

Holy War 2

HN 16/1/05 p

Reading: Deuteronomy 2:24-3:11, Revelation 17

Study: Deuteronomy 2:24-3:11

Palms : 95:1-5, 95:6-11, 135:6-11, 103:8-111

Through our God we shall do valiantly

It is he who will tread down our enemies (Psalm 60)

David knew that it was God who gave him the victory in battles that he fought. He knew that if God was not with him and his army they should stay at home.

The Israelites learnt this truth the hard way when they went up to fight against the Amorites in the south. They strapped on their weapons and presumed that the Lord would go with them. But he was not with them and they were routed. This new generation was called to go up and engage the Amorites east of the Jordan in battle. They were told to go up and possess the land. The Lord had given them victory. Would they obey?

They had come through the territory of Esau, Moab and Ammon peacefully – these were their brethren to whom the Lord had given the land as a possession. Now they were confronted by Amorites. Who were the Amorites? Apart from being descendants of giants they were idolaters and grossly immoral. They openly practiced ritual prostitution and child sacrifice. In the time of Abraham God declared that they were under divine judgment. They had had 400 years to repent!

So not only would the Lord be with his people in this battle, but the battle itself was the Lords. They were agents of God in what was a holy war, a war of judgment upon the enemies of God. All idolaters are enemies of God, as are all people who refuse to give glory to God as their creator. We will look further into this later – firstly let at look at the battle from the perspective of the people called to go up and fight.

Human perspective

Although the Lord had called upon Israel to go up and engage the two Amorite kings, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan, in battle, Moses sent a peace envoy to Sihon. He asked for safe passage through his territory just as was given by the others nations. The proud king refused the offer of peace. Sihon and all his people came out to fight against us at Jahaz (2:32).

Moses offered peace. It was refused. They came out to fight against Israel. What more could Moses have done from the human perspective. Was he not justified in going to battle against Sihon the Amorite?

Those who find it hard to understand this bloody campaign and others across the Jordan in the light of New Testament teaching – ‘love your enemies and do good to those who hate you’ – should remember that those who desired to be saved were saved. Sihon was offered peace but refused. Rahab and her house were saved in the battle at Jericho.

Divine perspective

This passage gives us a wonderful insight into the work of God in bringing about victory for his people. What does God do, how does he intervene into the affairs of men to ensure victory for his people?

Hardened king's heart

The Lord hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate (3:30). What tragic words these are. What greater tragedy could befall a man than that the Lord would harden his heart.

You will be thinking of another great man whose heart God hardened, Pharaoh the king of Egypt (Exodus 7:3). Moses offered him many opportunities to obey the word of God and let the people of God go. And what happened? His heart was hardened and eventually he and his whole army were destroyed in the Red Sea. God demonstrated his own sovereign power that his name might be honoured in all the earth.

Let us remember that even the people of God become hard of heart. Sin and disobedience hardens the heart. *Beware brethren...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13).* The parents of this new generation experienced hardening of their hearts there in the wilderness as they rebelled against the Lord (Psalm 95:8). Saul experienced hardening of his heart when he refused to heed the word of the Lord through the prophet Samuel.

Beware your heart does not become hard through the deceitfulness of sin!

Put fear upon the nations

The sovereign God not only hardened the heart of the king, but put fear into the hearts of their enemies. *I will put the dread and fear of you upon the nations under the whole heaven...they shall tremble and be in anguish because of you (2:25).* How amazing that this bunch of slaves wandering in out of the desert should strike fear into the heart of a nation where the people lived in walled cities.

It was the same in Jericho. The spies sent out by Joshua found the people of this city were in great fear – they were terrified of the people of God. *We have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt (Joshua 2:10).*

Do the nations fear the people of God today? How ridiculous you might say. God's people are ridiculed, mocked and persecuted all over the world. But stop and consider for

a moment why it is that Gods people are treated like this. In India the Christians are less than 3% of the population. Who would be afraid of such a tiny group within the population? Well militant Hindus are very afraid. They single out the Christians for persecution; they assault them and burn their churches. Why? Has God put fear into the hearts of the Hindus?

And what about our own nation? Believers are certainly not in the majority here either. Yet we see the press in particular always ready to ridicule what they call ‘fundamentalist’ Christians- those who believe the Bible to be the word of God. And who is targeted in pagan festivals like the Mardi Gras? Is there not some strange fear of believers among many in our society? God said I will put the terror and fear of you upon all the nations under heaven.

Utterly destroyed

Not only did the Lord call upon his people to go up and possess the land, at this time land east of the Jordan, but he also told them how to fight and how to finish the fight. It would be the same when they crossed over the Jordan – you shall conquer and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.

We took all his cities and utterly destroyed the men, women and little ones of every city; we left none remaining (2:34). Again in 3:6 in the kingdom of Og king of Bashan everything was *utterly destroyed* – only the livestock was left alive. Utterly destroyed is a translation of the Hebrew ‘cherem’. It is sometimes translated as ‘devoted’ – devoted to the Lord. It signifies the dedication of everyone and everything to the Lord, usually for destruction.

They were going up as agents of the Lord remember – from the divine perspective. They were not a barbaric and bloodthirsty people. They were agents of the Almighty carrying out his judgment upon the wicked. He could easily have used other ways to judge and destroy the wicked. He sent a flood upon the earth in the days of Noah – and all the wicked were destroyed. He sent fire and brimstone upon unrepentant sinners in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah – and they were all destroyed. *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right.* The sin of the Amorites had reached full measure and they were receiving the wages for their sin.

God is a holy God. Apart from judging the wicked, it was his sovereign purpose to establish a holy nation, a people who would worship God alone, a people who would walk according to his commands. The presence of idol worshippers in the holy land among his holy people would not be tolerated. Marriage with foreigners was forbidden lest the people of God be drawn away to worship idols – this had already happened at Baal Peor. It was therefore a theological necessity that every trace of idol worship be removed from the holy land.

The demand for holiness and purity was not of course limited to other nations. It was demanded among the people of God themselves. At Baal Peor on the plains of Moab the

people joined in idol worship. The Lord's anger was aroused and he destroyed thousands of Israelites.

There is an accursed thing in your midst said the Lord when Israel was defeated in the battle at Ai (Joshua 7:13). That thing must be removed. And so Achan who broke the law of 'cherem', was taken with his family and all his things and destroyed – the accused thing was removed from the holy nation.

In the early church we see the Lord acting similarly to maintain holiness among his people. The covetousness and secret greed of two members of the church was exposed (Acts 5). They had been lying against the Spirit of God. By the direct intervention of God they were removed and destroyed.

Not every sinner is removed and destroyed as immediately as were Ananias and his wife – though there are other examples in the Scripture of God's immediate judgment. God who is holy is also gracious. He is slow to anger *longsuffering toward and us and not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance* (II Peter 3:9).

But remember the time for repentance is short, that time is now. We have these examples before us of God's holiness, of his righteous judgment upon the wicked. Let us take heed. Let us be warned. Let us repent.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:9f).

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1 Acts 20:32; [I Cor. 15:50]; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; I Tim. 1:9

2 catamites, those submitting to homosexuals

3 male homosexuals