

# Encounters with Five Nations (Deuteronomy 2-3)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

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## I. Background / Review

- a. **Deuteronomy** captures Moses's final speeches to the people right before his death at the age of 120 after leading the Israelites for 40 years in the Wilderness.
  - i. Recall that Stephen summarized the life of Moses as consisting of three 40-year periods (**Acts 7:20-36**):
    1. 40 years as a prince in Egypt;
    2. 40 years in Midian where he was a shepherd; and
    3. 40 years leading Israel through the desert to the edge of the Promised Land.
  - ii. He recounts the past journey and gives warnings and encouragement to prepare the next generation before they enter the Promised Land.
  - iii. Moses knows he is going to die soon and that he will not cross the Jordan River to enter Canaan, the Promised Land.
- b. **Deuteronomy 1** recounts the time from Mt. Sinai (after Israel had crossed the Red Sea) to the time at Kadesh Barnea when the 12 spies were sent out for 40 days and returned (after which the people were sentenced to wandering in the Wilderness for 40 years). This corresponds roughly to **Numbers 1-14** and to about the first two years Israel was in the Wilderness after departing Egypt.
- c. In **chapters 1-3** Moses looks back and recalls a few specific events from their journey through the Wilderness. These are not random events. I believe they were selected to illustrate some of the points Moses will be expanding on further in the chapters that follow.
  - i. In each event Moses recalls, I think we should be asking ourselves, "What does he expect them (and us) to learn from that specific event, that will help them (and us) in the future?"
  - ii. For example, in the second half of **Deuteronomy 1**, Moses speaks about the events surrounding sending out the 12 spies from Kadesh Barnea to explore Canaan and the consequences of that exploratory trip. Take-aways included:

1. The people were faithless and complaining. They saw the obstacles (giant people, walled cities) rather than seeing the power of God, who was with them. They gave way to fear of men.
2. They ignored the signs of His power that God had provided them (pillar of cloud and fire).
3. They did not see how God had been carrying them throughout their journey from Egypt “as a man carries His son” (**Deuteronomy 1:31**).
4. Even if most of the people of God turn faithless, the few who remain faithful to Him (like Joshua and Caleb) will receive what was promised.
5. The people paid the consequence for their sins and were defeated.
6. When they later rebelled against the instruction of the Lord and attempted to attack their enemies anyway, they were defeated.
  - a. **Lesson:** The battle is the Lord’s. Heed what He says. If He is with you, you can defeat giants. But if you abandon Him, even weak enemies will be able to defeat you.

## II. Passing Peacefully Through Three Nations (Edom, Moab and Ammon)

- a. Israel passes through Edom.
  - i. Read **Deuteronomy 2:1-7**.
  - ii. [Moses’ retelling of their passing through the land of the Edomites appears to be in parallel with the account in **Numbers 20**.]
  - iii. Moses recounts how Israel passed through Mt. Seir, the land of the Edomites (the land given to the nation descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob).
    1. They will not get any of the land given to the Edomites.
    2. They will purchase food and water from them.
  - iv. God reminds Israel that He provided for them for 40 years, traversing the “great and fearful desert”. The Lord reminded them: “*I was with you, and you lacked nothing.*” (**Deuteronomy 2:7**)

1. For those who struggle with fear and anxiety, this theme throughout the Scriptures can reassure us. God reminds them, “*I was with you*” in the midst of the fearful challenges of the desert. He promises He will continue to be with them, *if they remain faithful to Him*.
2. This is not about being a “confident person” or a “positive thinker”, as helpful as that might be. It is understanding who God is, and being confident, based on His promises, that He will be with us if we stay faithful to Him. We see this theme running throughout the Scriptures.
  - a. In **Exodus 33**, it says that Moses went out to meet with the Lord, while they were camped at Mount Sinai, in the tabernacle of testimony. When the Lord told him to take the people and leave Mount Sinai, He promised to go with them on the journey. Moses said that if the Lord Himself did not go with them, he did not want to depart from Mount Sinai. (**Exodus 33:14-15**)
  - b. We see other examples in Deuteronomy where it speaks of the presence of God strengthening and protecting His people.
    - i. Read **Deuteronomy 1:29-31**.
    - ii. Read **Deuteronomy 1:42**.
    - iii. Read **Deuteronomy 7:21**.
    - iv. Read **Deuteronomy 31:7-8**.
  - c. This last passage from Deuteronomy 31 is repeated as an encouragement that also applies to Christians.
    - i. “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”” (**Hebrews 13:5-6**, NKJV; quoting from the prior passage in **Deuteronomy 31** and **Psalms 117/118:6**)
  - d. Consider the closing words in the gospel of **Matthew**, at the end of the Great Commission:

- i. "...and lo, *I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* Amen." (**Matthew 28:20**, NKJV)
- v. Our confidence in the presence of God is not simply based on our *feelings* (which can change like the wind). Instead, it should be solidly founded on God's promise, and on the nature of God (that He is faithful and always keeps His promises).
- vi. Even Jesus needed to be away from the pressures of the world, as well as His friends, to be alone in the presence of God, when he prayed. We see several examples of that in the gospels, such as in **Mark 1:35-37**.
- vii. This is where David found his strength.
  1. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For *You are with me...*" (**Psalm 22/23:4**, NKJV)
  2. Read **Psalm 33/34 vv. 7-8, 12-21**.
    - a. The presence of God and the protection of His angels are with the righteous who are humble, honest, fearing God and seeking peace.
- viii. The challenge before us, especially those anxious about many things, is to follow the example of Moses, David and even Jesus. Seek to be with the Lord. Seek a righteous life. When He is with us, we really do have nothing to fear. "What can man do to us?"
- b. Israel passes through the land of Moab.
  - i. Read **Deuteronomy 2:8-15**.
  - ii. Recall that the Moabites and Ammonites were nations that came from the two sons of Lot (one from each of his two daughters; see **Genesis 19:30-38**). They were given territory that the Israelites passed through on their way to Canaan.
    1. The Lord told Moses that his people were not to fight against the Moabites, since He had given the sons of Lot that land as an inheritance of their own.
  - iii. At this point, when Moses is retelling the story, we are about 38 years after the time that spies were sent out from Kadesh Barnea. Including the two years before that (most of which they were encamped at Mt. Sinai), we are now at the end of the 40 years. Recall that the Lord said it would take 40 years, until all the people of the first generation (who were over the age of 20) had died off. Except for Joshua and Caleb.
    1. Re-read **Deuteronomy 2:14-15**.

2. "The hand of the Lord was on them" for their wickedness, yet the Lord took 38 years to finish the job of killing off the rest of that rebellious generation.
3. He did it over time, to teach them a lesson (one year for each day the spies were in Canaan, to make 40 years in the Wilderness, including the two years in the Wilderness prior to Kadesh Barnea.)
4. God brings about His justice and does everything He promises. However, sometimes it takes decades or even longer. He does it in His own timing, for His own greater purpose. In the end, justice is served and no one "gets away with" anything.
  - a. This principle applies to God's enemies as well as to His people!
- c. Israel passes through the land of the Ammonites.
  - i. Read **Deuteronomy 2:16-19**.
  - ii. Again, they pass through the land of another nation without fighting them.

### III. Defeating Kings Sihon and Og

- a. These events were first described in **Numbers 21:21-35**.
- b. Read **Deuteronomy 2:24-37** (about the defeat of Sihon).
  - i. The Israelites request peaceful passage through that nation, just like the prior three. Instead, Sihon attacks them.
  - ii. The Israelites defeat Sihon, an Amorite king, and his nation and inherit their land. (Part of their inheritance will include this territory, on the east side of the Jordan River.)
    1. Please note that the *Amorites* (a Canaanite people) were a different nation from the *Ammonites* (descendants of Lot), although their names sound similar to us.
  - iii. **Question:** Does anyone have a problem with this story?
    1. Everyone is wiped out, including women and children (genocide).
      - a. How could a just and righteous God permit such a thing, let alone do it Himself?
    2. Also, it says God "hardened the heart" of Sihon.

- a. **Question:** Does that imply that *Sihon was not responsible*, because God controlled him and over-rode Sihon's will?
- iv. Some important things to note concerning the Amorites, which may help us to understand why the Lord would want to have them wiped out.
1. Read **Genesis 15:13-20**.
    - a. Abraham, in Canaan at the time, was promised that his descendants would be strangers in another land (Egypt) for hundreds of years. After that, they would inherit the land of Canaan, which would be occupied by other nations.
    - b. This would not happen until after "the sin of the Amorites is filled up". Like the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 19**), these people would become so depraved that the Lord would destroy them.
    - c. Read **Psalms 105/106:34-40**.
      - i. Notice what happened later, after they crossed the Jordan River when the Israelites did NOT wipe out the Canaanites. "They mingled with the nations" and became just like them, picking up all their sins, and thereby became *utterly useless* to the Lord.
      - ii. These sins included shedding the innocent blood *of their own children* whom they sacrificed to images and demons.
      - iii. The Lord wanted the Canaanites to be wiped out, so that they would not end up corrupting His people.
      - iv. **Lesson for Us:** If we are not careful, we will be destroyed if we become like the people in the world around us.
        1. "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'" (**1 Corinthians 15:33**, NKJV)
  - d. Read **Wisdom of Solomon 12:3-11**.

- i. [Note that this book is in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, and was in the King James Version of the Bible as well until about 120 years ago.]
  - ii. Their culture included human child sacrifice, cannibalism, the occult, and orgies. These people seem to be even worse than those who lived in the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah!
  - iii. Note that God even gave *these wicked people* an opportunity to repent. He does not want to destroy anyone. He is a merciful God who wants *even the most wicked* to repent and be spared destruction.
  - iv. In view of this, what Abraham was told in **Genesis 15** (regarding waiting until the sin of the Amorites was “filled up” until the Israelites took over their land) makes more sense to me.
- v. **Question:** Did God *harden* Sihon’s spirit and *make him stubborn*?
1. Read **Deuteronomy 2:30**.
  2. This is similar to what it says in Exodus about the Lord hardening Pharaoh’s heart.
  3. Paul also alludes to this concept of God “hardening” people, in **Romans**:
    - a. “For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and *whom He wills He hardens*.” (**Romans 9:17–18**, NKJV)
  4. **Question:** If God hardens someone’s heart, are they really responsible? Do we have free choice?
  5. Please see an interesting discussion of this important topic in *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, article on ‘Free Will and Predestination’. Quotes from early Christian writers illustrate how they understood this apparent paradox (we have free choice, yet God ‘hardens’ people’s hearts). In particular, early Christian writer Origen provided a great explanation, summarized as follows.

- a. This idea that the action of God in a person's life reveals the nature of that person can also be seen in a passage in **Hebrews**:
  - i. "For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned." (**Hebrews 6:7-8**, NKJV)
  - ii. Notice that the same rain produces two different results (useful crops vs. thorns and briers), depending on the land upon which it falls.
  - iii. The rain simply reveals the nature of the land upon which it falls (whether it already has good or bad seed in it).
- b. Likewise, the heat of the sun will harden clay, but soften butter or wax.
  - i. *We choose* whether to have a wax-like heart (which will become softer under the 'heat' of God's discipline) or a clay-like heart (which will become hardened by the very same heat of the sun).
- c. Therefore, God does not override our free choice. Rather, He brings hardship and discipline into the lives of people that will either *soften* them or *harden* them, depending on the kind of hearts they have chosen to have.
  - i. We've also seen this. Some people respond to hardship with humility and brokenness, drawing nearer to God. On the other hand, there are others who grow bitter and angry and are *hardened* by the same experience.
- d. **Challenge for Us:** Choose to have a heart that is like wax or butter, that becomes softer when facing hardship or discipline from God!
- c. Read **Deuteronomy 3:1-11**.
  - i. Same thing happens to Og, another king, as previously happened to Sihon.



- ii. **Question:** Was this, perhaps, the original “*king-sized bed*”?
  1. He had an iron bedstead that was 9 cubits long x 4 cubits wide. Note that an ancient cubit, the length of a man’s forearm, was roughly 18 inches (or about half a meter).
  2. His was a very large bed! King Og must have been an unusually tall man, an imposing figure.

d. Read **Deuteronomy 3:12-20**.

- i. Even though the Israelites have not yet crossed the Jordan River, these battles mark the start of their conquest of Canaanites, and receiving the promised inheritance of land.
- ii. The tribes of Reuben and Gad, as well as half of the tribe of Manasseh, will end up inheriting the land of Sihon and Og, which is east of the Jordan River.
- iii. These two great victories give the people confidence for the battles ahead and will be reminders to them of God’s power and faithfulness.

e. Read **Deuteronomy 3:21-28**.

- i. Moses recounts how he had pleaded with the Lord to allow him to cross over into the land of Canaan, the Promised Land.
- ii. God says, “Speak no more to Me of this matter.”
- iii. While watching this rejection of Moses’ plea to God is sad, perhaps there was a ‘silver lining’ at the end.
  1. Over 1,000 years later, Moses would, in fact, make it into Canaan. He appeared there with Jesus and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. (**Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9**)
- iv. God’s plan was for someone named *Jesus* (= Joshua; see **Numbers 13:16** in the LXX, and **Acts 7:45** and **Hebrews 4:8** in the Greek New Testament) to finish the journey begun by Moses.
  1. ‘*Jesus*’, not Moses, had to be the one who would lead God’s people into the Promised Land.
  2. Yet Moses would be brought back for an ‘*encore*’ at the Mount of Transfiguration, with Jesus, in the New Testament.