

Two More Witnesses – *Deuteronomy 2:24-3:11*

Introduction – Moses continues his sermon of encouragement to the next generation by bringing up another set of witnesses to God's faithfulness and exhaustive sovereignty. In the midst of this lesson, we are also reminded of our infinite and eternal God who works in individuals and nations according to the counsel of His will. While these are often hard lessons to learn, they are meant to encourage us as disciples and never to embarrass us.

More Giant-Killing – Israel saw that the sons of Esau and Lot had defeated giants, and now Moses reminds them that they had success as well in conquering giants. These are two witnesses, again, that Israel received to testify that God was true to His Word.

King Sihon of the Amorites (2:24-37) – Continuing on their journey, Israel had to go through the land of Sihon to get to Canaan. He put dread and fear in the hearts of the nations (as He had promised – v25). God already knew that He would harden Sihon's heart, but instructed Israel to send delegations with words of peace at first (not unlike forty years earlier with Pharaoh). This hardening is evidence that He had already begun to give Israel the land (v31). The victory was complete: all the cities were destroyed, all of the people were killed, and it was all because "*the LORD our God delivered all to us*" (v36).

Og King of Bashan (3:1-11) – Similarly, God promised Israel that He would deliver another Amorite kingdom, Og king of Bashan, and He did just that. The LORD delivered this kingdom over to Israel; they attacked until there were no survivors; every city, even those with high towers, were destroyed. And of course, Og himself a great giant is remembered as such by the size of his bed (v11).

Remember, Remember, Remember – Sihon and Og and the victory of God are foundational battles for Israel that she was never to forget. They bookend Deuteronomy (1:4, 31:4), and are brought up as well in 4:46-47 and 29:7. These battles are remembered centuries later in a victory song when God brings Israel out of exile (Neh 9:22). Israel was to sing of these battles (Psalm 135:5-12, 136:18-21) and God's people are to sing of these particular battles therefore until the end of the world.

Remember His Kindness – When we remember and sing of these battles, the thing we are to remember is that "*For His mercy endures forever*;" God's judgment is, for those walking in faith, a great sign of His kindness. But unless you understand the story of the antithesis between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, these stories look harsh.

Encouragement from Hard Things – There are some hard things in these stories to consider, but these hard things should encourage faithful saints. There ought to be more than a few things in a book where the infinite and eternal God is revealed to us that we find difficult to grasp. But this revelation has the virtue of provoking us to wake up and think, to strengthen our faith in what is not seen, and to humble us before God.

A God Who Gives Panic and Hardens Hearts – God is sovereign over everything, He does all that He pleases (Psalm 135:6). He struck fear into the hearts of these nations, and continued to do so (Josh 2:10). Our God can harden hearts and honestly offer peace at the same time. The sovereignty of God is not somehow at odds with man's freedom and responsibility, which is made clear throughout Scripture (Rom 9:14-24). While it is a doctrine that can be explained and embraced in faith, it overwhelms us with His glory as well (Rom 11:33-36). But notice, faith embraces this and is encouraged, not embarrassed.

Holy War – Many Christians are uncomfortable with verses like 2:33-34 and 3:6 and it gets worse when we say that God moves with such acts of destruction today as well in earthquakes, tsunamis, car accidents, and the like (Amos 3:6). But God has numbered all our days (Psalm 139:16) and war does not increase the number of deaths per person. When contemplating a tower that fell, Jesus warned stiff-necked Israel to be careful in considering the sin of others rather than seeing such judgment and fearing God (Luke 13:1-5).

The Scriptures teach us how to think about these events. "*The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether*" (Psalm 19:9), and with regard to these specific battles, "*His mercy endures forever*" (Psalm 136). Later, God tells Israel it was not because they were good that He dispersed these wicked peoples, but only because they were so wicked (Deut 9:4). As one saint said of a sinner being hauled off to prison, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Faith in One with Divine Authority – God often overthrows His enemies by making them His friends; but He sometimes overthrows His enemies by overthrowing His enemies. God controls the affairs of men, but not in a paganistic fatalism. Rather, we are to see each action of God as a part of His personal story with an eventual personal end which is glorious and good – using the actions of free and responsible men.

Encouragement and Warning – Who do we want to be in the story? What is our character? Are we like the Amorites, quite strong compared to other nations, but worshipping a false god, sacrificing our children to idols, building a culture of death and hedonistic rebellion? Are we like Israel, refusing to trust in the LORD at Kadesh-barnea when He has given clear orders with the promises of world conquest? We aren't required to conduct a Holy War as Israel was then, yet we are afraid even to declare the Lordship of Jesus Christ over our nation. Confused, muddled, and compromised, the church has no potency in our culture today. And is it possible that we should see the downfall of our empire, should it occur, not as a downfall of the City of God, but of the City of Man? If God gives this nation over to her idolatries and hardens her heart (Rom 1) then judgment is upon us, and it comes in liberal and conservative labels.

The End Game – But our hope is not in "traditional American values," nor is it in national pride and patriotism. The church was given a story to tell, a song to be sung, a Gospel to be preached. We must never forget Sihon and Og – giants who fell because God's people believed and obeyed. Against all odds. That is the only reason you are saved. It is the only reason that the world will be saved. Moses begins to whisper, "go – take the land."