

March 18, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2018 David J. Whitcomb

YOUR EYES HAVE SEEN
Deuteronomy 3:1-22

Maybe you have heard that there is conflict in the Middle East. That of course is to state the obvious. There has been conflict somewhere in the Middle East ever since Adam and Eve sinned against God with the result that their son killed his brother.

I don't want to sound like a know-it-all, but I think there is a simple plan to stop all the fuss in the Middle East. If everyone would just settle down and do what God wants them to do, there would be peace. Right. Isn't that the root to all problems all over the world in all times? Yes, but stop and think about the simplicity of the matter. The Palestinians are fighting with the Israelis over possession of land because "they were there first." Even if that were true, does that indicate that it is God's will for them to possess the land?

A lot of the Middle Eastern conflict goes all the way back to the words in our text. Let's go back to the beginning. God went to the land of the Chaldeans and found a man named Abram. God told Abram to leave his family and go to a land that He would give to his posterity. In Abram's mind, that presented a major problem because of the simple fact that he had no son. God promised to take care of the problem with the birth of Isaac and at that time changed Abram's name to Abraham to reflect the reality that He would be the father of a multitude of nations. While Abraham walked around on the land that is modern-day Israel, God promised to give it to his posterity.

God grew Abraham's posterity to massive numbers while they were slaves in Egypt. Finally the day came when God set them free and headed them up the road to the Promised Land. Our text finds that generation's children beginning to possess God's promise to Abraham. In the process, God delivered Sihon the king of Hesbon

and Og the king of Bashan over to the nation of Israel. Israel destroyed all the people and their cities, took their herds, and settled in the land.

So how could the Palestinians think they were there first? We know the story of how God's people were stubborn and disobedient against God so that God threw them out of the land. It was during their absence that the interlopers moved in. Now God is once again putting His people back in the Promised Land in order to carry out His promises to them. And the occupants of the land God gave to Israel are no happier than the citizens of Bashan were when Moses and his two million friends showed up the first time.

Why don't the people in the Middle East get it? Well, in the first place, they don't know God; and in the second place, they don't trust God's Word. Will God keep His promise to His people in spite of this conflict? They can trust God's Word because they have seen it happen before.

The lesson is clear for us. While the whole world appears to wring their collective hands over the conflict in the Middle East, we who trust God calmly wait for Him to keep His promise. We wait calmly because we have already seen this work before – like according to our text. The lesson becomes even more relevant when we apply it to our own circumstances. What promise of God are you doubting? What do you think God should do that He appears to not want to do? Have you not experienced answered prayers in the past? Will God not answer now? Will He not keep His promises? We have seen God work in the past and can be sure He will continue to carry out His will in the future.

A Lesson In Bible Geography (vv.1-17).

Our text begins with the story about the battle at Edrei or a geographic region called Bashan. A quick look at a Old Testament Bible map helps locate places when we read, *Then we turned and went up the way to Bashan. And Og the king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. But the LORD said to me, "Do not fear him, for I have given him and all his people and his land into your hand. And you shall do to him as you did to Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon"* (vv.1-2).

The kingdoms that existed in that region were actually the gift of God to His nation Israel. That is how verse three begins. *So the LORD our God gave into our hand Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people, and we struck him down until he had no survivor left. And we took all his cities at that time – there was not a city that we did not take from them – sixty cities, the whole region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. All these were cities fortified with high walls, gates, and bars, besides very many unwalled villages. And we devoted them to destruction, as we did to Sihon the king of Heshbon, devoting to destruction every city, men, women, and children. But all the livestock and the spoil of the cities we took as our plunder (vv.3-7).*

Verses eight through ten serve as a synopsis of how God's people took the gift God gave them. *So we took the land at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, from the Valley of the Arnon to Mount Hermon (the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, while the Amorites call it Senir), all the cities of the tableland and all Gilead and all Bashan, as far as Salecah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan.* It is quite impressive to realize that the area God's people subjugated from Sihon and Og amounts to almost 500 square miles.

Verse eleven is also kind of review as it reminded the people that they took the land away from a really a big guy. *(For only Og the king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bed was a bed of iron. Is it not in Rabbah of the Ammonites? Nine cubits was its length, and four cubits its breadth, according to the common cubit.)* That would be a bed about 13½ feet long by 6 feet wide.

Having taken the land, Moses parceled it out according to God's will. *When we took possession of this land at that time, I gave to the Reubenites and the Gadites the territory beginning at Aroer, which is on the edge of the Valley of the Arnon, and half the hill country of Gilead with its cities. The rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, that is, all the region of Argob, I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh. (All that portion of Bashan is called the land of Rephaim.)*

Then also, *Jair the Manassite took all the region of Argob, that is, Bashan, as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and called the villages after his own name,*

Havvoth-jair, as it is to this day. (v.14). And to Machir I gave Gilead (v.15).

Also by way of review Moses reminded the people that he gave *to the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave the territory from Gilead as far as the Valley of the Arnon, with the middle of the valley as a border, as far over as the river Jabbok, the border of the Ammonites; the Arabah also, with the Jordan as the border, from Chinnereth as far as the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, under the slopes of Pisgah on the east (vv.16-17).* That was the distribution of all the land in trans-Jordan. But did Moses simply want to give a history and geography lesson to the people, or did he have something else in mind?

A Lesson About God Working In Us and Through Us.

By going back through the first fifteen verses of the text, we can see a clear illustration of an important Bible principle. That principle is stated plainly in Philippians 2:12-13. *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).*

On one hand, it was obvious to Moses that the giving of the land was God's responsibility. We can easily observe statements about God's work such as we find in verse two. The LORD said to Moses, *For I have given him and all his people and his land into your hand (v.2).* Again in verse three we read, *So the LORD our God gave into our hand Og also (v.3).*

There should be no doubts in our minds that the people of Israel could overrun the well-established nations because God gave them the land. However, have we ever stopped to consider how God does the same kind of work in life's circumstances? That is what Paul meant when he wrote, *For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).*

We see this principle all through the New Testament. For example when the religious leaders questioned John about his ministry he replied, *"A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (John 3:27).* We learn from James that

beginning with salvation, all blessing comes from God. *Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (James 1:18)*. Therefore, even our life of service to Him is a gift from God. *Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God (2 Corinthians 3:5)*.

Therefore, it is right to conclude that even as God went before the Israelites and placed the gift of the promised land in their hands, so every opportunity we have to serve Him is His gift. We are not born again because we are wise or diligent. We are saved because God convicts us and draws us to the Savior. When He saves us, God gives us a capacity to serve Him by serving others. If all we have is natural talent, we are no different than entertainers, engineers, musicians or any other public speaker. You are where you are, with the abilities you have, facing the opportunities you have because the LORD gives.

While it is obvious that the giving of the land was God's responsibility, it is also obvious that the taking the land was the people's responsibility. We can also observe statements about human responsibility throughout the first fifteen verses of our text. In fact, there is a preponderance of these references. *Then we turned and went up the way to Bashan (v.1). And you shall do to him as you did to Sihon (v.2). We struck him down until he had no survivor left (v.3). And we took all his cities at that time – there was not a city that we did not take from them – (v.4). And we devoted them to destruction, as we did to Sihon the king of Heshbon (v.6). But all the livestock and the spoil of the cities we took as our plunder (v.7). So we took the land at that time (v.8). When we took possession of this land at that time, I gave to the Reubenites and the Gadites. . . (v.12). Jair the Manassite took all the region of Argob (v.14). To Machir I gave Gilead (v.16) and to the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave the territory from Gilead (vv.15-16a)*. The evidence of human activity in taking and appropriating God's gift is overwhelming.

Therefore, we do well to stop and consider our obligations in the will of God. The first part of that principle we stated from Philippians 2 says, *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*

(Philippians 2:12). This verse does not say that we **gain** our own salvation through obedience. Rather by obeying the Scripture we are putting to work the salvation God already gave us.

Obedience and labor for the Lord is our responsibility because of what the Lord already gave us. Picture a person who loves to do wood working. One day a wealthy and benevolent philanthropist arrives at the person's house and asks permission to give a gift. With permission, he orders the construction of a beautiful 1,500 square foot work shop complete with all the latest tools and gadgets. The philanthropist says, "This is my gift to you. All I ask in return is that you build me some furniture." How would the carpenter respond? No doubt he would joyously get to work using the tools he had been given.

God has already given us every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Our responsibility is to get busy taking ownership of what He has granted.

Let That Be a Lesson For You (vv.18-22).

Okay, it is nice to think about God graciously giving the land to the people. And it is almost expected that because God gave the land, the people needed to have the ambition and obedience to take it from the enemy and appropriate it to themselves. However, in real life the command to possess the enemy's property might seem insurmountable. Moses reminded the people, *And I commanded you at that time, saying, "The LORD your God has given you this land to possess. All your men of valor shall cross over armed before your brothers, the people of Israel. Only your wives, your little ones, and your livestock (I know that you have much livestock) shall remain in the cities that I have given you, until the LORD gives rest to your brothers, as to you, and they also occupy the land that the LORD your God gives them beyond the Jordan. Then each of you may return to his possession which I have given you" (vv.18-20)*.

Yes, God gives the gift, but you will need to fight to take possession. That is God's command. In the first place, human nature is not particularly receptive of commands. But Moses didn't pull any punches when he bluntly said, *"I commanded you" (v.18a)*. This was

the mere man Moses telling the men, the leaders of thousands of families what do to.

We already know that people were not always receptive to Moses bossing them around. When Moses tried to stop two Israelites from fighting their response was, “*Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?*” (Exodus 2:14). After Israel’s escape to the desert, one day Korah, Dathan and Abiram stirred up 250 leaders and their families against Moses because he tried to tell them what to do. *They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?”* (Numbers 16:3). Even Moses’s brother and sister resisted his commands. *And they said, “Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?”* (Numbers 12:2).

What was true about those ancient Israelites is only too true about us. We also naturally resist the commands of other people even though they might be God-ordained authorities. So employees get agitated with their employers. Teens resist their out-of-touch parents. Students walk out of classrooms in protest to express their superior knowledge and wisdom. And congregants don’t like the preacher telling them they need to spend more time in the Bible, more time praying, and look more diligently for opportunities to tell others about Christ.

In the second place, the command would require serious sacrifice. *All your men of valor shall cross over armed before your brothers* (v.18b). The terms *valor* and *armed* hinted that the people were not going to cross the Jordan River to meet the local welcome wagon. This was war and there were going to be casualties. We really don’t think that in all the battles to possess the gift of God there were no casualties for God’s people, do we?

And to make matters worse Moses commanded, *Your family and possession shall remain on the west side of the Jordan* (v.19). That would be a huge sacrifice. It is a reminder that taking possession of all the gifts God grants in this life will require some sacrifice on our part. It is wonderful news that God has promised that sin will not have dominion over us (Romans 6:14). However, that condition is

only realized when we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11), let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions (Romans 6:12), do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness (Romans 6:13a), but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness (Romans 6:13b).

If you have ever tried to live consistently dying to self to live for God, refusing to let sin reign and stir your passions, refusing to let unrighteousness use our bodies, and moment by moment presenting your body to God, you know it is a fight. Too many Christians are unwilling to be men and women of valor and to arm themselves and engage the battle. They are content to claim their stake in God’s many blessings, but then whine because sin has dominion over them.

We must fight with the assurance of the LORD’s provision. Moses told the people, *The LORD your God has given you this land to possess* (v.18b). He also told them to keep fighting *until the LORD gives rest to your brothers, as to you* (v.20a), because *the land that the LORD your God gives them* (v.20b). As you can see, Moses gave three clear reminders that, in His plans, God had already given the promised land to His people.

In a similar way, God has already determined two wonderful realities for us His people. He has taught us that we already have the means for spiritual victory in life: *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith* (1 John 5:4). Either this statement is true or it is not. It has to be true because it is from God. Therefore, we can fight with confidence to possess the victory God has already promised.

Second, God has already promised eternal life. We who are born again know for a fact that we have the promise of eternal life with Christ. The gift is already given. Therefore, we fight for purity in life. That is what John meant when he wrote, *Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure* (1 John 3:2-3). Paul agreed and wrote, *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every*

defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1).

We not only have God's promises for victory, but we have already witnessed God's work. Really? What have you witnessed? To the people Moses reminded, *And I commanded Joshua at that time, "Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings" (v.21).* At the very least Joshua was an eyewitness to God handing over two powerful kings so that Israel could have their land. Add to that experience all that Joshua witnessed in the wilderness wandering for 40 years.

Okay, he should have been a faithful warrior after all the promises he saw fulfilled. And what have you witnessed? The writer to the Hebrew Christians gave us an idea of what we all experience in the Body of Christ. We are like . . . *those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come (Hebrews 6:4-5).* We have experienced salvation and been eyewitnesses to the changes that have come about in our own lives. We have watched God turn other sinners into saints. We have shared victories and the joy of sanctification with many other fellow travelers on our way to the celestial city. Read biographies of saints from the past and see for yourself that God gives spiritual victory.

Yes, but will God continue to keep His promises? The LORD has done and will continue to do. *So will the LORD do to all the kingdoms into which you are crossing (v.21b).* We have the privilege of reading the accounts in Joshua and Judges of how God gave His people victory just like He promised. Therefore, we can depend on God to carry out His promises in our lives. He will do all that He has promised.

You shall not fear. *You shall not fear them, for it is the LORD your God who fights for you (v.22).* God's plan is for us to fear Him but not Satan, his minions, or other people. It appears that the reality is that we fear Satan and people, but not God. We need to hold God in highest esteem with proper reverence (fear). And because we have right fear of God, we need not fear those over whom He has promised to give the victory.

Memory should be a good stimulant to drive us on to greater sanctification in the Lord. We know that we can have success against the world, sin, and the devil because: 1) We have seen with our own eyes how God has given it to others; 2) We have seen with our own eyes how God has given victory to us in the past. So fight the good fight against sin by trusting God to keep His promises.