

February 18, 2018  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Deuteronomy  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2018 David J. Whitcomb

**HE KNOWS YOUR GOING THROUGH  
THIS GREAT WILDERNESS**  
**Deuteronomy 2:1-23**

The title for this message comes from verse seven of our text. *For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He knows your going through this great wilderness.*

One might think at first glance that there is a misspelling in that the pronoun *your* should actually be the contraction *you're* (you are). It does seem like God would say to the people through Moses, "I know you are going through the wilderness." But in fact the spelling is correct as it stands. God knows your going. God knows my going.

Because God knows the path we are traveling, we can rest assured that He is working His plan. Doesn't it seem like people who are walking a pathway determined by God should be able to rest contentedly in the confidence that God has this thing under control?

Part of the problem we deal with is the natural propensity to make our own choices, determine the path we want to walk, and try to arrange circumstances according to our pleasure. That is not always a possible scenario for a couple of reasons. First is the fact that we really don't know what is the best way for us to be shaped into the image of Christ. Second is the issue of sin. We live in a sinful world which is a good description of "wilderness." Because we have to walk through this wilderness, we can't always control circumstances. Furthermore, there are times when our wilderness is the result of our own sin or someone else's sin that impacts us.

Not to worry! God has a plan. He is working that plan. He demonstrated this principle so vividly with His people as He led them through the wilderness. It is sad that they had to go through the wilderness. But even while they were wandering around in that desolate place for thirty-eight years, God blessed and taught their

children. Now it was time for the second generation to enter the Promised Land. Moses was instructing them before he passed off the scene. There is much for us to learn in the instruction.

**Blessings in the Wilderness (vv.1-7).**

The first four verses of this chapter remind us that God has a plan (v.1-4). Moses rehearsed the fact that, according to God's plan, God's people wandered many days. *Then we turned and journeyed into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea, as the LORD told me. And for many days we traveled around Mount Seir (v.1).*

If we look at a map of ancient Bible lands, we can trace the path as God's people left Goshen for Succoth (Ex.12:37). Then, God sent the people north where they crossed the "Red Sea" (a body of water large enough to be a wall of water on the left and right) somewhere near Migdol and Baal-zephron (Ex. 14:2). After crossing the large body of water, God led the people south to Mt. Sinai where God gave the law, and the tabernacle and its furnishings were built (Ex. 19-40). All of this traveling up to his point had taken about three months. As far as we can tell, the people hung out around Sinai for many days (probably about 2 years).

Then it was time to move to the Promised Land. To that end, God led the people north to Kadesh-Barnea where they sent out the spies, rebelled against God, refused to enter the Promised Land and then were beaten by the Amorites (Deut. 1:42-45).

Now the story in our text picks up with Israel hanging out in the area of Seir (south of Kadesh), which is the wilderness where they wandered. The term *many days* in verse one means about 38 years.

After the many years of wandering, God directed His people's path in a new way. *Then the LORD said to me, "You have been traveling around this mountain country long enough. Turn northward and command the people, 'You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful'" (vv.2-4).*

It was time for God's people to move on according to God's plan. The first generation who rebelled are now pretty much all dead as God had promised. So God instructed them to move northward toward the Promised Land. Again a view of the map shows how the nation of Israel was going to pass through land where their relatives

from Esau lived. Moses rightly instructed the people at that time that they would cause fear to the Moabites because of their massive number. It is likely the nation numbered between 2 and 6 million. That could be as large as the population of South Carolina. How could a mass of people that large possibly survive for forty years in the wilderness?

They survived because of God's previous provision (v.7). It might seem hard for us to accept, but God blessed the work of their hands. *For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands (v.7a)*. Human wisdom might conclude that somehow a nation of millions of people survived wandering around in the wilderness for 40 years. God reminded them that they not only survived but prospered. This prosperity came not just to the second generation, but to their parents who had rebelled. How gracious God was to them.

And God's blessing was more than that. *These forty years the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing (v.7c)*. God gave them water. God gave them miracle bread and quail. Later in Moses's historical account we will read, *And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years (Deut. 8:2-4)*.

In spite of the people's continual complaining and sin God kept working with them, maturing them, helping them become obedient. The maturing process was not an easy time. But through it all, God knows. *He knows your going through this great wilderness (v.7b)*. God knew exactly what the first generation was going through. God knew what this generation about to enter the Promised Land had experienced most of their lives. God knew because God orchestrated the circumstances. They were trying circumstances as a result of the people's sin and rebellion. God even foreknew that rebellion. God was not surprised when the people rebelled at Kadesh-barnea and spent the next 38 years wandering.

## Encouraging Illustrations (vv.5-6; 8-23).

Let's take a minute to review the scene. Up to this point Moses has been telling the story that covered the last 40 years. For the most part it was the story of these people's parents and their rebellion and death-ward consequences. Still we must remember that all of this second generation, except for the little children and babies, had spent their lives in the wilderness drawing on God's provision and blessing. Now the story was getting close to "up to the present." Most recently, God had led the nation through the land of their relatives that Moses recounts in the rest of this second chapter.

Moses informed the people that God gave Mount Seir to Esau (vv.5-6,8). Why did He do that? God's provision was according to His sovereign choice. Therefore, the instruction was, *Do not contend with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession (v.5)*.

The area around Mount Seir, close to where Israel spent 38 years wandering, belonged to Esau's lineage. God would not give any of that land to Israel. It belonged to Esau's people because God gave it to them. Did the fact that God gave that land to who He wanted to give it register with God's people? And by the way, how did that "gift" come to pass? *The Horites also lived in Seir formerly, but the people of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them and settled in their place, as Israel did to the land of their possession, which the LORD gave to them (v.12)*.

This historical account should have rung a bell with the people who were about to enter a land owned by other people groups, but a land God promised to give them. If God did it once, could He not do it again?

The region of Mt. Seir was not desolate, unpopulated land when God gave it to Esau's lineage. The Horites had lived in the land many years. But because God chose to give that land to Esau, his relatives dispossessed them, destroyed them, and took the land for themselves. That story ought to sound familiar. God did it even though it looked like the people of Esau did it! Later in the text we read, *As He did for the people of Esau, who live in Seir, when He destroyed the Horites before them and they dispossessed them and settled in their place even to this day (v.22)*.

Because the land of Seir was God's gift to Esau, Israel needed to respect God's choice. It didn't matter if there was animosity or dislike toward the people. Because God's plan was obvious, God's people needed to respect it. To that end, they were to pay for whatever the nation consumed on the way through. *You shall purchase food from them for money, that you may eat, and you shall also buy water of them for money, that you may drink (v.6).* And so God's people obeyed. *So we went on, away from our brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Seir, away from the Arabah road from Elath and Ezion-geber. And we turned and went in the direction of the wilderness of Moab (v.8).*

According to God's plan, it was time to move north. He led His people to the region called Ar. God had given Ar to Moab's people (vv.9-11). Moab? Didn't he have a bit of a checkered history? He sure did. Moab was the son of Lot and his older daughter (Genesis 19:37). The horrible story reads like this:

*Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters. And the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father." So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father. He did not know when she lay down or when she arose (Genesis 19:30-33).*

Then we read, *The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day (Genesis 19:37).* That was not exactly a God-honoring situation. Lot had so much opportunity to learn how to love and serve God as he lived under the influence of Abraham. The influence never seemed to impact him as he lived his life in lust and greed and taught his children to do the same.

But notice what God did for Lot's grandson. God blessed Moab (vv.9-11). *And the LORD said to me, "Do not harass Moab or contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land for a possession, because I have given Ar to the people of Lot for a possession." (The Emim formerly lived there, a people great and*

*many, and tall as the Anakim. Like the Anakim they are also counted as Rephaim, but the Moabites call them Emim (vv.9-11).*

God would not give any of the Moabite land to Israel. God protected their possession even though Moabites did not honor God and replaced Him with their imaginary gods. God had given Ar to Lot's grandson. Why? ---- He wanted to.

Were any of these illustrations of God's sovereign blessing according to His choice registering with God's people? God was preparing to send His people into a land possessed by powerful and well-established people groups. Could they actually take the land from them and possess it? Did God give it to them? Why? He wanted to.

Moses reminded the second generation that God let the rebels die according to His promise (vv.13-16). Why would God do that to people who did what God commanded (v.13)? *"Now rise up and go over the brook Zered." So we went over the brook Zered (v.13).* After wandering for 38 years, when God said, "Move" the people moved. It looks like the people had a change of heart. Now they willingly obeyed God. Yes, but remember who these people were. By now most of the rebels were dead. It would appear that their children had learned well that when God speaks the wise man and woman obey.

The first generation of God's people reaped what they sowed. *And the time from our leaving Kadesh-barnea until we crossed the brook Zered was thirty-eight years, until the entire generation, that is, the men of war, had perished from the camp, as the LORD had sworn to them. For indeed the hand of the LORD was against them, to destroy them from the camp, until they had perished. So as soon as all the men of war had perished and were dead from among the people (vv.14-16).*

The 38 years of testing, wandering, and finally death was a matter of God's timing. He took that long to fulfill His promise that none of the rebels at the Golden Calf incident would enter the Promised Land. The hand of the Lord was against them as He had sworn (vv.14-15). Consider the timing. We read, *So as soon as all the men of war had perished and were dead from among the people the LORD said to me, "Today you are to cross the border of Moab at Ar" (Deuteronomy 2:16-18).* God did what He promised to do!

What happened to Moab's half brother? God gave land to the Ammonites (vv.17-23). Ben-ammi was the son of Lot and his

younger daughter. *The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day (Genesis 19:38).* Again this was a horrible, wicked rebellion against God's law. The relatives of Ben-ammi had no time for God at all. They were pagan, idol worshipers. And God blessed them.

God protected the possession He gave to the Ammonites (vv.17-23). It was not that they had been so brave or wise to take the land. God gave the land to the Ammonites. *The LORD said to me, "Today you are to cross the border of Moab at Ar. And when you approach the territory of the people of Ammon, do not harass them or contend with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot for a possession" (vv.17-19).*

God had taken the land from a great many big people. *(It is also counted as a land of Rephaim. Rephaim formerly lived there – but the Ammonites call them Zamzummim – a people great and many, and tall as the Anakim; but the LORD destroyed them before the Ammonites, and they dispossessed them and settled in their place (vv.20-21).* So, God protected the Ammonites from Israel at this time. That would not always be the case in the future. In the Judges period, God raised up the Ammonites to punish stubborn Israel, but then raised up judges to defeat the Ammonites. David would thoroughly defeat the Ammonites and Moabites. But for now, God protected them because He wanted to.

There is one more illustration of God's sovereign choice in this text. *As for the Avvim, who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim, who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and settled in their place (v.23).* This example almost seems out of place. Notice that these Avvim people lived in the area of Gaza. We know who they were. Gaza was one of the cities of the Philistine Petapolis – Gaza, Ekron, Ashdod, Gath, and Ashkelon. The Caphtorim who came from Caphtor were the Philistines. They moved into Palestine (which is named after the Philistines) in the early 1200's with the intent of taking over Egypt. Remember they were the ones who kept filling up the wells Abraham dug around Beersheba. Rameses III, Pharaoh of Egypt, defeated them and they settled in western Palestine, but were always trying to push east.

Okay, but they were way over on the west coast of the Promised Land. Why did God bring them up? God gave the illustration for

future reference. If any of the above dates or names sound familiar, they should. God led His people out of Egypt in 1440 B.C. They began to settle the Promised Land by 1405 B.C. The period of the "Judges" lasted until Samuel in about 1050 B.C. The Philistines became the perennial thorn in Israel's side from the time of the first judges until Solomon. Why did God ever allow that people group to enter the land and drive out the Avvim? *They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses (Judges 3:4).* God had a plan and God was working His plan.

Now by way of conclusion, let's review some lessons we learn from the illustrations. We have learned that God does whatever He chooses to do. Sometimes it is difficult for us to understand God's choices. That is especially the case when we think of precedence. If God is holy, why would He bless an unholy people like Russia, China, your co-worker, your adversarial family member? He would bless who He wants to bless because that is God's choice.

How could God ever use a person who sinned in the past to accomplish His will? You can ask that question regarding Saul of Tarsus. Or maybe even check with David, or Joseph, or even Peter, James and John — all who were as human as we are. God delights to bring beauty from ashes.

According to Moses's rehearsal of events, God blessed and prospered His people even though they had rebelled. Yes, and God also kept His promise about killing all of the rebels even while they prospered. Sometimes it is difficult for us to allow consequences for past sin to exist alongside blessing for current obedience.

Above all, we must remember that God is in control and will do what He deems most fitting to bring honor to Himself. We should rejoice to remember the way God moved and manipulated whole nations and people groups to bring about His will. We should rejoice to remember that God is working in our lives right now to bring glory to Himself. He does not ask us to understand His work or to explain what He is doing. He asks us to trust Him and obey Him. Do you believe that God knows YOUR GOING?