

# The Great Victories Over Sihon and Og (Numbers 21:10-35)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Numbers

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## I. Introduction

- a. The Israelite nation is wandering in the Wilderness. Due to the rebellion of the people when the 12 spies were sent out to explore Canaan for 40 days, the nation was sentenced to 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness.
- b. In recent lessons, we learned that:
  - i. Moses struck the rock (instead of just speaking to it). As a result, he and Aaron were not allowed to enter the Promised Land.
  - ii. Aaron, the brother of Moses and high priest, died on Mount Hor.
  - iii. The people “tested the Lord” and as a result were bitten by poisonous snakes. The cure involved Moses lifting up a bronze serpent in the Wilderness. The Israelites bitten by serpents could look to that and live.
    1. In **John 3**, Jesus pointed to that event as a picture of how He would have to be “raised up” similarly, in order for people to be saved.
- c. We are now in the last year or two of the 40 years (or 42 in the LXX; compare **Joshua 5:5-6**) that the Israelites would spend in the desert before entering the Promised Land.
- d. The Israelites encounter four nations as they pass northward in their journey through the Wilderness toward Canaan, the Promised Land. Those four nations of people are:
  - i. the Edomites, a nation descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob/Israel, who are first encountered in **Numbers 20** (we discussed the Edomites in the prior message); and
  - ii. the Moabites, Ammonites, and Amorites, who are encountered in **Numbers 21** (which we will discuss in the current lesson).
    1. A simple mnemonic to distinguish between the Ammonites and the Amorites (whose names sound almost identical): the Amorites, who have the ‘R’ in their name, were *ROTTEN to the core*.

## II. Introduction to the Moabites and Ammonites

- a. Read **Numbers 21:10-13**.
  - i. The Israelites move northward past the Edomites and now encounter another nation: the Moabites.
- b. Read from the parallel account as retold in **Deuteronomy**.
  - i. Read **Deuteronomy 2:1-5**.
    1. The Lord tells the Israelites not to fight against the Edomites, since the Lord had given the Edomites their land as an inheritance.
  - ii. Read **Deuteronomy 2:8-9**.
    1. Similarly, they were not to take land from the Moabites, who had been given their own inheritance of land from the Lord.
  - iii. Read **Deuteronomy 2:16-19**.
    1. Also, the Israelites were to pass by the Ammonites, who were descended from Lot. The Ammonites also had been given an inheritance of territory from the Lord.
- c. Location of the nations.
  - i. Traveling from the south to the north, the Israelites would have encountered these three nations in the following order:
    1. First, the Edomites, who lived south of the Dead Sea.
    2. Second, the Moabites, who lived east of the Dead Sea (and between the Edomites and the Ammonites).
    3. Third, the Ammonites, who live northeast of the Dead Sea
- d. The Moabites and Ammonites were related to the Israelites through the family of Abraham.
  - i. Read **Genesis 19:30-38**.
    1. Recall that Lot was the nephew of Abraham (**Genesis 12:5**).
    2. Lot had just fled Sodom with his wife and two daughters. His wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt (based on which Jesus would later issue a cryptic warning, "Remember Lot's wife" (**Luke 17:32**)). Therefore, the only survivors from Sodom were Lot and his two daughters.

3. After their escape from Sodom, Lot's daughters conspired to get him drunk, to have relations with him, and thereby preserve their lineage. The two sons that resulted were:
  - a. Moab, the father of the Moabites; and
  - b. Ammon (or Ben-Ammi), father of the Ammonites.

### III. Defeating Two Amorite Kings, Sihon and Og

- a. The Amorite kings Sihon and Og had territories east of the Jordan River, kind of between and bordering the Moabites and Ammonites.
  - i. The Israelites, moving south to north, encountered Sihon's territory (which was to the south) first, and Og's territory (which was to the north) after that.
- b. Read **Numbers 21:21-26 and 21:31-35**.
  - i. Unlike the Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites, these Amorite kings decided to attack the Israelites.
  - ii. The Israelites defeated these kings, killed all their people, and took over their land.
- c. **Question:** Isn't this a genocidal war? How can we condone this? Why did the Lord insist that these people be wiped out? Why would the Lord do such a thing? (Stories like this lead many to struggle with the nature and character of God as seen in the Old Testament.)
  - i. Read **Genesis 15:5-21**.
    1. The Lord promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land (of Canaan) after 400 years of suffering, during which time they would serve another nation.
    2. The Lord said it would take that long, since "*the sin of the Amorites is not yet filled up*".
      - a. This sounds like the Lord knew that the Amorite nation was going to sink into extreme depravity in the future.
  - ii. Regarding the specific sins of the people who lived in Canaan.
    1. Read **Wisdom of Solomon 12:1-11**.
      - a. The people of the land of Canaan were involved in extreme moral depravity (including child sacrifice, cannibalism, sorcery, occult and orgies).

- b. Even these people the Lord wanted to give an opportunity to repent. However, the Lord does bring judgment in the end.
- iii. Recall that elsewhere in the Scriptures, the Lord had obliterated (or threatened to obliterate) people who became extremely wicked and depraved. Examples include:
  - 1. First time: during the flood of Noah (**Genesis 6-8**).
  - 2. Second time: Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 18-19**).
  - 3. Another time: Nineveh (**Jonah 1-3**).
    - a. However, even though the Ninevites were wicked, they repented, and the Lord spared them.
    - b. Read **Ezekiel 33:10-11** and **33:14-20**.
      - i. The Lord does not want to destroy anyone.
      - ii. He wants even the most wicked to repent and live.
      - iii. Even when he pronounces judgment, if that person repents, the Lord will relent.
      - iv. The Lord is much more merciful and willing to forgive than people are!
        - 1. Let this serve as a challenge to us, to desire that all who have sinned against us should repent and be forgiven.
- d. More details regarding the battles against the kingdoms of Sihon and Og are provided in the retelling of the story, in the book of **Deuteronomy**.
  - i. Read **Deuteronomy 1:3-5**.
    - 1. The book of **Deuteronomy** starts with an address given shortly after the defeat of Sihon and Og.
  - ii. Read **Deuteronomy 2:24-25**.
    - 1. This defeat of the two kings was a turning point in Israel's history.
    - 2. After these victories, the other nations fear the Israelites.

- a. People of Jericho become terrified of Israelites, as Rahab explained to the two spies (**Joshua 2:9-11**).
  - b. The Gibeonites also fear the Israelites, so much so that they deceived the Jews into making a peace treaty with them (**Joshua 9:15-16**).
- iii. Read **Deuteronomy 2:26-37**.
1. In the parallel account in **Deuteronomy**, we find significant additional details regarding the victories over kings Sihon and Og.
  2. Regarding the Lord hardening the heart (or spirit) of Sihon.
    - a. Similar to the story of Pharaoh, where in **Exodus** (in several places) it says the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart as well as Pharaoh hardening his own heart.
      - i. See, for example: **Exodus 7:3, 8:32, 9:12, 9:34-35 and 10:20**,
    - b. Throughout Scripture, it speaks both of the Lord hardening people's hearts, and people hardening their own hearts.
      - i. "Do not *harden your hearts* as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness...." (**Hebrews 3:8**, NKJV; quoting from **Psalms 95:8**)
    - c. Early Christian explanation was that God hardens (or softens) the hearts of men, similar to how the heat of the sun will harden clay but soften wax or butter.
      - i. From Origen, writing c. 225 AD:
        1. "But, to establish the point more clearly, it will not be superfluous to employ another illustration, as if, e.g., one were to say that it is the sun which hardens and liquefies, although liquefying and hardening are things of an opposite nature.
        2. "Now it is not incorrect to say that the sun, by one and the same power of its heat, melts wax indeed, but dries up and hardens mud: not that its power operates one way upon mud, and in another way

upon wax; but that the qualities of mud and wax are different, although according to nature they are one thing, both being from the earth. In this way, then, one and the same working upon the part of God, which was administered by Moses in signs and wonders, made manifest the hardness of Pharaoh, which he had conceived in the intensity of his wickedness, but exhibited the obedience of those other Egyptians who were intermingled with the Israelites, and who are recorded to have quitted Egypt at the same time with the Hebrews.”

a. (Source: Origen, *De Principiis*, book 3, chapter 1.11; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 311)

ii. We get to choose what type of heart we want to have. (A wax-like heart will become *softer* when the Lord applies the ‘heat’ of discipline or chastening, versus a clay-like one that will become *harder* under the same ‘heat’.)

iii. God does not override our free will.

iv. Read **Deuteronomy 3:1-11**.

1. In **Deuteronomy 3:11**, in the OSB translation, which is based on the Septuagint, it says Og was the only one left of “*the Rephaim*”. However, the Masoretic Text says, “*the giants*”.
2. The great size of Og is suggested by his unusually large iron bed.
  - a. Perhaps this is the first example we have of a ‘king-sized’ bed?
  - b. Og’s famous bed had about the same width as a modern ‘king-sized’ or ‘California king-sized’ bed.
    - i. However, Og’s bed was about *twice the length* of our modern king-sized beds!

v. Read **Deuteronomy 7:1-11**.

1. The Amorites, Canaanites, etc. would end up corrupting God's people if they mixed in with them. The Israelites would start worshiping their gods, participating in their evil, etc.
2. The Lord wanted His people to be a holy people, set apart for Him; not conformed to the ways of the worldly people of the land.
3. Lesson for us: we also are called to be a holy people, not contaminated by the world around us. While we do not physically kill those around us, we are nevertheless called to be separate, lest we pick up their ways.
  - a. Read **2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1**.
    - i. This cannot be reduced to just a set of rules and regulations, or a list of '*dos and don'ts*'.
    - ii. This is a distinct way of life that has all kinds of implications regarding who we spend time with, what we listen to and watch (media), who we marry, etc.
  - b. We will tend to become conformed to the ways of the people we are close to, whether for the better or for the worse!
    - i. "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.' Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame." (**1 Corinthians 15:33-34**, NKJV)
    - ii. "He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed." (**Proverbs 13:20**, NKJV)
  - c. "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself *unspotted* from the world." (**James 1:27**, NKJV)
    - i. Some translations will render it "unstained" or "unpolluted".
  - e. These victories are incredibly important in the history of Israel.
    - i. This story is alluded to again and again throughout the Old Testament.

- ii. The land of these two kings becomes the inheritance of 2-1/2 of the 12 tribes of Israel, east of the Jordan River.
  1. Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh will be assigned land here, with the other 9-1/2 tribes getting land on the west side of the Jordan.
- iii. Remembering this victory would be a tremendous encouragement of what the Lord had done for them and through them.
  1. Read **Deuteronomy 31:1-8**.
    - a. Moses reminded them, as his death approached, that the Lord would be with them in Canaan as He had been with them in defeating Og and Sihon.
    - b. Similar to David recalling that the Lord had delivered him from the paw of the lion and the bear, so He also could deliver him from Goliath (**1 Samuel 17**).
  2. When the people return from captivity, Ezra reminded them of their history and how the Lord had led them to victory when they had been obedient, in **Nehemiah 9**.
  3. In **Psalms 135 and 136** (designated **Psalms 134 and 135** in the LXX), wonderful psalms of praising and thanking the Lord for great things He has done throughout history, these two victories are highlighted.
    - a. Read **Psalms 135:1-12**. (designated **Psalms 134** in the LXX)
      - i. Praising the Lord for what He had done in the past.
    - b. Read **Psalms 136:13-22** (designated **Psalms 135** in the LXX)
      - i. Thanking the Lord for what He has done and for His mercy, which endures forever.
- f. Remembering what God has done in the past, praising and thanking Him.
  - i. Satan, the liar and deceiver, is always striving to discourage us, so that we do not carry out God's will.
  - ii. The answer is not found in becoming an 'optimist' or a 'positive thinker', but rather in being a realist, in the sense of *speaking the*



*truth*. Recount the facts regarding what the Lord has accomplished in the past.

- iii. The Israelites tended to focus on their problems and forget the incredible things that the Lord had done for them both in Egypt, and also in the Wilderness. This led to them being discontent, faithless, complaining, and testing the Lord.
  1. For many of us, it is easier to focus on the current problems than to recall the good things that the Lord has done in the past.
- iv. Part of the answer is to be consistently reminded of what the Lord has done, His faithfulness in keeping His promises, and the miraculous victories He has accomplished throughout the Scriptures (as well as in our own lives).
  1. One of the most important reasons to read the Scriptures daily is to be constantly reminded of the victories that the Lord has achieved in the past.
  2. That also is why we gather every week on the Lord's Day and take the Lord's Supper, to be reminded of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus.
    - a. That should fortify us when we are suffering (if we are living according to righteousness).
    - b. That also should give us hope that we will be delivered and resurrected to eternal life on the Last Day.
  3. We also need to remember, recall and repeat in our prayers the great things that the Lord has done in our own lives.
  4. This gave the Israelites the confidence to enter the Promised Land and to defeat the walled city of Jericho, etc.
  5. **Challenge:** What are the major challenges to your faith that you are struggling with today?
    - a. Recall, read about, meditate and praise God in prayer for the incredible things He has done in the past.
    - b. Mary had that kind of faith when she was approached by the angel Gabriel. She responded, "For with God nothing will be impossible." (**Luke 1:37**)

#### IV. Conclusion and Take-Aways

- a. When we are challenged by others regarding God telling his people to destroy other nations, let us remember:
  - i. The people who were destroyed were involved in unspeakable depravity.
  - ii. God did not (and still does not) want anyone to perish, even from among the Gentiles. He is happy to forgive even the most wicked, *if they repent*.
    1. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, *who desires all men to be saved* and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:3–4, NKJV)
  - iii. God is patient and merciful, but that patience has its limits. However, He is also *just*.
- b. The Lord operates on a different timeline than we do and for His own reasons (which we may not understand at the time). He was planning 400+ years ahead when He spoke to Abraham about the Amorites.
- c. In this story, we can see lessons about holiness. God wants His people to be a holy people and knows we can be easily corrupted by those around us.
  - i. While He no longer calls us to kill other people in the world, there is a lesson for us nevertheless about how serious we need to be regarding the influence of those in the world on us.
  - ii. That should impact not only who we marry, but also the influences we let into our lives.
- d. While it is true that God “hardens the hearts” of the wicked, He does not override our free will. We need to decide to have hearts that are like wax or butter, which become softer when the Lord brings chastening into our lives in one form or another.
- e. Let us read the stories of Scripture to gather a mental scrapbook of how the Lord has done wonderful things in the past. May we augment that by remembering how the Lord has delivered us so many times in the past.
  - i. May those things fill our minds and prayers when Satan, the accuser of the brethren, is striving to discourage us.