

## Promises and the Lord of the Promises – *Deuteronomy 3:12-29*

**Introduction** – Whether in the midst of great personal victory or great personal disappointment, keeping one's eye on the Lord of the promises and not simply the promises is the challenge and test of faith. Moses continues his sermon of encouragement to the children of Israel with these two lessons.

**Dividing the Conquered Lands** (vv12-17) – Moses recounts how the LORD divided the conquered “*land of the giants*.” The land taken from Sihon, generally, is given to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, along with portions of Gilead (v12). The half-tribe of Manasseh is given the remainder of Gilead and all Bashan (v13). Further details are given for Manasseh's descendants (Jair, v14, and Machir, v15) and then for the Reubenites and Gadites (v16) with a description of the whole western border along the Jordan River from Chinnereth (Sea of Galilee) down to the Salt Sea (v17).

**The Lord of this Land** (vv18-20) – This land had been given to these tribes at their request (see Numbers 32 for more details). But the land had been conquered as a lesson and preparation for the greater conquest ahead, a conquest which required the loyalty of all the tribes combined. They were to receive this land by faith and prove their faithfulness by going with Israel to take all of the other kingdoms promised. Loyalty to the Lord and to His people meant refusing to rest on the laurels of personal victories and spoils while the rest of the kingdom still fought. They were to go with the children of Israel “*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*” (v20).

**Promises to Joshua** (vv21-22, 28) – Moses would be turning over the command of Israel to Joshua and so he addresses this rising leader specifically. Look at what you have seen the Lord do here; this is what He will do “*to all the kingdoms through which you pass*.” Joshua is to have learned and is to pass on to all Israel that they need not fear giants, “*for the LORD your God Himself fights for you*.” This was the point of the historical sermon through the land of Edom, Moab, and Ammon, through the lands of Heshbon and Bashan. God keeps His word. God has given promises. Go and take the land with your eye on the LORD.

**Request Denied** (vv23-29) – Moses gives the reason for this promise to Joshua and why it was not given to him. For at that time he had pleaded with the LORD (v23). Moses had seen the marvelous works of the Lord, from the burning bush until now. But just as the climax was drawing near he would be unable to see the promise fulfilled to which he had devoted his whole life. This had occurred because of Moses' disobedience in the Wilderness of Zin just before they had come to Edom (Num 20:1-13), speaking rashly with his lips and usurping the place of God (Num 20:10-11, Psalm 106:32-33). Upon seeing these great victories over Sihon and Og, Moses pleaded and pleaded with God until finally “*the LORD said to me; ‘Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter.’*”

**Behold from Afar** (vv27-28) – God was going to keep His word for Israel, but in His sovereign holiness and wisdom, He would not have Moses lead them into the land. Moses is told to go up a mountain and see from afar (and believe) that God would give to Israel as He promised. Joshua (whose name is Jesus in Greek) would lead them into the land. In that sense, a greater-than-Moses would lead them now.

**When the Answer is “No.”** – Why does God say “no” to good prayer requests offered by good saints and requested for good reasons? Why does God, who is rich in mercy and kindness, seemingly deny His large-heartedness to those upon whom He loves? And how is this story part of a sermon of encouragement to Israel – and to us?

**Greater Purposes** – We must be careful here, as Job learned. God does not reveal His secret purposes to finite minds that could not hold them (Deut 29:29) and so we must learn to trust and obey based on the promises we are given. In fact our vision must be on the Lord of the promise and not in the promise itself. Only then can we say with Paul, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*” (Rom 8:35). And we can add, “*shall loss of a loved one, loss of an opportunity, difficulties in finances or marriage or with children – shall these separate us from the love of Christ?*” What was Paul saying? What was Moses preaching?

**Greater Blessings** – The Son pleaded with the Father that if there was any way, this cup of judgment would pass – and God said “no” (Matt 26:36-46). And the world was saved. Paul pleaded with the Lord three times for a thorn in the flesh to be removed – and God said “no” (2 Cor 12:7-10). And grace beyond measure was given to Paul to endure and in fact to magnify the power of Christ in the midst of personal weakness.

**Resurrection Hope** (1 Cor 15:42-58) – But there is so much more. Every death reminds us that we have not yet received all of the promises. Every personal defeat is soon swallowed up in countless other personal stories – often with no sense of closure for the one left in some kind of ruin. When you seem to have lost sight of the promise, it is because you have taken your eyes of faith off of the Lord of the promise. Moses did see the Promised Land on the Mount of Transfiguration – but that was only the beginning. In Christ, we will all one day live in incorruptible, immortal bodies. It will come to pass that which is written, “*Death (and every single loss) is swallowed up in victory*.”