

February 25, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Deuteronomy 2:24-37.

1. Explain the correlation between God giving King Sihon into the Israelites' hands and yet they had to fight for it?
2. In what ways does God do for us and yet requires us to do for ourselves?
3. Do you know anyone who has dread or fear toward you because God causes it?
4. How do we explain the mass slaughter of all men, women and children when God delivered Sihon to His people?
5. Why did Moses make an offer to Sihon when God had just told him that He was going to defeat Sihon?
6. Do you know anyone whose heart is or was hardened by God and what does that look like?

THE LORD HAS GIVEN Deuteronomy 2:24-37

The story of God growing Jacob's people into a nation while they were in Egypt, His delivering His people from bondage under the Egyptians, providing for them for forty years of wandering, and bringing them into the very land He had promised He would give

Abraham's seed nearly 600 years earlier is more than an intriguing story.

To some extent, the "why" behind God's amazing works with ancient Israel is hidden in the "secret things" of God. But at the same time, God's work with His people in the past is a startlingly accurate picture of His work with His people still. There are so many similarities between the actual physical heartaches and battles those people experienced and the spiritual battles we face. They looked across the battlefields at real enemies they had to defeat in order to receive God's promise. Nearly every moment of every day we look spiritual enemies in the eye knowing we must do battle with them.

In my opinion, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is still the standard-setter for picturing the spiritual battles we must fight as we are on the way to the celestial city, the ultimate "Promised Land." If you do not find yourself in real spiritual battle virtually every day, you might want to assess which road you are traveling through life. The Bible makes it very clear that we must put on the spiritual armor every day because we are doing battle against the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). Theologians in the past distilled that reality down to the battle with "the world, the flesh, and the devil." The battle is real.

The good news is that the LORD promises to give us victory. We must know the enemy, be certain of the battle, but go at it knowing that the Lord has already determined that we should win. We have Jesus' promise: "*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33). The Holy Spirit has promised that God has already given the victory. *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith* (1John 5:4). Do we believe that the victory is ours and that finally we will reach heaven because God has already given it to us?

God's Plan (vv.24-31).

God's instruction to Moses and the people revealed that it was time to start possessing the promise. "*Rise up, set out on your journey*

and go over the Valley of the Arnon. Behold, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land. Begin to take possession, and contend with him in battle” (v.24).

We see in this verse that God instructed the people to pass over the Valley of the Arnon. In our last study we left Moses and the people at the city of Ar in the northern area of Moab’s land (Deut. 2:18). Now we can zoom in on the map as it were to see that it is time for the people to cross over the valley formed by the Arnon River. According to God’s plan, the people would have to face Sihon, the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon.

It is important for us to recall from our previous study that God did not give to Israel the land He had previously given to Esau’s people, or to Moab’s people, or to Ammon’s people. However, God did intend for Israel to possess the land of Sihon the Ammorite. This land would be given to the tribe of Reuben. Also, some of the land would be in the boundaries of Gad.

But to possess the gift God gave, Israel would need to *“begin to take possession, and contend with him in battle” (v.24)*. Sounds like a real scrum was shaping up. That had to be the case according to the way God would set the stage. He told Moses, *“This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you on the peoples who are under the whole heaven, who shall hear the report of you and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you” (v.25)*. By sending the people to do battle with Sihon, and defeating him, and giving his land to Israel, God would create an environment of dread throughout the whole region. Though they did not have the internet, television, or social media, word traveled. If people in that day were anything like people in our day, the news about Israel defeating the mighty king Sihon and taking all the property and possessions would be expanded. Though it was already a big deal, it probably was communicated as a bigger deal.

But, in light of God’s plan, notice how Moses began the conflict with Sihon. He made the pagan king a very gracious offer after he made the request for Sihon to allow the nation to pass through untouched. *So I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon the king of Heshbon, with words of peace, saying, “Let me pass through your land. I will go only by the road; I will turn aside neither to the right nor to the left” (vv.26-27).*

We see from the text that Moses sent the messengers from Kedemoth, a city located fairly well within the boundaries of Sihon’s city. Moses did not send a declaration of war. He sent words of peace. He promised to stay on the road and pass through. Moses also promised to pay for food and water. *You shall sell me food for money, that I may eat, and give me water for money, that I may drink. Only let me pass through on foot (v.28)*. Surely a couple million people would eat a lot of food and drink a lot of water along the way. Moses promised that they would pay for it. It’s quite doubtful they would use cash or credit cards. Rather, they would have paid in gold, silver, and jewels they had taken from the Egyptians.

This was nothing new, but rather a reference to past practice. Moses reminded Sihon *“As the sons of Esau who live in Seir and the Moabites who live in Ar did for me, until I go over the Jordan into the land that the LORD our God is giving to us” (v.29)*. Again, it was not a novel offer. Moses had made the same offer to the people of Esau and they obliged the Israelites.

But Moses’s offer begs a question. Why bother to make an offer at all? God already promised that He was going to give Sihon’s land and possessions to Israel. God had already promised that there was going to be a battle. God had already promised the outcome of the battle. I probably would have marched my massive army up to Heshbon and simply declared that Sihon and all his people were as good as dead because God said so. But Moses gave Sihon the opportunity to reject a viable offer in order to put the onus on the man who rejected God.

That Sihon rejected God is obvious from his response. Sihon responded negatively because his heart was hardened. *But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as he is this day (v.30)*. Notice the responsibility is laid squarely on Sihon for refusing to let Israel pass through. However, at the same time, Sihon could not respond any other way because God hardened his heart. Sihon had to be obstinate because God was going to defeat him in battle and give his land to the Israelites.

This is a good picture of God’s ongoing work to bring about His will. It is the same picture God drew of Him hardening Pharaoh’s

heart. *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. (Romans 9:17-18).* The Scripture teaches that every person is born as a rebel against God. God responds to that rebellion by showing common grace to all by allowing us to live. But then God shows special mercy on some. Those who do not receive mercy God can choose as instruments of His work unto destruction. The principle in life is that *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will (Proverbs 21:1).* We need to be careful not to get frustrated with obstinate people because it is possible God is working His will in them.

Sihon's hard-hearted reply was evidence of God's work. *And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to take possession, that you may occupy his land" (v.31).* When Sihon rejected Moses's offer, Moses should have been encouraged. It was simply evidence that God was doing exactly what He promised to do. Moses had already been down that road with Pharaoh and knew from experience that things don't turn out well for those whose hearts are made obstinate.

God's Plan Completed (vv.32-37).

The adversary came out to do battle. He came with the intent to destroy. *Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Jahaz (v.32).* The city of Jahaz was about five miles south of Heshbon, the "capital" city of Sihon's kingdom. The reference to *all his people* would have been to Sihon's army. Maybe this was just another battle to him and his people. Or maybe the army went out to do battle being in great fear and dread, but knowing they had to defend their homes and families.

The LORD proved faithful to His word. *And the LORD our God gave him over to us (v.33a).* It was all the LORD's work. It turned out exactly the way the LORD had promised. This was a first step of obedience in which God was showing the people that they could trust Him to do what He said.

And because God kept His word, "we" destroyed them. First consider the gory details of the battle. *33b And we defeated him and his sons and all his people. 34 And we captured all his cities at that time and devoted to destruction every city, men, women, and children. We left no survivors. 35 Only the livestock we took as spoil for ourselves, with the plunder of the cities that we captured (vv.33b-35).*

In this account, let's once again count the use of the plural personal pronoun "we" in these few verses. It is stated 5 times directly. It is implied in verse thirty-four where we read *"And [we] devoted to destruction."* There are also the personal pronouns *ourselves* (v.35) and *us* (v.36). Sounds like the Israelite army was pretty good.

As a result, "we" took the whole kingdom from Sihon. *From Aroer, which is on the edge of the Valley of the Arnon, and from the city that is in the valley (v.36a). As far as Gilead, there was not a city too high for us (v.36b).* That is quite a statement in light of the fact that the argument thirty-eight years earlier was that they could not enter the Promised Land because *"the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there" (Numbers 13:28).*

Wow! You guys were great! What a mighty army! But why the mass, mindless destruction? Why did they kill every man, woman and child? God's plan was to eradicate every vestige of sin and wickedness that replaced Him with imaginary gods. This is a good picture of what God will do in the end of the age when He wipes out the entire universe and creates a new one. Peter taught us that *[We are] waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:12-13).*

So why were "we" so successful? *The LORD our God gave all into our hands (v.36b).* This was a doing of God's will. As is generally the case, He used people. It is the responsibility of the people to seek God, to know Him, understand God's will, and yield self to God. If we do that, we like the ancient Israelites, will be content with what God gave. *Only to the land of the sons of Ammon you did not draw near, that is, to all the banks of the river Jabbok*

and the cities of the hill country, whatever the LORD our God had forbidden us (v.37). They stopped at the Jabbok River. Why? God would not give them Ammon's land at this time. It is a reminder that obedience to the Lord is, 1) Doing all He tells us to do; 2) Refraining from doing what He forbids.

Lessons Learned.

God has promised the "Celestial City" to His people. This wonderful promise that we hold dear is very much like the land God promised to Abraham's physical seed. The whole story from Genesis chapter forty-six to where we are studying in Deuteronomy is about God fulfilling His promise to Abraham. Around the year 2090 BC, God promised to create a nation out of Abraham and give to that nation all the land on which Abraham was walking. In the year 1875 BC, Jacob moved to Goshen in Egypt with 70 people. God took 400 years to create the nation. In 1445 BC, God called Moses to lead His people out of Egypt to the land He promised to give them. Now here the people were forty years later finally learning how God was going to deliver the Promised Land to them.

In the same way, God promised to give us an amazing city. Read the brief description in Revelation 21.

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But as for the

cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." 9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed-- 13 on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15 And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. 16 The city lies foursquare; its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. 17 He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. 18 The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. 22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates will never be shut by day--and there will be no night there. 26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:1-27)

The big question we might have is whether God is keeping His word. And even though God is keeping His promise, how are we pursuing it? Are we just cruising along to that city like a pleasant stroll through a rose garden down by the duck pond? What did Jesus mean when He said, *“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12)*. Jesus taught that our inheriting the beautiful city is a serious war against sin. That is why Jesus also promised as we already saw, *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33)*.

Therefore, we can be sure, that just like Israel had to fight battles with kings like Sihon, along the road to the Celestial City there are battles for us. Overall we battle because of sin and sinners. In that realm we wrestle against sin in our own lives. We constantly face temptations that appeal to our baser instincts, to our pride, to our desires to have what God forbids. This is not just a daily battle, but sometimes an hour-by-hour battle.

We also wrestle against the sin of others. It is quite easy for us to become envious of those who seem to enjoy “freedom.” But God teaches us not to envy them because they are actually slaves. And there are times when the sins of others impact us directly. It is a real battle when we have to deal with lying at work, or divorce, or rebellious children, or neighbors who are intent on doing evil to us.

Or at other times, the sins of a culture can seem overwhelming. Everywhere we look humanity is exalted and God is rejected and mocked. It becomes increasingly more difficult to rear our children to “fear God and keep His commands” which is our whole duty (Ecc. 12:13).

Sometimes our battles along the road to the city are the result of fear. Yes, there are times we fear the battle itself. We want to become unknown, unseen. We do tend to fear what man can do to us. At such times we need to respond like the warrior Stonewall Jackson who said “I never take counsel of my fears.” That quote is also attributed to unbelievers like George Patton, Douglas MacArthur, and Norman Schwartzkopf all who followed Jackson and probably borrowed it from him.

But I am thinking more about the fear we instill in others. God still works through His people to cause fear in the sinners in their

circles of influence. Often the reason a person is vicious toward you is because they fear the confidence you have in God. Because God has written His law on every conscience (Romans 2:15), everyone knows in their heart that God is their Creator, His law is their judge, and they are guilty. When you live according to God’s law and precepts, it is a constant reminder to the sinners’ consciences that God is true to His word—and that scares them. The result is often a battle.

Sometimes our battles are the result of God hardening hearts for His own purposes. How could the religious leaders of Israel deliver Jesus Christ to crucifixion? How could Pilate not release Jesus when he knew what was going on? How could Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot kill millions of innocent people? How can an abortionist end the life of real humans over and over? Only a hard, calloused heart can explain such extreme sin. And it is possible, yea likely, that you will have some kind of relationship with someone whose heart God has hardened against Himself. When people hate God, they will hate God’s people.

Regardless of the source of the battle or the character of the battle, God’s plan is for us to have victory. God intends for His people to be overcomers. John wrote, *Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4)*. Christians will overcome evil in the battle because God also intends for His people to persevere. He promises to give us grace to that end.

But because ours is a spiritual battle it sometimes looks like we are losing. Nero was sure he defeated Paul and Peter. The Pharisees were sure they defeated Jesus. And multitudes of the enemy are quite sure they are winning the war against God and His people. But what is the promise of God’s Word? Paul reminded us, *Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering – since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting*

vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed (2 Thessalonians 1:4-10).

The promise of eternal life in heaven with our Lord and Savior is certain. The promise that we will battle all the way is also certain. The promise that we will win is just as certain. Don't be surprised when Sihon shows up in some form. Go at the battle with the confidence of God's promise that He has already given the victory.