

## Essential Unity

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Reading: Number 32:1-28, John 17

Study: Deuteronomy 3:12-22

Palms : 122, 103:1-5, 25:1-6, 133

God gave his people decisive victories over two great Amorite kingdoms – Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan. In these holy wars the enemy was utterly destroyed – no treaties were made, no prisoners taken, no one was left alive. This was divine punishment just like Noah's flood and just like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

### Remember

The book of Numbers has a record of these wars. Here in Deuteronomy Moses recalls these victories, this recent history, for the purpose of encouraging the people as they waited to cross over the Jordan and go in and possess the land.

They would be going up against an enemy living in fortified cities – and there were some giants among them. They might well be overcome with fear like their fathers back at Kadesh. But let them remember how the Lord gave them victory over Sihon and Og.

We are getting familiar with those names are we not! Well Moses wanted the people to be familiar with them also. He wanted them to remember those names and what happened to the men, the kings, bearing those names. Let them teach those names to their children – Sihon and Og – Oh yes with the Lord's help we destroyed them.

Remember the big flood my grandmother would say recalling the big flood on the Manning in 1957. Remember the drought – I remember the big drought in 65. Remember your first day at school or at college. Remember your time in hospital desperately sick. Remember when there was no money in the house- yes we had that experience in India.

And here you are today. The Lord has brought you through. If you can remember anything you surely can remember God's provision, his protection, and his providence. Above all we remember Calvary – the death of Jesus Christ death through which we stand here today not only alive in the body but in the Spirit.

*Your eyes have seen all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings (3:21) Moses told Joshua and in effect all the people as he spoke to them. So will the Lord do to all the kingdoms through which you pass.* If the Lord gave you victory back then, then the same Lord is able to give you victory again. He is able and he is willing according to his word. You are his chosen people. You are his covenant people. The Lord himself will fight for you.

You may not be engaged in war against flesh and blood – as some of our fathers were. But you are engaged in war against *the rulers of the darkness of this age* (Ephesians 6:12). You are engaged in spiritual warfare. Paul was well aware of the battle he was fighting (II Corinthians 10:3f). In God he was pulling down the strongholds of the enemy all the time – arguments and false teaching that sought to exalt itself over the word of God. In doing so he remembered how the Lord Jesus took hold of him, how he humbled this proud young Jew, many years before on the road to Damascus.

### **Unity essential**

The land in which Sihon and Og had their kingdoms was extensive and it was good pasture land especially in the north. Bashan was a plateau well known for its lush pasture and fine cattle (Amos 4:1). Today is within the country of Jordan.

The people of Reuben and Gad approached Moses asking that they be given this land for their inheritance. They had large herds. Moses was reluctant at first. *Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here?* (Numbers 32:6) If this happened the rest of them would be discouraged, even fearful of going across the Jordan. They could well be resentful also – ‘we fought for them but they are not fighting for us’. They might rebel like their fathers did at Kadesh. Moses remembered that only too well.

However, they assured Moses that they would arm themselves and go up and fight till their brothers were settled in the land of Canaan. So he gave Reuben, Gad and the tribe of Manasseh their inheritance east of the Jordan. He solemnly warned them not to go back on their word – or they would lose this inheritance in the east (Numbers 32:30).

As Moses addressed Israel on the plain beside the Jordan, as he spoke encouraging them to go up and possess the Canaan, he reminded these two and one half tribes of their commitment to go across and fight with their brothers. *I commanded you at that time he said. The Lord your God has given you this land to possess. All your men of valour shall cross over before you brethren the children of Israel.* This was not a commitment to be forgotten. It was important to Moses that they all cross over the Jordan together.

Why was it important to Moses? Would it matter if these tribes stayed back? The Lord had promised them victory anyway. How could he expect them to leave their wives and children behind?

It was of the utmost importance to Moses for he was leading the people of God. ‘This was one nation under one God going in to possess one land’. Moses had struggled to lead these people since he was first called by the Lord at the burning bush. He struggled to maintain unity, to keep them as one people.

The British once proudly claimed that the sun never set on the British Empire. They indeed ruled over many nations. From this tiny island they went out and conquered nations having much greater populations than themselves. They had a disciplined, unified army but they also knew how to deal with the enemy – divide and rule was their motto.

They used this strategy very effectively for centuries. The devil of course used it before them and still uses it today against his enemy – the people of God.

The apostle Paul was aware of this strategy just as much as Moses was. Paul struggled all the days of his ministry to maintain unity in the assembly of Gods people. Time and again he had to exhort members of the church to walk together in unity – *endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit, the bond of peace*. He wrote this to the church at Ephesus (4:3). He also wrote to the church at Philippi (4:3), the church at Rome and almost all the churches exhorting them to unity, to oneness as the people of God.

Paul had to rebuke those causing disunity in the assembly of Gods people. He rebuked men for their teaching and their behaviour that provoked disunity. He even rebuked Peter for his divisive behaviour. Paul was ever alert to the wiles of the devil and his strategy to divide the church. He knew that a divided church would be weak and ineffective in preaching the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Moses commanded that all the tribes must go up together, including those settled in the east. Look at 3:18 again. *The Lord has given you this land*. It done, the Lord has assured them of victory. The land is yours to possess. But you must still go up possess it. And you must fight to possess it. And you must fight as one to possess.

Is this not a picture of the church? Paul thought so. He knew that Christ had won the victory on Calvary. Through his death he *defeated him who has the power of death, that is the devil* (Hebrews 2:14). The devil was defeated there at Calvary. Yet we see Paul as a fighter like no other. He was going up to possess the land, to possess his inheritance in Christ Jesus. But he knew that integral to that possession was the unity of Gods people.

In our individualistic society far too many Christians have come to think that they can also be individuals, doing what they like, when they like and how they like. Have you ever thought how your fellow worshippers are affected by your absence from worship? Are they discouraged when you are not present in the assembly ?

In closing let us remember that our Lord Jesus Christ was also passionate about unity among the people the Father had given him. Is this not the main focus of his great prayer in John 17? He prayed that *they may be one just as we are one...that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them just as you loved me* (John 17:22f).

Moses, Paul and our Lord Jesus himself, all regarded unity among the people of God as essential if the kingdom of God was to advance upon this earth. Do leaders of the church today have the same concern? Do we have the same concern? Your family like mine may well have suffered from disunity in the church – as have multitudes of others. What shame!

Shall we continue on in our divisive ways? How will the world know the love of God, how will they know that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, how will they know that God

sent his son Jesus Christ into this world to seek and to save the lost, if we are not one with Christ and with each other.

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*