

## 2. God's protection or punishment

July 29, 2010

Let's face it, folks. The majority of people in this world think that they will go to heaven when they die. But they are literally scared to death of dying. I know that even many born-again believers of Jesus are the same when it comes to dying. Somehow the believers forget that the best place on earth pales in comparison with heaven.

The ones who go to heaven are the chosen ones by the Lord for their simple faith in Jesus Christ, not by their good works. They are protected by His faithfulness through His promises. We can bank on His promises a whole lot more than what the FDIC – Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation can provide. They supposedly guarantee that your deposits are backed by the government of the United States, but since it is in debt up to its eyeballs, I guess the FDIC's promises don't amount to a hill of beans.

God's protection for His chosen ones is great, but His punishment through His impeccable judgment is not something any of us wants to face. There is no gray area – either you are under His protection or you will face His eternal punishment that will not be reversed by any method.

This evening, we are going to unfold the past history of the Hebrew nation as their leader Moses revisits what they'd done in the wilderness.

### A. GOD'S PROTECTION FOR THE EDMITES

*Deuteronomy 2:1-6 "Then we turned and journeyed into the wilderness of the Way of the Red Sea, as the Lord spoke to me, and we skirted Mount Seir for many days. 2 And the Lord spoke to me, saying: 3 'You have skirted this mountain long enough; turn northward. 4 And command the people, saying, "You are about to pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. Therefore watch yourselves carefully. 5 Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. 6 You shall buy food from them with money, that you may eat; and you shall also buy water from them with money, that you may drink.*

Since the Edomites were descendants of Esau who was a brother of Jacob – a patriarch of Israel, Moses and the Jews were told not to declare war on them to take their land. First, Moses tried a friendly approach, but the Edomites wouldn't accept their terms. So the Israelites took another route that bypassed Mount Seir.

You know the story about how Jacob conned the blessings from his brother Esau when they were young. The Edomites still held a grudge against the descendants of Jacob, Israel. I am sure that you remember we studied that the Edomites rejoiced when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem from the Book of Amos and Obadiah.

Perhaps the most famous Edomite in the New Testament was Herod the Great. He was hated by the Jews because he was an Edomite but he wanted to be received and respected as a Jew.

Out of all problems we face in life, I believe that family disagreements are probably the most painful and the hardest to solve. In light of over 56% of marriages in America end up in divorce courts, I don't think it is necessary to elaborate on it.

Even the Bible also records so many of them.

- Cain killed his brother Abel in Genesis.
- Jacob and Esau were at each other.
- Jacob's four wives competed with one another.
- Jacob favored Joseph over his brothers and brought a dissension within the family.
- David's father-in-law king Saul hounded him and tried to kill him.

In the Christian family, brothers and sisters in the local church don't always love each other.

- The Corinthian church was divided four ways.
- The Galatian believers were biting and devouring each other.
- The believers in Ephesus needed to be kind and forgive each other.

Family feuds and church disagreements are at least somewhat confined, but when entire nations sustain hatred for one another and wage war, many innocent people get killed.

Moses did the right thing by obeying God's command and deliberately avoiding a costly and unprofitable confrontation.

*Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.*

There are times when avoiding conflict is cowardly, but there are other times when it's a mark of courage and wisdom.

*James 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Because of God's covenants with Esau through Isaac in Genesis 27, the Israelites were not allowed to attack them.

In v8-9, we find the Moabites were also protected by the Lord because of their ancestor Lot, Abraham's nephew. One of the more famous Moabites in the Bible was Ruth. She was a Moabite woman who married an Israelite man, a son of Naomi, and became grandmother to king David and one of the ancestors of the Messiah.

## **B. GOD'S PROVISION FOR ISRAEL**

*Deuteronomy 2:7 For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing."*

For forty years, their feet didn't swell up, their clothes didn't wear out. I've heard that when you are lacking in nutrition, your feet get swollen. Obviously, these Hebrews were not lacking in nutrition for last 40 years. I am sure that it was a major bummer for the ladies during that time. They didn't have excuses to buy new wardrobes and sandals.

Moses and the people were in the desert, but what was he going to do with them?

They had to be fed, and feeding 2 or 3 million people requires a lot of food. According to the Quartermaster General in the U.S. Army, it is reported that Moses would have to have had 1500 tons of food each day. Do you know that to bring that much food each day, 11 freight train cars would be required!

Besides you must remember, they were out in the desert, so they would have to have firewood to use in cooking the food. This would take 4000 tons of wood and 29 more freight train cars, just for one day. And just think, they were forty years in transit.

And Oh yes! They would have to have water. If they only had enough to drink and wash a few dishes and clothes and bathe time to time, it would take 11,000,000 gallons each day and 175 freight train tank cars, almost 3 miles long, just to bring water!

And then another thing! Each time they camped at the end of the day, a campground two-thirds the size of the State of Rhode Island was required. Think of it! This much space for camping.

Do you think Moses figured all this out before he left Egypt? I think not! You see, Moses believed in God. God took care of these things for him. Now do you think God has any problem taking care of all your needs?

I asked the Lord to bless you as I prayed for you today. To guide you and protect you as you go along your way. His love is always with you, His promises are true. And when we give Him all our cares, you know He will see us through.

Our God is an Awesome God, isn't He?

### **C. GOD'S PUNISHMENT FOR THE FIRST GENERATION OF EXODUS**

*Deuteronomy 2:13-16 "Now rise and cross over the Valley of the Zered.' So we crossed over the Valley of the Zered. 14 And the time we took to come from Kadesh Barnea until we crossed over the Valley of the Zered was thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war was consumed from the midst of the camp, just as the Lord had sworn to them. 15 For indeed the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from the midst of the camp until they were consumed. 16 "So it was, when all the men of war had finally perished from among the people,*

It was a turning point in their history when the Jews crossed into the Zered Valley, for now the older generation was gone except for Moses, Caleb, and Joshua. With their time of divine discipline ended, Israel could now look forward to defeating their enemies and moving into the land which the Lord had promised to them.

In these brief verses, Moses covered thirty-eight years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness. This was a period when they just took up time, waiting for the generation of unbelief to die so that the generation of faith could take the Promised Land.

Can you imagine you being the last person alive out of the first generation of the group who were older than 20 years old when they came out of Egypt? Everybody in

the whole camp hopes that you kick the bucket soon so that they can settle in the Promised Land instead of wandering around in the wilderness.

If you start to choke because something you just swallowed, nobody in the camp would do a Heimlich maneuver to you – hoping that you would die soon.

By the way, why thirty-eight years? After this teaching by Moses, it took another two years to conquer the land they were supposed to occupy.

#### **D. GOD'S PUNISHMENT FOR KING SIHON AND KING OG**

From chapter 2 verse 24 to chapter 3 verse 11, we find two kings and their followers got punished by the Lord through the Israelites.

There are verses that disturb many readers, Christians and non-Christians alike:

*Deuteronomy 2:34-35 We took all his cities at that time, and we utterly destroyed the men, women, and little ones of every city; we left none remaining. 35 We took only the livestock as plunder for ourselves, with the spoil of the cities which we took.*

*Deuteronomy 3:6 And we utterly destroyed them, as we did to Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and children of every city. 7 But all the livestock and the spoil of the cities we took as booty for ourselves.*

Why does God of mercy, God of forgiveness, God of love and kindness destroy everyone in these cities including children and little ones? Some would say, "God of Christianity is sadistic to kill children."

If you did some research about the people who lived in that area during this time, you may not think that they were such innocent people after all. The practices of these people were horribly vile beyond description. The only way to protect the Israelites from these people was getting them out of the land for four hundred years.

While the Israelites were in Egypt, God gave these people plenty of time to repent from their pagan rituals, but they didn't. The nations Israel encountered east of the Jordan and in Canaan were brutal people who sacrificed their own children to the false gods that they worshiped. Male and female prostitutes served in their temples and sexual intercourse was an important part of the Canaanite religion.

God had been long-suffering with these wicked nations even in Abraham's day, but now their time had run out and their punishment had come. If these evil civilizations had not been exterminated, Israel would have been in constant danger of being tempted by pagan idolatry. In fact, that's what did happen during the Period of the Judges, and God had to chasten His people to bring them back to the true God.

#### **E. GOD'S PREPARATION FOR ISRAEL** *Deuteronomy 3:12-29*

The victories over Sihon and Og, the two mighty kings of the lands east of the Jordan, were themselves preparation for the battles Israel would fight when they arrived in Canaan. The new generation was getting its first real taste of warfare and was quickly discovering that their God Jehovah could be trusted to overcome every enemy. All that the army had to do was obey God's orders, trust His promises, and courageously confront the enemy.

A second step of preparation for conquest was the settling of the two-and-a-half tribes in the territory that had been captured on the east side of the Jordan. This

land was given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. They especially wanted this land because they were herdsmen and the territory was suitable for their livestock.

The two-and-a-half tribes were allowed to fortify the cities for their families to live in and also to build pens for their flocks and herds. But it was understood that the men of war in the tribes would cross the Jordan with the other tribes and help their brothers conquer the land. Once that was done and all the tribes had been assigned to their inheritance, the men of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh could return home to their families.

A third step of preparation for conquest was the appointment of Joshua to succeed Moses and lead the nation into Canaan, so that by the time Moses left the scene, Joshua was ready to take charge.

*Deuteronomy 3:21-22 And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, 'Your eyes have seen all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings; so will the Lord do to all the kingdoms through which you pass. 22 You must not fear them, for the Lord your God Himself fights for you.'*

Remembering God's past faithfulness is a key to present and future victory.

Moses wanted to go into the Promised Land with the Israelites so much but the Lord says, "Enough of that." Because Moses represented Him incorrectly, that was his punishment. Nobody in God's kingdom should think that he or she is not replaceable or expendable. If we go against the will of the Lord, He will make sure that we will be replaced and someone else will have the privilege of being used by God Almighty.

## **F. APPLICATIONS**

- 1) There are times when avoiding conflict is cowardly, but there are other times when it's a mark of courage and wisdom.
- 2) Remembering God's past faithfulness is a key to present and future victory.