" to redeem themselves.

When the people broke camp, the three Levite clans dismantled and transported the Sanctuary, and reassembled it at the center of the next encampment. They then erected their own tents around it: the Kehatites, who carried the Sanctuary's vessels (the ark, menorah, etc.) in their specially designed coverings on their shoulders, camped to its south; the Gershonites, in charge of its tapestries and roof coverings, to its west; and the families of Merrari, who transported its wall panels and pillars, to its north. Before the Sanctuary's entranceway to its east were the tents of Moses, Aaron and Aaron's sons.

Beyond the Levite circle, the twelve tribes camped in four groups of three tribes each. To the east were Judah (pop. 74,600), Issachar (54,400) and Zebulun (57,400); to the south, Reuben (46,500), Simeon (59,300) and Gad (45,650); to the west, Ephraim (40,500), Menasseh (32,200) and Benjamin (35,400); and to the north, Dan (62,700), Asher (41,500) and Naphtali (53,400). This formation was kept also while traveling. Each tribe had its own nassi (prince or leader), and its own flag with its tribal color and emblem.

Naso

Numbers 4:21 - 7:89

Completing the head-count of the Children of Israel taken in the Sinai Desert, a total of 8,580 Levite men between the ages of 30 and 50 are counted in a tally of those who will be doing the actual work of transporting the Tabernacle.

G-d communicates to Moses the law of the "Sotah", the wayward wife suspected of unfaithfulness to her husband. Also given is the law of the Nazir who forswears wine, lets his or her hair grow long, and is forbidden to become contaminated through contact with a dead body. Aaron and his descendents the Kohanim are instructed on how to bless the people of Israel.

The leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel each bring their offerings for the inauguration of the altar. Although their gifts are identical, each is brought on a different day and is individually described by the Torah.

Behaalotecha
Numbers 8:1-12:16

Aaron is commanded to raise light in the lamps of the menorah, and the tribe of Levi is initiated into the service in the Sanctuary.

A "Second Passover" is instituted in response to the petition "Why should we be deprived?" by a group of Jews who were unable to bring the Passover offering in its appointed time because they were ritually impure. G-d instructs Moses on the procedures for Israel's journeys and encampments in the desert, and the people journey in formation from Mount Sinai, where they had been camped for nearly a year.

The people are dissatisfied with their "bread from heaven" (the manna) and demand that Moses supply them with meat. Moses appoints 70 elders, to whom he emanates of his spirit, to assist him in the burden of governing the people. Miriam speaks negatively of Moses and is punished with leprosy; Moses prays for her healing and the entire community waits seven days for her recovery.

Shelach

Numbers 13:1-15:41

Moses sends twelve spies to the Land of Canaan. Forty days later they return, carrying a huge cluster of grapes, a pomegranate and a fig, to report on a lush and bountiful land. But ten of the spies warn that the inhabitants of the land are giants and warriors "more powerful than we"; only Caleb and Joshua insist that the land can be conquered, as G-d has commanded.

The people weep that they'd rather return to Egypt. G-d decrees that Israel's entry into the Land shall be delayed forty years, during which time that entire generation will die out in the desert. A group of remorseful Jews storm the mountain on the border of Land and are routed by the Amalekites and Canaanites.

The laws of the menachot (meal, wine and oil offerings) are given, as well as the mitzvah to consecrate a portion of the dough (challah) to G-d when making bread. A man violates the Shabbat by gathering sticks and is put to death. G-d instructs to place fringes (tzitzit) on the four corners of our garments so that we should remember to fulfill the mitzvot (Divine commandments).

Korach
Numbers 16:1-18:32

Korach incites a mutiny challenging Moses' leadership and the granting of the kehunah ("priesthood") to Aaron, accompanied by Moses' erstwhile foes, Dathan and Aviram. Joining them are 250 distinguished members of the community, who offer the sacrosanct ketoret (incense) to prove their worthiness for the priesthood. The earth opens up and swallows the mutineers, and a fire consumes the ketoret-offerers.

A subsequent plague is stopped by Aaron's offering of ketoret. Aaron's staff miraculously blossoms and brings forth almonds to prove that his designation as High Priest is Divinely ordained.

G-d commands that a terumah ("uplifting") from each crop of grain, wine and oil, all firstborn sheep and cattle, and other specified gifts be given to the Kohanim.

Chukat

Numbers 19:1-22:1

Moses is taught the laws of the Red Heifer, whose ashes purify a person who has been contaminated by contact with a dead body.

After 40 years of journeying through the desert, the people of Israel arrive in the wilderness of Zin. Miriam dies and the people thirst for water. G-d tells Moses to speak to a rock and command it to give water. Moses gets angry at the rebellious Israelites and strikes the stone. Water issues forth, but Moses is told by G-d that neither he nor Aaron will enter the Promised Land.

Aaron dies at Har Hahar and is succeeded in the High Priesthood by his son Elazar. Venomous snakes attack the Israelite camp after yet another eruption of discontent in which the people "speak against G-d and Moses"; G-d tells Moses to place a brass serpent upon a high pole, and all who will gaze heavenward will be healed. The people sing a song in honor of the miraculous well that provided the water in the desert.

Moses leads the people in battles against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og (who seek to prevent Israel's passage through their territory) and conquers their lands, which lie east of the Jordan.

Balak
Numbers 22:2-25:9

Balak, the King of Moab, summons the prophet Balaam to curse the people of Israel. On the way, Balaam is berated by his ass, who sees the angel that G-d sends to block their way before Balaam does. Three times, from three different vantage points, Balaam attempts to pronounce his curses; each time, blessings issue instead. Balaam also prophecies on the end of the days and the coming of Moshiach.

The people fall prey to the charms of the daughters of Moab and are enticed to worship the idol Peor. When a high-ranking Israelite official publicly takes a Midianite princess into a tent, Pinchas kills them both, stopping the plague raging among the people.

Pinchas

Numbers 25:10-30:1

Aaron's grandson, Pinchas, is rewarded for his act of zealotry in killing the Shimonite prince Zimri and the Midianite princess: G-d grants him a covenant of peace and the priesthood.

A census of the people counts 601,730 men between the ages of 20 and 60. Moses is instructed on how the Land is to be divided by lottery among the tribes and families of Israel. The five daughters of Zelophehad petition Moses that they be granted the portion of the land belonging to their father, who died without sons; G-d accepts their claim and incorporates it into the Torah's laws of inheritance.

Moses empowers Joshua to succeed him and lead the people into the Land of Israel. The Parshah concludes with a detailed list of the daily offerings, and the additional offerings brought on Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh (first of the month), and the festivals of Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret.

Matot
Numbers 30:2-32:42

Moses conveys the laws governing the annulment of vows to the heads of the tribes of Israel.

War is waged against Midian for their role in plotting the moral destruction of Israel, and the Torah gives a detailed account of the war spoils and how they were allocated amongst the people, the warriors, the Levites and the High Priest.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad (later joined by half of the tribe of Menasseh) ask for the lands east of the Jordan as their portion in the Promised Land, these being prime pastureland for their cattle. Moses is initially angered by the request, but subsequently agrees on the condition that they first join, and lead, in Israel's conquest of the lands west of the Jordan.

Massei
Numbers 33:1-36:13

The forty-two journeys and encampments of Israel are listed, from the Exodus to their encampment on the plains of Moab across the river from the Land of Canaan.

Also in Massei: The boundaries of the Promised Land are given, and cities of refuge are designated as havens and places of exile for inadvertent murderers. The daughters of Tzelafchad marry within their own tribe of Menasseh, so that the estate which they inherit from their father should not pass to the province of another tribe.

Devarim

Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22

On the 1st of Shevat (37 days before his passing), Moses begins his repetition of the Torah to the assembled Children of Israel, reviewing the events that occurred and the laws that were given in the course of their 40-year journey from Egypt to Sinai to the Promised Land, rebuking the people for their failings and iniquities, and enjoining them to keep the Torah and observe its commandments in the land that G-d is giving them as an eternal heritage, into which they shall cross after his death.

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

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

Va'etchanan
Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

Moses tells the people of Israel how he implored G-d to allow him to enter the land of Israel, but G-d refused, instructing him instead to ascend a mountain and see the Promised Land.

Continuing his "review of the Torah," Moses describes the Exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah, declaring them unprecedented events in human history. "Has there ever occurred this great thing, or has the likes of it ever been heard? Did ever a people hear the voice of G-d speaking out of the midst of the fire... and live? ... You were shown, to know, that the L-rd is G-d... there is none else beside Him."

Moses predicts that, in future generations, the people will turn away from G-d, worship idols, and be exiled from their land and scattered amongst the nations; but from there they will seek G-d, and return to obey His commandments.

Our Parshah also includes a repetition of the Ten Commandments, and the verses of the Shema which declare the fundamentals of the Jewish faith: the unity of G-d ("Hear O Israel: the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is one"); the mitzvot to love G-d, study His Torah, and bind "these words" as tefillin on our arms and heads, and inscribe them in the mezuzot affixed on the doorposts of our homes.

Eikev

Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25

In the Parshah of Eikev ("Because"), Moses continues his closing address to the Children of Israel, promising them that if they will fulfill the commandments (Mitzvot) of the Torah, they will prosper in the Land they are about to conquer and settle in keeping with G-d's promise to their forefathers.

Moses also rebukes them for their failings in their first generation as a people, recalling their worship of the Golden Calf, the rebellion of Korach, the sin of the Spies, their angering of G-d at Taveirah, Massah and Kivrot Hataavah ("The Graves of Lust"); "You have been rebellious against G-d," he says to them, "since the day I knew you." But he also speaks of G-d's forgiveness of their sins, and the Second Tablets which G-d inscribed and gave to them following their repentance.

Their 40 years in the desert, says Moses to the people, during which G-d sustained them with daily manna from heaven, was to teach them "that man does not live on bread alone, but by the utterance of G-d's mouth does man live."

Moses describes the land they are about to enter as "flowing with milk and honey," blessed with the "Seven Kinds" (wheat and barley, grapevines, figs, pomegranates, olive oil and dates), and the place that is the focus of G-d's providence of His world. He commands them to destroy the idols of the land's former masters, and to beware lest they become haughty and begin to believe that "my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth."

A key passage in our Parshah is the second chapter of the Sh'ma, which repeats the fundamental mitzvot enumerated in the Sh'ma's first chapter and describes the rewards of fulfilling G-d's commandments and the adverse results (famine and exile) of their neglect. It is also the source of the precept of prayer and includes a reference to the resurrection of the dead in the Messianic Age.

Re'eh

Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17

"See," says Moses to the people of Israel, "I place before you today a blessing and a curse" -- the blessing that will come when they fulfill G-d's commandments, and the curse if they abandon them. These should be proclaimed on Mount Gerizim and Mount Eibal when the people cross over into the Holy Land.

A Temple should be established in "the place that G-d will choose to make dwell His name there" where the people should bring their sacrifices to Him; it is forbidden to make offerings to G-d in any other place. It is permitted to slaughter animals elsewhere not as a sacrifice but to eat their meat; the blood, however (which in the Temple is poured upon the Altar) may not be eaten.

A false prophet, or one who entices others to worship idols, should be put to death; an idolatrous city must be destroyed. The identifying signs for kosher animals and fishes, and the list of non-kosher birds (first given in Leviticus 11) are repeated.

A tenth of all produce is to be eaten in Jerusalem, or else exchanged for money with which food is purchased and eaten there. On certain years this tithe is given to the poor instead. Firstborn cattle and sheep are to be offered in the Temple and their meat eaten by the Kohen (priest).

The mitzvah of charity obligates a Jew to aid a needy fellow with a gift or loan. On the Sabbatical year (occurring every seventh year) all loans are to be forgiven. All indentured servants are to be set free after six years of service.

Our Parshah concludes with the laws of the three pilgrimage festivals -- Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot -- when all should go to "see and be seen" before G-d in the Holy Temple.

Shoftim

Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

Moses instructs the people of Israel to appoint judges and law-enforcement officers in every city; "Justice, justice shall you pursue," he commands them, and you must administer it without corruption or favoritism. Crimes must be meticulously investigated and evidence thoroughly examined -- a minimum of two credible witnesses is required for conviction and punishment.

In every generation, says Moses, there will be those entrusted with the task of interpreting and applying the laws of the Torah. "According to the law that they will teach you, and the judgement they will instruct you, you shall do; you shall not turn away from the thing that they say to you, to the right nor to the left."

Shoftim also includes the prohibitions against idolatry and sorcery; laws governing the appointment and behavior of a king; and guidelines for the creation of "cities of refuge" for the inadvertent murderer. Also set forth are many of the rules of war: the exemption from battle for one who has just built a home, planted a vineyard, married, or is "afraid and soft-hearted"; the requirement to offer terms of peace before attacking a city; the prohibition against wanton destruction of something of value, exemplified by the law that forbids to cut down a fruit tree when laying siege (in this context the Torah makes the famous statement "For man is a tree of the field").

The Parshah concludes with the law of Eglah Arufah - the special procedure to be followed when a person is killed by an unknown murderer and his body is found in a field - which underscores the responsibility of the community and its leaders not only for what they do but also for what they might have prevented from being done.

Ki Teitzei
Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19

Seventy-four of the Torah's 613 commandments (mitzvot) are in the Parshah of Ki Teitzei. These include the laws of the beautiful captive, the inheritance rights of the first-born, the wayward and rebellious son, burial and dignity of the dead, returning a lost object, sending away the mother bird before taking her young, the duty to erect a safety fence around the roof of one's home, and the various forms of kilayim (forbidden plant and animal hybrids).

Also recounted are the judicial procedures and penalties for adultery, for the rape or seduction of an unmarried girl, and for a husband who falsely accuses his wife of infidelity. The following cannot marry a person of Jewish lineage: a bastard; a male of Moabite or Ammonite descent; a first- or second-generation Edomite or Egyptian.

Our Parshah also includes laws governing the purity of the military camp; the prohibition against turning in an escaped slave; the duty to pay a worker on time and to allow anyone working for you - man or animal - to "eat on the job"; the proper treatment of a debtor and the prohibition against charging interest on a loan; the laws of divorce (from which are also derived many of the laws of marriage); the penalty of 39 lashes for transgression of a Torah prohibition; and the procedures for yibbum ("levirate marriage") of the wife of a deceased childless brother or chalitzah ("removing of the shoe") in the case that the brother-in-law does not wish to marry her.

Ki Teitzei concludes with the obligation to remember "what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt."

Ki Tavo

Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8

Moses instructs the people of Israel: When you enter the land that G-d is giving to you as your eternal heritage, and you settle it and cultivate it, bring the first-ripened fruits (bikkurim) of your orchard to the Holy Temple, and declare your gratitude for all that G-d has done for you.

Our Parshah also includes the laws of the tithes given to the Levites and to the poor, and detailed instructions on how to proclaim the blessings and the curses on Mount Grizzim and Mount Ebal -- as discussed in the beginning of the Parshah of Re'ei. Moses reminds the people that they are G-d's chosen people, and that they, in turn, have chosen G-d.

The latter part of Ki Tavo consists of the Tochachah ("Rebuke"). After listing the blessings with which G-d will reward the people when they follow the laws of the Torah, Moses gives a long, harsh account of the bad things -- illness, famine, poverty and exile -- that shall befall them if they abandon G-d's commandments.

Moses concludes by telling the people that only today, forty years after their birth as a people, have they attained "a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear."

Nitzavim

Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20

The Parshah of Nitzavim includes some of the most fundamental principles of the Jewish faith:

The unity of Israel: "You stand today, all of you, before G_d your G_d: your heads, your tribes, your elders, your officers, and every Israelite man; your young ones, your wives, the stranger in your gate; from your wood hewer to your water drawer."

The future redemption: Moses warns of the exile and desolation of the Land that will result if Israel abandons G_d's laws, but then he prophesies that, in the end, "You will return to G_d your G_d... If your outcasts shall be at the ends of the heavens, from there will G_d your G_d gather you... and bring you into the Land which your fathers have possessed."

The practicality of Torah: "For the Mitzvah which I command you this day, it is not beyond you nor is it remote from you. It is not in heaven... It is not across the sea.... Rather, it is very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, that you may do it."

Freedom of choice: "I have set before you life and goodness, and death and evil; in that I command you this day to love G_d, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments... Life and death I have set before you, blessing and curse. And you shall choose life."

Vayelech
Deuteronomy 31:1-30

The Parshah of Vayelech ("And He Went") recounts the events on Moses' last day of earthly life. "I am one hundred and twenty years old today," he says to the people, "and I can no longer go forth and come in." He transfers the leadership to Joshua, and writes (or concludes writing) the Torah in a scroll which he entrusts to the Levites for safekeeping in the Ark of the Covenant.

The mitzvah of Hak'hel ("Gather") is given: every seven years, during the festival of Sukkot of the first year of the shemittah cycle, the entire people of Israel -- men, women and children -- should gather at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, where the king should read to them from the Torah.

Vayelech concludes with the prediction that the people of Israel will turn away from their covenant with G-d causing Him to hide His face from them, but also with the promise that the words of the Torah "shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their descendants."

Haazinu
Deuteronomy 32:1-52

The greater part of the Torah reading of Haazinu ("Listen In") consists of a 70-line "song" delivered by Moses to the people of Israel on the last day of his earthly life.

Calling heaven and earth as witnesses, Moses exhorts the people to "Remember the days of old / Consider the years of many generations / Ask your father, and he will recount it to you / Your elders, and they will tell you" how G-d "found them in a desert land," made them a people, chose them as His own, and bequeathed them a bountiful land. The Song also warns against the pitfalls of plenty -- "Yeshurun grew fat and kicked / You have grown fat, thick and rotund / He forsook G-d who made him / And spurned the Rock of his salvation" -- and the terrible calamities that would result, which Moses describes as G-d "hiding His face." Yet in the end, he promises, G-d will avenge the blood of His servants and be reconciled with His people and land.

The Parshah concludes with G-d's instruction to Moses to ascend the summit of Mount Nebo, from which he will behold the Promised Land before dying on the mountain. "For you shall see the land opposite you; but you shall not go there, into the land which I give to the children of Israel."

V'Zot HaBerachah (Deut. 33:1-34:12)
and the Sukkot Torah readings

The Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret Torah readings are from Leviticus 22-23, Numbers 29, and Deuteronomy 14-16. These readings detail the laws of the moadim or "appointed times" on the Jewish calendar for festive celebration of our bond with G-d; including the mitzvot of dwelling in the sukkah (branch-covered hut) and taking the "Four Kinds" on the festival of Sukkot; the offerings brought in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem on Sukkot, and the obligation to journey to the Holy Temple to "to see and be seen before the face of G-d" on the three annual pilgrimage festivals -- Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot.

On Simchat Torah ("Rejoicing of the Torah") we conclude, and begin anew, the annual Torah-reading cycle. First we read the Torah section of Vezot Haberachah, which recounts the blessings that Moses gave to each of the twelve tribes of Israel before his death. Echoing Jacob's blessings to his twelve sons five generations earlier, Moses assigns and empowers each tribe with its individual role within the community of Israel.

Vezot Haberachah then relates how Moses ascended Mount Nebo from whose summit he saw the Promised Land. "And Moses the servant of G-d died there in the Land of Moab by the mouth of G-d... and no man knows his burial place to this day." The Torah concludes by attesting that "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom G-d knew face to face... and in all the mighty hand and the great awesome things which Moses did before the eyes of all Israel."

Immediately after concluding the Torah, we begin it anew by reading the first chapter of Genesis (the beginning of next Shabbat's Torah reading) describing G-d's creation of the world in six days and His ceasing work on the seventh-- which He sanctified and blessed as a day of rest.

Rosh Hashanah Torah Readings
Genesis 21:1-34; Genesis 22:1-24

Day 1:

G-d remembers Sarah and gives her and Abraham a son, who is named Isaac (Yitzchak) meaning "will laugh"; Abraham is 100 years old, and Sarah 90. Isaac is circumcised at the age of eight days.

Hagar and Ishmael are banished from Abraham's home and wander in the desert; G-d hears the cry of the dying lad and saves his life by showing his mother a well. The Philistine king Avimelech makes a treaty with Abraham at Be'er Sheva.

Day 2:

G-d commands Abraham to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah (the Temple Mount) in Jerusalem. Isaac is bound and placed on the altar, and Abraham raises the knife to slaughter his son. A voice from heaven calls to stop him, saying it was a test; a ram, caught in the undergrowth by its horns, is offered in Isaac's place.

Yom Kippur Torah Readings
Leviticus 16:1-34; 18:1-30

The Torah reading for Yom Kippur morning describes the service performed on this day by the Kohen Gadol (high priest) in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

A special feature of the Yom Kippur service was the casting of lots over two he-goats -- equal in age, size and appearance -- to determine which shall be offered to G-d in the Holy Temple, and which shall be dispatched to carry off the sins of Israel to the wilderness.

The climax of the service was when the Kohen Gadol entered the innermost chamber in the Temple, the "Holy of Holies." Wearing special garments of pure white linen, the Kohen Gadol would enter the sacred place with a pan of burning coals in his right hand, and a ladle containing an exact handful of ketoret in his left. Inside the Holy of Holies, he would place the ketoret over the coals, wait for the room to fill with its aromatic smoke, and hastily retreat from the holy place.

"This shall be an everlasting statute for you," the Torah reading concludes. "...For on this day He will forgive you, to purify you, that you be cleansed from all your sins before G-d... once a year."

During the afternoon Minchah service, we read chapter 18 of Leviticus, which details the prohibitions against incest and other deviant sexual behaviors. The Torah reading is followed by a haftarah (reading from the Prophets) which tells the story of Jonah -- the prophet who was sent to prophesy the destruction of the sinful city of Ninveh, ran away from G-d, was swallowed by a fish, and learned the power of prayer and repentance to evoke G-d's mercy and annul the harshest decrees.

First Days of Sukkot Torah Readings
Leviticus 22:26-23:44 Numbers 29:12-16

The reading begins with an injunction that a newborn calf, lamb, or kid must be left with its mother for seven days; one may not slaughter an animal and its offspring on the same day.

The reading then lists the annual Callings of Holiness -- the festivals of the Jewish calendar: the weekly Shabbat; the bringing of the Passover offering on 14 Nissan; the seven-day Passover festival beginning on 15 Nissan; the bringing of the Omer offering from the first barley harvest on the 2nd day of Passover, and the commencement, on that day, of the 49-day Counting of the Omer, culminating in the festival of Shavuot on the 50th day; a "remembrance of shofar blowing" on 1 Tishrei; a solemn fast day on 10 Tishrei; the Sukkot festival -- during which we are to dwell in huts for seven days and take the "Four Kinds" -- beginning on 15 Tishrei; and the immediately following holiday of the "8th day" of Sukkot (Shemini Atzeret).

G-d declares the fifteenth day (and the subsequent 6 days) of the seventh month to be a holy convocation, no work shall be done during that time. The reading then describes the Sukkot offerings which were brought in the Holy Temple.

Chanukah
Numbers 7:1-8:4

On Chanukah we celebrate the re-dedication of the Temple by the victorious Maccabee forces, a Temple that had been defiled by the Greeks. In fact the Hebrew word "Chanukah" means dedication.

In a similar vein, the Chanukah Torah reading discusses the dedication of the desert Tabernacle.

The leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel each bring their offerings for the inauguration of the Tabernacle and the altar.

Collectively, they present Moses with six covered wagons and twelve oxen to assist in the transportation of the Tabernacle. G-d instructs Moses to accept the gift.

The leaders of the tribes also bring individual gifts. Although their gifts are identical, each is brought on a different day and is individually described by the Torah.

The gift consisted of: one silver tray and one silver basin both filled with a meal-offering, one golden incense-filled spoon, and an assortment of sacrificial bulls, rams, lambs, and goats.

The sum total of the gifts is given, and the procedure for G-d's communication with Moses in the Tabernacle is described.

Aaron is commanded to raise light in the lamps of the menorah, whose stem and seven branches was hewn from a single block of pure gold.

(This Torah reading is divided, and completed in the course of the eight days of Chanukah.)

Shekalim
Exodus 30:11-16

This week's Torah reading also includes Parshat Shekalim (Exodus 30:11-16), which speaks of the half-shekel each Jew contributed to the Sanctuary.

Zachor [Shabbat before Purim]
Deuteronomy 25:17-19

This being the Shabbat before Purim, on which we celebrate the foiling of Haman the Amalekite's plot to destroy the Jewish people, the weekly Parshah is supplemented with the Zachor reading (Deuteronomy 25:17-19) in which we are commanded to remember the evil of Amalek and to eradicate it from the face of the earth:

Remember what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt. That he encountered you on the way and cut off those lagging to your rear, when you were tired and exhausted; he did not fear G-d. And it shall come to pass, when the L-rd your G-d has given you rest from all your enemies round about, in the land which the L-rd your G-d is giving you for an inheritance to possess it, that you shall obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget.

Purim
Exodus 17:8-16

On Purim we celebrate our deliverance from the death decree issued by the Persian prime minister Haman, who was of Amalekite ancestry.

The brief Purim morning Torah reading recounts the original battle between Amalek and the Israelites, waged in the Sinai Desert nearly a millennium before the Purim events.

The Israelites arrive in Rephidim, and are attacked by the Amalekites. Moses charges Joshua to raise an army. On the following day, Joshua led the Israelites into battle, while Moses, Aaron and Hur went to an adjacent hilltop and prayed.

When Moses' arms were raised in prayer, the Israelites would prevail; when he would lower his hands, Amalek prevailed. Aaron and Hur supported Moses' arms until the Israelites defeated their foe.

G d commanded Moses to inscribe the story of Amalek's unprovoked attack in a book. "I will surely obliterate the memory of Amalek from beneath the heavens," G d said.

Parah [Pessah]
Numbers 19

In preparation for the upcoming festival of Passover, when every Jew had to be in a state of ritual purity, the section of Parah (Numbers 19) is added to the weekly reading this week. Parah relates the laws of the Red Heifer with which a person contaminated by contact with a dead body was purified.

Hachodesh [Shabbat that falls on or before the 1st of Nissan]
Exodus 12:1-20

This being the Shabbat that falls on or before the 1st of Nissan, we also read the section of Hachodesh (Exodus 12:1-20) which relates G-d's words to Moses in Egypt two weeks before the Exodus, instructing us to set the Jewish calendar by the monthly new moon and to regard Nissan as the "head of months." G-d also instructs to bring the Passover offering, to eat it with matzah and bitter herbs, and to abstain from leaven for seven days.

Shavuot Torah Readings

Exodus 19:1-20:23; Deuteronomy 14:22--16:17

The Children of Israel camp opposite Mount Sinai, where they are told that G-d has chosen them to be His "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation." The people respond by proclaiming, "All that G-d has spoken, we shall do."

On the sixth day of the third month (Sivan), seven weeks after the Exodus, the entire nation of Israel assembles at the foot of Mount Sinai. G-d descends on the mountain amidst thunder, lightening, billows of smoke and the blast of the shofar, and summons Moses to ascend.

G-d proclaims the Ten Commandments, commanding the people of Israel to believe in G-d, not to worship idols or take G-d's name in vain, to honor their parents, keep the Shabbat, and not to murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness or covet another's property. The people cry out to Moses that the revelation is too intense for them to bear, begging him to receive the Torah from G-d and convey it to them.

On the second day of Shavuot we read from Deuteronomy chapters 14-16 which detail the laws of the three pilgrimage festivals -- Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot - - on which all Jews came "to see and be seen before the face of G-d" in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

Vayak'hel-Pekudei & Hachodesh
Exodus 35:1-40:38 & 12:1-20

Moses assembles the people of Israel and reiterates to them the commandment to observe the Shabbat. He then conveys G-d's instructions regarding the making of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). The people donate the required materials in abundance, bringing gold, silver, copper, blue, purple and red-dyed wool, goat hair, spun linen, animal skins, wood, olive oil, herbs and precious stones. Moses has to tell them to stop giving.

A team of wise-hearted artisans make the Mishkan and its furnishings (as detailed in the previous Torah readings of Terumah, Tetzaveh and Ki Tisa): three layers of roof coverings; 48 gold-plated wall panels, and 100 silver foundation sockets; the Parochet (Veil) that separates between the Sanctuary's two chambers and the Masach (Screen) that fronts it; the Ark and its cover with the Cherubim; the Table and its Showbread; the seven-branched Menorah with its specially-prepared oil; and the Golden Altar and the incense burned on it; the Anointing Oil; the outdoor Altar for Burnt Offerings and all its implements; the hangings, posts and foundation sockets for the Courtyard; and the Basin and its pedestal, made out of copper mirrors .

An accounting is made of the gold, silver and copper donated by the people for the making of the Mishkan. Betzalel, Ahaliav and their assistants make the Eight Priestly Garments -- the Efod, Breastplate, Cloak, Crown, Turban, Tunic, Sash and Breeches -- according to the specifications communicated to Moses in the Parshah of Tetzaveh.

The Mishkan is completed and all its components are brought to Moses, who erects it and anoints it with the holy Anointing Oil, and initiates Aaron and his four sons into the priesthood. A cloud appears over the Mishkan, signifying the Divine Presence that has come to dwell within it.

Tazria-Metzora
Leviticus 12:1-15:33

The Parshahs of Tazria and Metzora continue the discussion of the laws of Tumah v'Taharah, ritual impurity and purity.

A woman giving birth should undergo a process of purification, which includes immersing in a mikvah (a naturally gathered pool of water) and bringing offerings to the Holy Temple. All male infants are to be circumcised on the eighth day of life.

Tzaraat ("leprosy") is a supra-natural plague, which can afflict people as well as garments or homes. If white or pink patches appear on a person's skin (dark pink or green in garments or homes), a Kohen is summoned. Judging by various signs, such as an increase in size of the afflicted area after a seven-day quarantine, the Kohen pronounces it tameh (impure) or tahor (pure).

A person afflicted with tzaraat must dwell alone outside of the camp (or city) until he is healed. The afflicted area in a garment or home must be removed; if the tzaraat recurs, the entire garment or home must be destroyed.

When the metzora ("leper") heals, he or she is purified by the Kohen with a special procedure involving two birds, spring water in an earthen vessel, a piece of cedar wood, a scarlet thread and a bundle of hyssop.

Ritual impurity is also engendered through a seminal or other discharge in a man, and menstruation or other discharge of blood in a woman, necessitating purification through immersion in a mikvah.

Acharei Mot-Kedoshim
Leviticus 16:1-20:27

Following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, G-d warns against unauthorized entry "into the holy." Only one person, the Kohen Gadol ("high priest"), may, but once a year, on Yom Kippur, enter the innermost chamber in the Sanctuary to offer the sacred ketoret to G-d.

Another feature of the Day of Atonement service is the casting of lots over two goats to determine which should be offered to G-d and which should be dispatched to carry off the sins of Israel to the wilderness.

The Parshah of Acharei also warns against bringing korbanot (animal or meal offerings) anywhere but in the Holy Temple, forbids the consumption of blood, and details the laws prohibiting incest and other deviant sexual relations.

The Parshah of Kedoshim begins with the statement: "You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy" followed by dozens of mitzvot (Divine commandments) through which the Jew sanctifies him or herself and relates to the holiness of G-d. These include: the prohibition against idolatry, the mitzvah of charity, the principle of equality before the law, Shabbat, sexual morality, honesty in business, honor and awe of one's parents, the sacredness of life.

Also in Kedoshim is the dictum which the great sage Rabbi Akiva called a cardinal principle of Torah -- Love your fellow as yourself.

Behar-Bechukotai
Leviticus 25:1-27:34

On the mountain of Sinai, G-d communicates to Moses the laws of the sabbatical year: every seventh year, all work on the land should cease, and its produce becomes free for the taking for all, man and beast.

Seven sabbatical cycles are followed by a fiftieth year -- the jubilee year, on which work on the land ceases, all indentured servants are set free, and all ancestral estates in the Holy Land that have been sold revert to their original owners. Additional laws governing the sale of lands and the prohibitions against fraud and usury are also given.

G-d promises that if the people of Israel will keep His commandments, they will enjoy material prosperity and dwell secure in their homeland. But He also delivers a harsh "rebuke" warning of the exile, persecution and other evils that will befall them if they abandon their covenant with Him. Nevertheless, "Even when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away; nor will I ever abhor them, to destroy them and to break My covenant with them; for I am the L-rd their G-d."

The Parshah concludes with the rules on how to calculate the value of different types of pledges made to G-d.

Chukat-Balak
Numbers 19:1-25:9

Moses is taught the laws of the Red Heifer, whose ashes purify a person who has been contaminated by contact with a dead body.

After 40 years of journeying through the desert, the people of Israel arrive in the wilderness of Zin. Miriam dies and the people thirst for water. G-d tells Moses to speak to a rock and command it to give water. Moses gets angry at the rebellious Israelites and strikes the stone. Water issues forth, but Moses is told by G-d that neither he nor Aaron will enter the Promised Land.

Aaron dies at Hor Hahar and is succeeded in the High Priesthood by his son Elazar. Venomous snakes attack the Israelite camp after yet another eruption of discontent in which the people "speak against G-d and Moses"; G-d tells Moses to place a brass serpent upon a high pole, and all who will gaze heavenward will be healed. The people sing a song in honor of the miraculous well that provided the water in the desert. Moses leads the people in battles against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og (who seek to prevent Israel's passage through their territory) and conquers their lands, which lie east of the Jordan.

Balak, the King of Moab, summons the prophet Balaam to curse the people of Israel. On the way, Balaam is berated by his ass, who sees the angel that G-d sends to block their way before Balaam does. Three times, from three different vantage points, Balaam attempts to pronounce his curses; each time, blessings issue instead. Balaam also prophecies on the end of days and the coming of Moshiach.

The people fall prey to the charms of the daughters of Moab and are enticed to worship the idol Peor. When a high-ranking Israelite official publicly takes a Midianite princess into a tent, Pinchas kills them both, stopping the plague raging among the people.

Matot-Massei
Numbers 30:2--36:13

Moses conveys the laws governing the annulment of vows to the heads of the tribes of Israel. War is waged against Midian for their role in plotting the moral destruction of Israel, and the Torah gives a detailed account of the war spoils and how they were allocated amongst the people, the warriors, the Levites and the High Priest.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad (later joined by half of the tribe of Menasseh) ask for the lands east of the Jordan as their portion in the Promised Land, these being prime pastureland for their cattle. Moses is initially angered by the request, but subsequently agrees on the condition that they first join, and lead, in Israel's conquest of the lands west of the Jordan.

The forty-two journeys and encampments of Israel are listed, from the Exodus to their encampment on the plains of Moab across the river from the Land of Canaan. The boundaries of the Promised Land are given, and cities of refuge are designated as havens and places of exile for inadvertent murderers. The daughters of Tzelafchad marry within their own tribe of Menasseh, so that the estate which they inherit from their father should not pass to the province of another tribe.

Nitzavim-Vayelech
Deut. 29:9-31:30

The Parshah of Nitzavim includes some of the most fundamental principles of the Jewish faith:

The unity of Israel: "You stand today, all of you, before the L-rd your G-d: your heads, your tribes, your elders, your officers, and every Israelite man; your young ones, your wives, the stranger in your gate; from your wood hewer to your water drawer."

The future redemption: Moses warns of the exile and desolation of the Land that will result if Israel abandons G-d's laws, but then he prophesies that, in the end, "You will return to the L-rd your G-d... If your outcasts shall be at the ends of the heavens, from there will the L-rd your G-d gather you... and bring you into the Land which your fathers have possessed."

The practicality of Torah: "For the Mitzvah which I command you this day, it is not beyond you nor is it remote from you. It is not in heaven... It is not across the sea.... Rather, it is very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, that you may do it."

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Vayelech concludes with the prediction that the people of Israel will turn away from their covenant with G-d causing Him to hide His face from them, but also with the promise that the words of the Torah "shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their descendants."

Special Readings

Parshah	Torah	Maftir	Haftarah
Rosh Hashanah , Day 1	Gen 21:1-34	Num 29:1-6	I Sam 1:1-2:10
Rosh Hashanah , Day 2	Gen 22:1-24		Jer 31:1-19
Shabbat Shuvah			Hos 14:2-10 Mic 7:18-20
Yom Kippur , Morning	Lev 16:1-34	Num 29:7-11	Is 57:14-58:14
Yom Kippur , Afternoon	Lev 18:1-30		Jonah 1:1-4:11 Micah 7:18-20
Sukkot , Day 1	Lev 22:26-	Num 29:12-16	Zech 14:1-21
Sukkot , Day 2	23:44		I Kings 8:2-21
Sukkot , Chol Ha-mo'ed Day 1	Num 29:17-25		
Sukkot , Chol Ha-mo'ed Day 2	Num 29:20-28		
Sukkot , Chol Ha-mo'ed Day 3	Num 29:23-31		
Sukkot , Chol Ha-mo'ed Day 4	Num 29:26-34		
Sukkot , Intermediate Shabbat	Ex 33:12-34:26		Ezek 38:18-39:16
Hoshanah Rabbah	Num 29:26-34		
Shemini Atzeret	Deut 14:22-16:17	Num 29:35-30:1	I Ki 8:54-9:1
Simchat Torah	Deut 33:1-34:12 Gen 1:1-2:3	Num 29:35-30:1	Josh 1:1-18 (Josh 1:1-9)
Chanukkah , Day 1	Num 7:1-17		
Chanukkah , Day 2	Num 7:18-29		
Chanukkah , Day 3	Num 7:24-35		
Chanukkah , Day 4	Num 7:30-41		
Chanukkah , Day 5	Num 7:36-47		
Chanukkah , Day 6 (Rosh Chodesh)	Num 28:1-15 Num 7:42-47		
Chanukkah , Day 7 (not Rosh Chodesh)	Num 7:48-59		
Chanukkah , Day 7 (Rosh Chodesh)	Num 28:1-15 Num 7:42-47		
Chanukkah , Day 8	Num 7:54-8:4		
Chanukkah , First Shabbat		Day 6: Num 28:9-15	Zech 2:14-4:7

Chanukkah , Second Shabbat		Num 7:54-8:4	I Ki 7:40-50
Sheqalim		Ex 30:11-16	II Ki 11:17-12:17 (II Ki 12:1-17)
Zakhor	Deut 25:17-19		I Sam 15:1-34
Purim	Ex 17:8-16		
Parah		Num 19:1-22	Ezek 36:16-38 (Ezek 36:16-36)
Ha-Chodesh		Ex 12:1-20	Ezek 45:16-46:18 (Ezek 45:18-46:18)
Shabbat Ha-Gadol			Mal 3:4-24
Pesach (Passover) , Day 1	Ex12:21-51	Num 28:16-25	Josh3:5-7; 5:2-6:1; 6:27 (Josh 5:2-6:1)
Pesach (Passover) , Day 2	Lev 22:26-23:44		II Ki 23:1-9; 21-25
Pesach (Passover) , Chol Ha-mo'ed Day 1	Ex 13:1-16; Num 28:19-25		
Pesach (Passover) , Chol Ha-mo'ed Day 2	Ex 22:24-23:19; Num 28:19-25		
Pesach (Passover) , Chol Ha-mo'ed Day 3	Ex 34:1-26; Num 28:19-25		
Pesach (Passover) , Chol Ha-mo'ed Day 4	Ex 9:1-14; Num 28:19-25		
Pesach (Passover) Intermediate Shabbat	Ex 33:12-34:26	Num 28:19-25	Ezek 37:1-37:14 (Ezek 36:37-37:14)
Pesach (Passover) , Day 7	Ex 13:17-15:26		II Sam 22:1-51
Pesach (Passover) , Day 8 (weekday)	Deut 15:19-16:17		Is 10:32-12:6
Pesach (Passover) , Day 8 (Shabbat)	Deut 14:22-16:17		
Shavu'ot , Day 1	Ex19:1-20:23	Num 28:26-31	Ezek 1:1-28; 3:12
Shavu'ot , Day 2 (weekday)	Deut 15:19-16:17		Hab 2:20-3:19
Shavu'ot , Day 2 (Shabbat)	Deut 14:22-16:17		
Tisha B'Av , Morning	Deut 4:25-40		Jer 8:13-9:23
Tisha B'Av , Afternoon	Ex 32:11-14, 34:1-10		Isaiah 55:6-56:8 (Hosea 14:2-10;

			Micah 7:18-20)
Minor Fasts , Morning	Ex 32:11-14; 34:1-10		Is 55:6-56:8 (none)
Minor Fasts , Afternoon	Ex 32:11-14; 34:1-10		
Shabbat Mevarekhim (Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh)			I Sam 20:18-42
Rosh Chodesh (weekday)	Num 28:1-15		
Rosh Chodesh (Shabbat)		Num 28:9-15	Is 66:1-24