

Sermon Notes Deut. 2:24-37; 3:21-39. 17/7/2022

Background. The Arnon Gorge, which ran into the Dead Sea, was the border between Moab peoples in the south and Ammon peoples in the north. To the West of the Ammon people were the Amorites (Gen. 10:16) whose territory bordered the eastern side of the Jordan River. The Israelites needed to pass through this territory in order to cross the Jordan and enter the promised land.

Vv. 24-33. The account begins with the assurance that the land of the Amorites will be delivered to the Israelites by God 24-25 with further details in 31-33. **Vv. 26-30** spell out the initial intent to pass through the Land of the Amorites. This area east of the Jordan, called Transjordan, may not have been part of the initial idea of the promised land (Gen 12; 15:18-20) as it was not planned to conquer the Amorites.

The refusal of the King and the making of 'his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate' by God are two actions that happen simultaneously. The King is responsible for his actions, yet it is also true that the Lord God is sovereign over all things. This linking of human responsibility and God's sovereignty is also apparent in the Lord God giving the Amorite King and his country into the hands of the Israelites (24, 31) along with the command for them to 'conquer and possess his land' (31).

Vv. 32-37. The Israelites are successful in conquering the land and they destroy all the people. This is a stark contrast with the initial request to travel through the land and to pay fair prices for food and drink (27-29). The glaring issue for us is that all the people including women and children were killed. This was the law of 'herem',- dedicated to God (Yahweh). Why such destruction? Part of the explanation is that the Israelites were to be completely dedicated to serving the one true God (Yahweh) and were not to marry, socialise or follow the social, and especially the religious, practices of the peoples in the promised land. God was delivering the land to a landless people, the Israelites, while also judging the existing people for their idolatry.

This further reminds us that God is sovereign He gives life and all life is accountable to Him.

The Covenant principles that govern Israel's life under God are **love for God** (Yahweh) and **love for neighbour**. But how does love for neighbour operate in war? Love for neighbour does not exclude discipline and punishment. Equally God's intention to bless the nations through Israel does not preclude His exercise of divine judgment on wickedness. Being active in human affairs means God acts in a sinful human world. The constraints on warfare listed in chapter 20 and 21 illustrate the reality of seeking to act humanely in an inhuman world (Wright 227ff).

Relevance for today. The distinction between **principles** and **practices** reminds us of the need to remember the social and political context of God's dealing with the Israelites (Thomson,96). The principle that Israel, as the people formed and chosen by God to reveal His character to the world, was to be holy (separate from the nations) continues today but not as a distinct nation. The new people of God, chosen in Christ, are made up of both Jew and Gentiles (Gal. 3:28). They are to be dedicated to God and separate from the world in the sense of not following the values of the world. But they no longer form a nation so the practice of being Holy is to occur within the world as salt and light (Mt. 5:13). So, the principle remains with some modification but the practice of God's people engaging in God's war against the pagan nations no longer applies.

3:21-39. Moses' plea to God to be allowed to lead the people into the promised land is rejected. Moses, along with most of his generation, is punished for their failure to trust God (1:36-37). However, he is given the opportunity to view the promised land (3:27). Moses now has the task of commissioning, encouraging, and strengthening Joshua to lead the people to their inheritance.

Reflection/Response. How do we show our commitment to dedicate our whole lives completely to God? How do we act as salt and light in the world but live according to God's requirements with the enabling of the Holy Spirit?