

Moses Reviews Israel's Conquest of Transjordan

Deuteronomy 3

Deuteronomy 3: 1- 11 - *"Then we turned and went up the road to Bashan; and Og king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. ² And the Lord said to me, 'Do not fear him, for I have delivered him and all his people and his land into your hand; you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon.'* ³ *"So the Lord our God also delivered into our hands Og king of Bashan, with all his people, and we attacked him until he had no survivors remaining. ⁴ And we took all his cities at that time; there was not a city, which we did not take from them: sixty cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. ⁵ All these cities were fortified with high walls, gates, and bars, besides a great many rural towns. ⁶ And we utterly destroyed them, as we did to Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and children of every city. ⁷ But all the livestock and the spoil of the cities we took as booty for ourselves.*

⁸ *"And at that time we took the land from the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were on this side of the Jordan, from the River Arnon to Mount Hermon ⁹ (the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, and the Amorites call it Senir), ¹⁰ all the cities of the plain, all Gilead, and all Bashan, as far as Salcah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan. ¹¹ "For only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of the giants. Indeed his bedstead was an iron bedstead. (Is it not in Rabbah of the people of Ammon?) Nine cubits is its length and four cubits its width, according to the standard cubit."*

Background Notes

If Og, the king of Bashan, was living today, I'm sure some NBA pro basketball team would offer him a contract - even if they had to teach him how to play the game! Verse 11 says that his bed was 13 ½ feet long and 6 feet wide - so Og was a big man for sure. Og was a remnant of the giant people who lived in that area at that time. Og was one of the two kings of the Amorites who were on the east side of the Jordan River, or Transjordan (v8). The other Transjordan Amorite king was Sihon, king of Heshbon. God promised that He would give Israel the victory, and Israel overwhelmingly defeated both Sihon and Og.

Doctrinal Points

1. Moses reviewed Israel's conquest of Transjordan.

The first section of Deuteronomy 3 is the record of the overwhelming defeat of Og, the Amorite king of Bashan, and Sihon, the Amorite king of Heshbon (v3-6). Sihon's kingdom extended from the Arnon River in northern Moab to the Jabbok River that runs into the Jordan River about half way between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. Og's kingdom

extended from the Jabbok River all the way north to Mount Hermon. It included a good portion of Gilead as well as Bashan (also called "Argob" in verse 4).

The children of Israel had captured **sixty cities with high walls** east of the Jordan River, and a great many un-walled towns as well (v4-5). Wow! So they had experienced a lot of battles, even before they crossed over the Jordan River and conquered Jericho. By the way, archaeology confirms the biblical record of many walled cities in Transjordan during this time period.

In this chapter, and in the book of Joshua, the biggest problem for many believers is, "Why did God condone the utter destruction of the Amorites and the Canaanites, including the killing of all the children?" "*And we utterly destroyed them, as we did to Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and children of every city*" (v6).

To answer a difficult question like this, we start with two basic teachings about God in the Bible:

- a. **God is love** (1 John 4:8). In John 3:16 Jesus said that God loves everyone - the entire world.
- b. **God always does what is right**. Following the truth that "God is love," we move to a foundational truth about God's dealings with mankind in Genesis 18:25: "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" We must trust that what God does is the right thing. We may not understand everything God is doing, and sometimes it may even seem that God is unfair or even cruel, but that's because we need to consider the larger picture. A dentist may *look* cruel when he's extracting a diseased tooth, or a surgeon may *look* cruel when he's excising a tumor – but those are the *right* things to do. And we can be sure that God always does the *right* thing.

After being convinced of the basic answers, that God is love and that He always does the right thing, there are other answers to consider about why God condoned all the killing at the time of the Conquest of the Promised Land. God knew that if these pagan people, with all their detestable idolatry and immorality, were not rooted out, they would "infect" God's people with their pagan ways. But why kill the children? Well, little Amorites and Canaanites grow up to be big Amorites and Canaanites. The book of Judges says that Israel did not obey the Lord by completely clearing the enemy out - and sure enough, that failure led to Israel's downfall.

Another point to remember is that God had given the Amorites and the Canaanites plenty of time to change their ways - but they would not. In Genesis 15:60 God told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years before they entered and conquered Canaan. Why? Because "*the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet complete.*" So God was patient and longsuffering with the Amorites and Canaanites for four centuries, but they refused to repent and turn from their wicked lifestyle.

So there are good and helpful answers as to why God directed His people that the entire population must be wiped out, when it came to the conquest of pagan lands.

One more point to ponder: in view of the overall teaching of the Bible about the way God deals with the souls of men, would you want to be an Amorite or Canaanite baby who was killed in Israel's conquest - or would you rather grow up to be a pagan Amorite or Canaanite worshiping foreign gods - and thus be separated from God forever? I know what option I would choose!

2. Moses reviewed Israel's distribution of Transjordan.

Deuteronomy 3:12-22 - *"And this land, which we possessed at that time, from Aroer, which is by the River Arnon, and half the mountains of Gilead and its cities, I gave to the Reubenites and the Gadites. ¹³ The rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to half the tribe of Manasseh. (All the region of Argob, with all Bashan, was called the land of the giants. ¹⁴ Jair the son of Manasseh took all the region of Argob, as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maachathites, and called Bashan after his own name, Havoth Jair, to this day.)*

¹⁵ "Also I gave Gilead to Machir. ¹⁶ And to the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave from Gilead as far as the River Arnon, the middle of the river as the border, as far as the River Jabbok, the border of the people of Ammon; ¹⁷ the plain also, with the Jordan as the border, from Chinnereth as far as the east side of the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea), below the slopes of Pisgah.

¹⁸ "Then I commanded you at that time, saying: 'The Lord your God has given you this land to possess. All you men of valor shall cross over armed before your brethren, the children of Israel. ¹⁹ But your wives, your little ones, and your livestock (I know that you have much livestock) shall stay in your cities which I have given you, ²⁰ until the Lord has given rest to your brethren as to you, and they also possess the land which the Lord your God is giving them beyond the Jordan. Then each of you may return to his possession which I have given you.'

²¹ "And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, 'Your eyes have seen all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings; so will the Lord do to all the kingdoms through which you pass. ²² You must not fear them, for the Lord your God Himself fights for you.'"

This passage recorded Moses' review of the distribution of the land to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh that requested to settle east of the Jordan River. The full account of this transaction is found in Numbers 32. God wanted all 12 tribes to settle on the west side of the Jordan, but these 2 1/2 tribes wanted to live on the east side because the land was good for grazing and raising livestock. They promised to help the other tribes fight the battles in the Promised Land, but once the conquest was over they would return to their families and farms on the east side of the Jordan River. Although it was not His ideal plan, God graciously allowed this arrangement.

The Transjordan tribal boundaries for the 2 1/2 tribes were recorded here. Reuben was in the south, Gad in the middle, and half tribe of Manasseh in the north. "Chinnereth" (v17) is another name for the Sea of Galilee, and the "Sea of the

Arabah" or "the Salt Sea" is the Dead Sea. So here in the second half of Deuteronomy 3, Moses reviewed Israel's distribution of Transjordan.

Practical Application

Don't say "Please" when God says "No!"

Deuteronomy 3:23-29- *"Then I pleaded with the Lord at that time, saying: ²⁴'O Lord God, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds? ²⁵I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon.'*

²⁶But the Lord was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. So the Lord said to me: 'Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter. ²⁷Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. ²⁸But command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see.' ²⁹So we stayed in the valley opposite Beth Peor."

Normally we instruct children to say "please" when they ask for something - but when we say "no," we don't want them to beg and whine and say "please, please, please!" But that's what Moses actually said to God!

In Numbers 20 God told Moses that he would **see** the Promised Land from a distance, but he would not be allowed to **enter** the Land. That was the penalty for Moses' disobedience to God's command, when God told Moses to speak to the rock to get water for the people. But in his anger with the people, Moses struck the rock – thus destroying a truth picture that God intended.

Perhaps Moses thought God would change his mind if he pleaded - but in no uncertain terms, God said, "*Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter.*" Don't mention this again!

Do you see the application for us? Has God said "no" to you in some area of your life? Perhaps it's about a change in your location or job? Perhaps it's even in an area of Christian service that you desire, but God knows is not best for you? Are you willing to take "No" for an answer - or are you pleading with God to change His mind?

Don't say "Please" when God says "No!"