

## INTRODUCTION

A down payment for a house, an appetizer to a feast and a movie trailer – they all serve a similar purpose. They alert people that something better is coming. They also create a suspense atmosphere for what is ahead. Sports fans have the same anticipation in their favorite teams. They wait for months before the season begins. During that period of time the squads make a ton of preparations. They evaluate the performance from the previous season. They dismiss players that did not do so well, and try out new members to fill the vacancies. Of course, there will be lots of practice with strength-training and new game plans. When all the changes are in place, the coaches want to know if their teams are ready for contest. In come with the preseason games. It is a dress-rehearsal for all the personnel. Whether win or lose, the result will not be counted toward the final record. But coaches will be anxious to see what strategies actually work and where further adjustments will be needed. In the book of Numbers, the Israelites were involved in real wars. There was no preseason warm-up. How could some wilderness wanderers defeat experienced soldiers? There was no doubt that they had to trust God rather than relying on their own strength. The good news is that God had written the outcome even before the Israelites went to a battle. Today, God also drafts us as His spiritual warriors. From today's story let us learn that God has declared the final victory; and He invites us to partner with Him to fight our enemy.

When we read today's passage we come across the names of many places. We can do a quick overview of the 1400 BC geography to get some idea of the setting. I would like to draw your attention to the **map** on the screen. Remember that by this time the Israelites had completed the 40 years of wilderness wandering. They were heading north toward Canaan. They just traveled around the outskirts of Edom because the king did not allow the Israelites to go through his country. In the days ahead, God's people had to walk past a few nations. From the south to the north beyond Edom there are Moab, the Amorites, Ammon and Bashan. The boundaries for those people groups were defined by a few rivers: Zered, Arnon and Jabbok. God gave the Israelites clear instructions on how to treat the four people groups we just mentioned. God preserved the land of Moab and Ammon because those people were the descendants of Lot, who was the nephew of Abraham. God forbade His people to conquer their territory. In contrast, God ordered the Israelites to completely destroy the Amorites and the citizens at Bashan. With all that background in mind, we will now look at the two battles.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. 強中之強 Overcome the Overcomers

First, the Israelites had to defeat the Amorites. I call it a battle to overcome the overcomers. The passage tells us the Amorites overcame the Moabites years ago, and seized a piece of their land. Now the Israelites had to overcome the Amorites and kick them out. God's people now camped in the valley of Zered, right outside the southern border of the Amorites. The Israelites sent a few messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites. They delivered a request in **verse 22**: "Let us pass through your country. We will not turn aside into any field or vineyard, or drink water from any

well. We will travel along the king's highway until we have passed through your territory." It was the identical message they told the king of Edom. They were only in transit. They would take the major pathway. They would not touch anything as they walked through the area. However, just like the king of Edom replied, Sihon did not welcome the Israelites. Worse still, he sent his army to attack the Israelites. Thus, the two groups engaged in a battle. **Verses 24-25** tell us the results of the war: 24 Israel, however, put him to the sword and took over his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, but only as far as the Ammonites, because their border was fortified. 25 Israel captured all the cities of the Amorites and occupied them, including Heshbon and all its surrounding settlements. The Israelites killed Sihon and occupied his land. Verse 24 says it was from the Arnon to the Jabbok. That was the whole territory that used to belong to Sihon, of which Heshbon was the capital city. **Deuteronomy chapter 2** fills in further details about the itinerary of the Israelites. The book was written as a recollection of the major events during the past 40 years. It was a testimony of God's faithfulness to encourage the new generation of Israelites. In **verse 30**, Moses explained what God did behind the scene to give the Israelites a victory: "But Sihon king of Heshbon refused to let us pass through. For the Lord your God had made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate in order to give him into your hands, as he has now done." Here we see a few expressions that we are familiar with. God made Sihon's "spirit stubborn" and his "heart obstinate." Those two descriptions go in parallel. Back then before God's people left Egypt, God also caused Pharaoh to harden his heart. Those phrases depict the same mental condition. Those two kings were determined to oppress the Israelites. Little did they know that the spiritual reason for their defeats was that God intended to judge them. From the verse, we also read that God gave Sihon into the hands of the Israelites. It means that God guaranteed them a win. As a result, the Israelites completely destroyed the Amorites, and captured their cities and properties. It must be a huge boost in the morale of God's people. Besides, God gave them another encouraging message in **verse 25** of the same **Deuteronomy** passage: "This very day I will begin to put the terror and fear of you on all the nations under heaven. They will hear reports of you and will tremble and be in anguish because of you." God used four words – terror, fear, tremble and anguish – to describe how the foreign nations would feel when they thought of Israel. It was because those worshippers of false gods clearly saw that Jehovah was behind the Israelites. That was why they could defeat Pharaoh and leave Egypt. That was why they could triumph over the Canaanite kings one after another. There were in fact spiritual warfare behind the physical battles. God pronounced a holy war to the Canaanite idols. God would be fighting for His people. Today, God delivers us from the dark domain and recruits us to be His spiritual warriors. We cannot fight this war by our own strength. We must rely on God in order to win. Paul told us in **Ephesians 1:19-20** that the power of God is working in us—  
19 And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. God's power that is great enough to raise Jesus from the dead is now in every believer. Are you connected to this power? If not, then you are counting on your own strength to defend Satan's attack. Nowadays, most people plug in their phones before they go to bed. It will make sure that the batteries are fully-charged for the next day. Brothers and sisters: are your spiritual battery always at 100%? Do you have a close and growing relationship with Jesus? It all goes back to the basics of reading the Bible every day, pray to God for strength and wisdom and edify one another in church meetings. Any time you fight this spiritual battle alone, then you are destined to fail. Our enemy is powerful and crafty. But do not forget that God is on our side. **1 John 4:4** reads: You, dear children, are from God and have

overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. If we do not overcome the devil's attack with the power from God, then we will be overcome by the dark force. For example, when a temptation comes, the Holy Spirit in us will flash a warning light. We need to cry out to God for help, praying: "Lord, I am weak by myself. I need your strength to protect me." Then you can say "no" to the enticement and walk away by the power of God that is in you. The secular world is a battleground. Satan wants to confuse us into believing that we live in a playground. He uses various tactics to lure us away from following our Lord. It can be money, success, fame, material possessions, outward appearance and entertainment. Do not get me wrong. All those items I just mentioned can be part of God's blessings. However, if our hearts are fully devoted to those things, we forget the reason why God saved us. God calls us to be His people. We are to reflect His glory. If we attract people's attention to us rather than to the Lord living in us, then we have fallen into Satan's trap. The devil can also use hardship to stumble us. It can be frustration over difficulties, bitterness about the past, anxiety concerning the future, sorrow for loss, anger, diseases, etc. Satan spreads doubt in our mind, wondering if God still cares about us and whether He will protect us and provide for us. Brothers and sisters: we have to stay alert to all those weapons. Go back to the fortress God erects for us. Allow God's truth to infuse our hearts. We belong to the Lord. He has overcome our spiritual enemy. We can only have victory when we draw near to God.

## 2. 以寡敵眾 Outnumbered the Numbers

God helped the Israelites to overcome the overcomers. They were 1-0 so far in this round of military campaign. Next, they would have another confrontation at Bashan. I describe their next battle as a challenge to outnumber the numbers. God's people had to deal with a multitude of soldiers. As the Israelites traveled further north, Og, the king of Bashan led his troop to go to war. God rallied behind the Israelites once again. Look at [verse 34](#) – The Lord said to Moses, "Do not be afraid of him, for I have handed him over to you, with his whole army and his land. Do to him what you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon." God promised to hand Og into the hands of the Israelites just like how He treated Sihon. Therefore, God's people marched out in faith. Eventually, the Israelites completely demolished their enemies. They also seized all the land and possessions. This victory may sound like a piece of cake. The records in the book of [Deuteronomy](#) tell us that the Israelites did not encounter some boys' scouts and sand castles. Look at [3:4-5](#) – 4 "At that time we took all his cities. There was not one of the sixty cities that we did not take from them – the whole region of Argob, Og's kingdom in Bashan. 5 All these cities were fortified with high walls and with gates and bars, and there were also a great many unwalled villages." Just imagine that! Sixty cities reinforced with high walls plus other villages. How many soldiers the Israelites had to combat with? How many weapons they had to overcome? And how much time it would take to knock down just one stronghold? But as the battles went on, the Israelites experienced victory after victory. Their momentum would be built up. What God told them was true. He gave the enemies over to their hands. God helped His people outnumbered the numbers. At the conclusion of the battles with the Amorites and at Bashan, Moses encouraged his successor, Joshua, in [verses 21-22](#) of the chapter: 21 ... "You have seen with your own eyes all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings. The Lord will do the same to all the kingdoms over there where you are going. 22 Do not be afraid of them; the Lord your God himself will fight for you." There would be many wars in the near future before they could finally conquer Canaan. For sure they would be outnumbered. But the

battle did not belong to the Israelites as if they were invading other nations like a tyrant. They battle was God's battle. He would chase out the Canaanites, and He would give their land to the Israelites. God sends us into the world to experience spiritual victory. However, as Christians, we are always outnumbered by our enemy. Jesus told us in [Matthew 7:13-14](#) – 13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” The reason is simple. The world sells treasure and pleasure that most people are going after. But Jesus told us to deny ourselves and take up our cross to follow Him. It is completely contrary to what the world preaches. The world tells us to care about our own business and to accumulate as much toys as we can get. It says since we only live once, we have to work hard and play hard. Non-believers think that the moral values in the Bible are only good for study. They believe that honest people will be taken advantage of, showing compassion is a waste of time and money and being patient is seen as slow. Our enemy exerts his influence through politics, education and entertainment to brainwash the public that there is no God or absolute truth. You will sense the pressure to blend in to the secular world every time you turn on the internet, go to the stores or even at work-place. Christians will definitely feel that we are outnumbered. But we are never alone. God is on our side. Jesus prayed for His disciples in [John 17:14-15](#) – 14 “I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” The same prayer is for us too. In fact, the Bible says that Jesus is now sitting on the right-hand side of the Heavenly Father to pray for you and me. We may feel outnumbered in the spiritual warfare. But God will never forsake us like orphans. We have the Holy Spirit living inside us to remind us of God's truth and to strengthen us when we are weak. God is only a prayer away when we need His help.

## CONCLUSION

God has declared the final victory; and He invites us to partner with Him to fight our enemy. The Israelites had to wrestle with the two kings and their armies. But in the spiritual realm, God had defeated the dark force behind the two nations. He invited the Israelites to experience the victory. God's people had gone through a lot of changes in the past. God rescued them from slavery and was about to give them rest in Canaan. There was failure when they united to complain. But there would be victory when they united to combat. Isn't Christian life like that too? God redeemed us when we were in the bondage of sin. He helps us grow in our faith day by day. We look forward to the future glory in heaven. The lesson for the Israelites and for us as Christians is the same. When God's people grumble, they will tumble. However, when they learn to humble before God, they will rumble. Our enemy is always looking for ways to attack us. We have to stay strong in the Lord and take courage. In 1993, Christian song-writer Don Moen released his well-known album “God with Us.” Some of you may remember the song “God Will Make A Way.” But there is another beautiful song “Be Strong and Take Courage” in the same record. Part of the lyrics read: “So, be strong and take courage. Do not fear or be dismayed. For the Lord will go before you, and His light will show the way. Be Strong and take courage. Do not fear or be dismayed. For the one who lives within you, will be strong in you today.” That is the message we need each and every day in our walk with the Lord. In closing, let us listen to part of the song.