



The Divine Warrior
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INTRODUCTION

One of the most rewarding aspects of reading history is learning just how close the world came to a very different outcome. What if the British had won the battle of Saratoga in 1777 or Lee had swept the field at Gettysburg in 1863? What if the Japanese had won the Battle of Midway in 1942 or the Third Reich had prevailed at Stalingrad in 1943? What if cooler heads had not prevailed during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962? Insert your own experience of narrowly averting a disaster of some kind.

Narrative tension is part of what makes a good story. We love the back-and-forth drama, the hero who ekes out a victory in the nick of time. Will Gandalf prevail? Or will Sauron triumph? The same goes for a good sports game. Unless your favorite team is winning, who likes to watch a blowout?

To live in this world, even if you're the President of the United States, is to be confronted with all manner of natural and personal forces outside our control. It's part of our weakness as creatures. Even when we plan for all manner of contingencies, we still cannot guarantee outcomes. The best investment banker cannot guarantee a return. The best baseball team cannot guarantee a trophy. The best general cannot guarantee a victory. We are frail. We are finite. We are only human.

Not so our Great Creator, brothers and sisters. He knows the end from the beginning, not because he has some supernatural ability to peer down the corridor of time, but because he has conformed all things from eternity past to the perfection of his sovereign will. He does not take chances. He does not develop back up plans. He is not sitting on the edge of his seat wondering what will happen. He does all that he pleases. He always wins his battles!

And here's the amazing thing. Through the person and work of Christ, he invites you to share in his victory. Revelation 12:10-11, "And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the



Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

What is the word of our testimony? A profession of faith in the promises of God. What does it mean to love our lives even unto death? To obey the Lord no matter the cost. So what’s John saying? If you are willing to trust the promises of the God who always wins his battles and express your trust by obeying the God who always wins his battle, then rest assured, you will share in Christ’s victory over every evil power.

The Apostle Paul says it this way in Rom 8:35, 37, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

That’s what Israel forgot in Deuteronomy 1 and what Moses exhorts her to remember in Deuteronomy 2-3. **Victory is assured if you trust and obey the God who always wins his battles.** That’s Israel’s experience in this passage. It can be yours too. Here’s what you need to know.

1) GOD ACCOMPLISHES HIS SOVEREIGN WILL THROUGH OUR OBEDIENCE

Earlier in chapter 2, when Israel drew near to the land of Edom, Moab, and Ammon, the Lord said not once but three times, “I will not give you any of their land.” The pattern is suddenly broken in verse 24. “Behold, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land.”

When God says “No” to something, friends, it’s because he is saying “Yes” to something else. He’s not a cosmic killjoy who gets a high out of denying things. Don’t speak like that. Don’t spend time with those people. Don’t have sex before marriage. He says “No” to certain things because he wants us to experience the joy of something far better. This land is not for you, Israel. Why not? Because this land is. He’s the God who delights to give. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son...”

Don’t begrudge his prohibitions. Rejoice in the goodness of his provision, greatest of all the joy of knowing and serving him. In Israel’s case, how did God purpose to provide the land of Sihon the Amorite? verse 24, “Begin to take possession, and contend with him in battle.”



There are no less than six imperatives in verse 24. Rise up. Set out. Go over. Begin. Take possession. Contend. But what anchors them? What enables them? What ensures Israel's military labor will not be in vain? It's the sovereign hand of God. Verse 24, "I have given Sihon into your hand." Verse 25, "I will begin to put the dread and fear of you on the peoples."

Notice God is doing immeasurably more than acting based on foreknowledge of how other peoples and nations will respond to Israel. To the contrary, he is sovereignly determining the way they will respond by controlling their interpretations, directing their emotions, taking away their courage to fight. Israel didn't do that to the nations. God did! His sovereign power knows no bounds.

And it was his promise that gave Israel courage to contend with Sihon in battle, confident God would grant them the victory. The sovereignty of God in Scripture is never an excuse for disobedience. It's a life-giving, hope-sustaining, motivation for obedience.

What emboldens us to persevere in the battle against sin? The promises that God will complete his work of transforming us into the image of Christ. What sustains us in the sorrow of speaking the truth to children who want nothing to do with it? The promise that God's Word will not return void. What will strengthen you to keep living with a chronic illness or a difficult spouse? The promise that the tested genuineness of your faith will result in praise and glory and honor on the day Christ returns.

To say, "I have given Sihon into your hand," is to assert the priority of divine sovereignty. To say, "Begin to take possession," is to insist on the means of human responsibility. Such has always been God's way, brothers and sisters. He accomplishes his sovereign will through our obedience. Indeed, it's the knowledge of his sovereign will, revealed in pages of his Word, that compels our obedience!

2) OUR VICTORIES ARE ULTIMATELY THE LORD'S WORK

Moses' actions in verse 26 might seem, at first glance, like the opposite of what God told Israel to do. She's supposed to contend with Sihon in battle. So why does Moses send messengers with "Words of peace"? It's standard diplomatic rhetoric in keeping with the laws for warfare the Lord spells out in Deuteronomy 20:10-12.

"When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it. And if it responds to you peaceably and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it



shall do forced labor for you and shall serve you. But if it makes no peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it.”

Sihon refused Moses’ invitation to submit to Israel’s terms. Verse 30 identifies the reason. “But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as he is this day.” It was the same expression of divine judgment the Lord meted out against Pharaoh and his host in Egypt. God hardened his heart, ensuring that he would be destroyed.

Prov 21:1, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.” But how is that fair? Doesn’t God owe Sihon and his people an opportunity to submit to Israel’s terms and live? No, he doesn’t, friend, no more than he owes sinners like you and me an opportunity to repent and escape the coming day of judgment.

We don’t deserve God’s grace. Grace, by definition, is God giving what we do not deserve. None of us deserve salvation. We deserve for God to harden our hearts in response to our willful rejection of his authority. Hardening Sihon’s heart does not undermine God’s justice. It reveals his justice.

In Genesis 15, the Lord affirms his promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham’s descendants. They will first spend 400 years in a land that is not their own – Egypt. Genesis 15:16, “And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” What were the Amorites doing during the 400 years the Israelites were in Egypt? Filling up the measure of their sins until they reached a point where God finally said, “Enough.”

The destruction of Sihon and his people in verse 34 – men, women, and children – was not an outrageous act of genocide on the part of Israel. It was a divinely-ordained judgment against the Amorites in response to centuries of iniquity. God will not tolerate unrepentant sin forever. And he hasn’t changed. A day is coming, friend, when he will hold the entire world accountable, not just the Amorites.

Do not presume upon his patience and forbearance. Today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow may not be. You need to repent of your sins, embrace the Savior who received in his body the death you deserve so you could be forgiven, and hold fast to him as your Greatest Treasure, the only One who can make you right with God.



The Promised Land represents the place where God dwells. An unholy people cannot dwell in God's holy place. It's why those who are not part of God's holy people, the Amorites included, are summarily destroyed. They could not remain. It's also why God sent Israel herself into exile centuries later. When she refused to walk the path of holiness and righteousness, she couldn't remain any more than the Amorites.

God doesn't play favorites. If you are refusing to trust and obey the Lord, Sihon's death is a warning, a summons to flee to Christ for salvation. Yet even if you are, the death of Sihon and all his people still has something to say to you. Whatever measure of spiritual victory or physical success you experience in this life, know this. Every victory, every success in your life, including the decision you're making to turn from sin and run to Jesus, is ultimately the Lord's work!

Look at verse 32. "Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Jahaz. And the LORD our God gave him over to us, and we defeated him and his sons and all his people." Did Israel defeat them? Yes. But the emphasis is on what the LORD, Yahweh, the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God is doing. God gave Sihon over. God hardened his heart. God enabled Israel to defeat him. It wasn't ultimately Israel's battle. It was the Lord's! Her victory was the result of his work.

Part of me wants to know exactly how Israel defeated Sihon. What battlefield strategy did they use? What techniques did they employ? Pastor, tell me exactly what the saints who've gone before me have done to conquer the monster of pornography, slay the dragon of greed, or lead their prodigal children home to God? Give me a formula. Tell me the exact steps I need to take to secure the spiritual victory I long to know!

I have two things to say to you, friend. **First, God generously provides the guidance we need for every spiritual battle in the pages of his Word.** Scripture is entirely and gloriously sufficient. Can we benefit from the insights of modern psychology? Absolutely. But they cannot change the human heart. Only God can and he does it through the power of his Word. The Word searches. The Word convicts. The Word opens. The Word reveals. The Word holds forth the splendor and beauty of Christ, causing dead hearts to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Second, our greatest need in every spiritual battle is the faith that believes the battle is the Lord's and he always wins his battles! Said differently, experiencing spiritual victory in any area of your life always begins with remembering God's promises. Israel's



victory against Sihon is a perfect example. Notice how the Lord graciously repeats in verse 31

the very same promise he made to Moses back in verse 24. “Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to take possession, that you may occupy his land.”

And having remembered God’s promises and believed God’s promises, we then rest in the assurance that the battle is the Lord’s. Instead of anxious striving or fretful worrying, we express our trust in the Lord by obeying the Lord, doing the simple things he’s commanded us to do – meditate on his Word, spend time in prayer, pursue community with his people, share the Lord’s Supper, sit under biblical preaching – and watch as his power triumphs gloriously in our lives!

I’ll give you an example. Say a married couple comes to you with a history of poor communication. Might they benefit from a list of practical ideas for connecting with their spouse? Sure. But what’s the deeper issue? It’s probably not a lack of information. It’s a lack of faith, the difficulty of believing that after all these years, God is still at work, God hasn’t abandoned their marriage. And because he hasn’t abandoned them, they can work on their communication with the confidence that God is fighting for their relationship and that his power will prevail in their weakness.

When our trust in any spiritual battle is in the right place, the necessary acts of obedience through which God brings victory to pass in our lives have an uncanny way of working themselves out. Our faith isn’t a magic formula. It’s the lifeline that connects us to the God who saves, the channel through which we receive and experience his power in our lives. Ephesians 6:16, “In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one...”

What did he tell Israel? Trust me. I have given Sihon into your hand. What does he tell us? Trust me. I have given all things into Jesus’ hands. Ephesians 1:22, “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church...” And what is true of all who are united to Jesus by faith? Ephesians 2:6-7, he has “Raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

To be “Seated with him in the heavenly places” means what? It means right now, in this very moment, Christian, you share in Jesus’ spiritual victory over every power of evil in



the universe! Yes, we must learn how to live in the good of his victory. But you do not walk onto the battlefield as an underdog. You enter the arena eternally and irrevocably

bound to a King who has already conquered, the King who walked out of the tomb under his own power, proving even death itself could not hold him down.

And having won that decisive battle in the gospel, what sort of promises has he made to you, fearful saint, prone to discouragement, liable to condemnation? Philippians 1:6, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely...He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." Our victories are ultimately the Lord's work. Let that humble you. And let that encourage you. It's not an excuse for passivity in the battle. It's the assurance of success that keeps us going in the fight.

3) NO ENEMY IS TOO GREAT FOR THE LORD OUR GOD

After the victory over Sihon, King Og of Bashan with "All his people" attacks Israel at Edrei. It's a new threat. Deuteronomy doesn't tell us if Moses saw it coming or not. Regardless, when the threat arrived, so did a word from the Lord. Deuteronomy 3:2, "But the LORD said to me, 'Do not fear him, for I have given him and all his people and his land into your hand. And you shall do to him as you did to Sihon...'"

Notice two things about how the Lord cares for his people. **First, he knows our fears.** He knew Moses (and Israel) had reasons to fear Og. Verse 11 tells us he was a formidable man, the last remaining descendant of a race of giants known as the Rephaim. We don't have an exact height or weight. We do know his bed was 13' long and 6' wide. Og wasn't an imaginary enemy or a man-made fable. He was as real as the sunrise, a force to be reckoned with.

Isn't it comforting to know God is intimately familiar with the things that tempt us to fear? He doesn't comfort us from a position of blissful ignorance. He knew Og. And the words of comfort he spoke to Moses were as specific as his fears. He cares for you through his Word the very same way today, brothers and sisters. Read the psalms. They are brutally honest about the external and internal fears we confront in this life. And they are just as honest about the better reasons we have to trust the Lord. God knows our fears and addresses them head on.



Second, when fears arise in our life, our greatest need is to remember who he is and what he's promised to accomplish in our lives. "Do not fear him," the Lord said, "For I have given him and all his people and his land into your hand."

When you are afraid, what do you feel like you need the most? Do you need that person to change their mind or alter their actions? Do you need that contract or bid to be accepted? Do you need more money in your bank account or a vacation to forget your worries for a week or two? No. You need to see something that is just as real as your fears. You need to see the character and sovereign purposes of God.

There is an "I" that confronts all of our deepest anxieties, brothers and sisters. The "I" is the Lord Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. Therein lies the comfort we need. "Do not fear, for I..." Therein lies the perspective we lack. "Do not fear, for I..." Therein lies the assurance that we are never alone in our little corner of the universe. "Do not fear, for I..." I am God. I am present. I am working. This enemy that you are sorely tempted to fear is completely subject to my sovereign purposes.

The victory has yet to go down. But as far as God is concerned, it's a done deal. Why? Because he has resolved in the perfect sovereignty of his will to bring it to pass. Given what I have purposed to do, Israel, do not fear. Given what I have promised will happen, do not fear. Given what I have pledged to accomplish, do not fear. And what do you know? It all went down just the way God said it would. Verse 3, "And we struck him down until he had no survivor left."

You realize these are not idle stories, friends? This isn't mere history. This is history that testifies to the faithfulness of God who does exactly what he says he will do – not once or twice, but over and over again. When God says something, you can take it to the bank. He doesn't bounce checks.

Nor does he traffic in partial victories. He wins his battles, and he does so decisively and completely. Look at verse 4. "And we took all his cities at that time – there was not a city that we did not take from them – sixty cities, the whole region of Argob..." It was a gracious foreshadowing of all the battles Israel would soon wage in Canaan on the other side of the Jordan. Ultimately, it's a picture of the fullness of victory Christ won for us at the cross.

Colossians 2:13–15, "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by



canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

Christian, every enemy you encounter in this life, whether physical or spiritual, has already been given into Jesus’ hands no less than the Lord gave Og into Israel’s hands. And we have something far better to look upon to remember his victory than an iron bed. We have an empty tomb!

There are times our enemies in this world, the enemy of our own sinful nature, or the enemy of Satan and his demonic hosts look altogether intimidating. Verse 5 tells us the cities in the kingdom of Og were “Fortified with high walls, gates, and bars” – the very sort of cities that sent Israel crumpling in fear back in Deuteronomy 1:28, “The cities are great and fortified up to heaven.”

Besetting sins can feel like that. Fortified with bars. Coworkers who are out to get you for whatever reason can feel like that. High walls. Family members who refuse to listen can feel like that. Impenetrable gates. And all of it is no match for the power of God in the gospel – the good news of Christ’s victory over sin and death at the cross. Do you believe that, brothers and sisters? Or have you assigned a determinative power to that person or thing you fear that belongs to God alone?

Under the New Covenant, we’re not fighting against a physical people for a physical land like Israel. Our struggle is not against “Flesh and blood,” as Paul says in Ephesians 6:12. It’s against the spiritual forces of evil – the world, the flesh, the devil. And we wage war, we march forward, by proclaiming and holding fast to the truth of the gospel, taking ground from the kingdom of darkness as lost sinners are brought home to God.

The day of your salvation, Christian, was a marvelous spiritual victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. The coming day of your salvation when Christ returns will be a marvelous spiritual and physical victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. And there are innumerable victories God has prepared for you between this day and that day as the outworking of his once-for-all victory in the gospel.

Here’s the key question. Are you willing to trust him? And are you willing to express your trust by obeying his Word? Spiritual victories are not automatic. They are the reward of obedient faith, a faith that rests in God’s power to deliver us, not our power to deliver ourselves. Why? Because no enemy is too great for the Lord our God.



CONCLUSION

God accomplishes his sovereign will through our obedience. Our victories are ultimately the Lord's work. And no enemy is too great for the Lord our God. I love how Daniel Block summarizes the message of the whole passage. "This account shows there is no limit to what God is able to do for and through his people if they trust him." He's exactly right.

Victory is assured for those who are willing to trust and obey the God who always wins his battles.

That's the message of Israel's triumph over the Amorites east of the Jordan. It strengthened their faith for the battles to come. May it do the same for us, knowing in Jesus, the greatest battle has already been won, a victory that guarantees our own, come what may. In him, we have a glorious inheritance.