

“From thence they removed, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, which is in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites; for Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. Wherefore it is said in the BOOK OF THE WARS OF THE LORD, What he did in the Red sea, AND in the Brooks of Arnon.” Num. 21:13,14.

Here is a great military campaign, that Moses and the children of Israel kind of stumbled into on their road to the Promised Land; and it compares in size and intensity very favorably to the Battle of the Red Sea where Pharaoh and the entire Egyptian army were completely destroyed, and which became the subject of sermon, poem and song during all of the days of the 3,500+ years from that day to this, and is likely to be the subject of more highly animated discussions and songs in heaven throughout all time to come. The Holy Ghost gave us many details in the history of the Battle of the Red Sea. This wealth of details does not accompany the Battle of the River Arnon which is the subject of our text today. But, much is given us, and we are able to figure out much more from what is given us, so as to make this word and doctrine well worth the labor. I am satisfied that the *“Book of the Wars of the Lord,”* tells us generously of, 1) *“What the Lord did in the Red sea, AND, 2) IN THE BROOKS OF ARNON, AND AT THE STREAM OF THE BROOKS THAT GOETH DOWN TO THE DWELLING OF AR, AND LIETH UPON THE BORDER OF MOAB.”* Num. 21:14,15.

Now we get corroboration of the Red Sea/Arnon River Battles dichotomy from the testimony of Rahab the Harlot; to wit: *“And before they (i.e., the two spies of Israel) were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof, And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard 1) how the Lord dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and, 2) what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, 1) Sihon and 2) Og, whom ye UTTERLY DESTROYED. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you; for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath...And they said unto Joshua, Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.”* Josh. 2:8-11, 24.

Furthermore, the thoroughness and completeness with which Moses destroyed and annihilated the two Amorite kings Sihon and Og and their inhabitants – is seen in the truncated fashion in which Moses describes Og’s defeat and demise; to wit:

“And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan; and Og the king of Bashan went out against them, he, and all his people, to the battle at Edrei. And the Lord said unto Moses, Fear him not; for I have delivered him into thy hand, and all his people, and his land; and thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon.” (Num. 21:33-35)

Now recapture the picture of that rag-tag army of undisciplined, untrained Jewish riff-raff left to die in the wilderness because of their murmuring against the Lord and His servants at Kadesh-Barnea when they wept in their tents all night for fear of even ATTEMPTING to conquer Canaan; to-wit:

“And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, Let me pass through thy land; we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well; but we will go along by the king’s high way, until we be past thy borders.” (Num. 21:21,22)

Right here – RIGHT HERE – Beloved. I have sought for the right word to describe the condition Moses and Israel are in at the time they make their first pitiful, contrite, humble, altogether reasonable, hat-in-hand plea to the mighty Sihon king of the Amorites – that they be allowed right of passage – tightly constrained passage – through Sihon’s Amorite land. On their way to God’s holy Promised Land, and compelled to pass through Sihon’s land. No other way. Is not the condition of Moses and Israel – at that time, at that place – acute? crucial? desperate? dire? conclusive? decisive? determinative? consequential? important? weighty? momentous? significant?

At that time in the history of the world there was none mightier than Sihon king of the Amorites, whose territory was virtually all land east of the Jordan River, – (later to become Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, **Josh. 1:12; 4:12**), – with capital city the magnificent Heshbon of proverb, poetry and song fame; to wit: ***“For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon. Wherefore they that speak in proverbs say, Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared; For there is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon; it hath consumed Ar of Moab, and the lords of the high places of Arnon. Woe to thee, Moab! thou art undone, O people of Chemosh (chief god of the Moabites); he hath given his sons that escaped, and his daughters, into captivity unto Sihon king of the Amorites (signifying complete humiliation and utter defeat of the Moabites at the hands of the mighty Sihon and the glory – the worldwide, unparalleled glory – and magnificence of the city of Heshbon, as told by the bards and minstrels and poets).” Numbers 21:26-29.***

Indeed, facing down Moses on the plains of Moab on that eventful day, meekly seeking leave to pass through the land of the Amorites on the way to the Promised Land, was the mighty Sihon king of the Amorites, who not only turned down the humble request to pass through the land, but who went to war with his victorious Amorite army against Moses and his rag-tag army of Israel. Not since the Red sea had Israel faced such grim prospects of EVER REACHING THE PROMISED LAND. But they had no other option.

“And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, Let me pass through thy land; we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well; but we will go along by the king’s high way, until we be past thy borders.” (Num. 21:21,22)

In fact, Sihon has been compared to Pharaoh in a similar predicament at the Red sea, even as the beautiful city of Heshbon has been compared to Babylon in its days of glory; to wit: ***“The king (Nebuchadnezzar) spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world)?” Dan. 4:30.*** Then came the worst that Satan could do to the saints on their way to the Promised Land; to wit:

“And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border; but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness; and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel. AND ISRAEL SMOTE HIM WITH THE EDGE OF THE SWORD, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon; for the border of the children of Ammon was strong. And Israel took all these cities; and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof.” (Num. 21:23-25)

“Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites.” (Num. 21:31)

What an amazing thing. The Jews now – almost as an afterthought – have annihilated the mighty nation of the Amorites, and are now occupying improved real property and fertile crop land, which almost doubles the size of the original Canaan-land, the Promised Land, which is to become the permanent homeland of 2 ½ of the 12 Tribes of Israel ! To wit: ***“And Gad, and Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh, have received their inheritance beyond Jordan on the East, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave them.” Josh. 18:7.*** Think of it, Beloved.

From the very brink of total destruction at the hands of an unreasonable super-monarch leading a thriving empire with an always-unbeatable, ever-victorious military machine – I say, from certain doom, to complete and glorious victory – all thanks and praise to the Captain of our salvation. Remember, all these things are recorded in the Book of the Wars of the Lord. And all as it took place in like fashion at the Red Sea; to wit:

“Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation; he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name.” (Ex. 15:1-3)

They also sang a song unto the Lord ***“in the (Battle) brooks of Arnon,”*** which is the case before us today; to wit: ***“Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the Lord, What he did in the Red Sea, AND IN THE BROOKS OF ARNON.” ! Num. 21:14.***

Notice how often the great and marvelous and miraculous battles of the Arnon are mentioned in tandem and on a par with the Red Sea referral. Even from the naive and unprejudiced Gentile mouth of Rahab the Harlot; to wit:

“And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof; And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard HOW THE LORD DRIED UP THE WATER OF THE RED SEA for you, WHEN YE CAME OUT OF EGYPT; AND ! AND ! AND ! WHAT YE DID UNTO THE TWO KINGS OF THE AMORITES, on the other side Jordan, SIHON AND OG, WHOM YE UTTERLY DESTROYED. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you; for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.” (Josh. 2:8-11)

Now for some mopping-up operations so as to totally consolidate – shall we say – all Israel’s winnings, vouchsafed to Israel at the hands of our gracious God who doeth all things well. It appears that a strong confederate of King Sihon, was a gentleman with a strange name; to wit: OG. The best I can make out of the arrangement is, that the northern area of the Amorite kingdom was Bashan, which was ruled over by King Og in some kind of subservient position (think, Vice-President) under King Sihon.

At any rate, after Moses and Israel had annihilated the bulk of the Amorite kingdom, completely occupied and secured peaceful possession of the land – it appears that they headed north toward the Promised Land, when up popped OG; to wit: ***“Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites (i.e., they peacefully occupied the land).” Num. 21:31.***

“And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan; and OG the king of Bashan went out against them, he, and all his people, to the battle at Edrei. And the Lord said unto Moses, Fear him not; for I have delivered him into thy hand, and all his people, and his land; and thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon. So they smote him, and his sons, and all his people, UNTIL THERE WAS NONE LEFT HIM ALIVE; AND THEY POSSESSED HIS LAND.” (Num. 21:33-35)

And so it was that the expression – “*Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan*” – passed forever into the holy language of pilgrims on their way to Canaan, the Promised Land. “*Sihon and Og*” – powerful symbols, divine miracles, standing for the proposition that God Almighty can and will deliver his oppressed people from the most perilous of situations into the most glorious of victories; and that His Holy Attribute of MERCY appears to be the primary investiture of His motivating forces (MERCY); evoking our profoundest levels of humble thanksgivings and praises; and suggesting that when we see the MIGHTY falling into the greatest of calamities, it is probably the avenging hand of God’s holy and wrathful vengeance at work, surgically, down the line somewhere, for wrongs done His saints; to wit:

“O give THANKS unto the Lord; for he is good; FOR HIS MERCY ENDURETH FOREVER ...To him which led his people through the wilderness; for his mercy endureth for ever; To him which smote great kings; for his mercy endureth forever; And slew famous kings; for his mercy endureth for ever; SIHON KING OF THE AMORITES; for his mercy endureth forever; And OG THE KING OF BASHAN; for his mercy endureth for ever; And gave their land for an heritage; for his mercy endureth for ever; Even an heritage unto Israel his servant; for his mercy endureth for ever; Who remembered us in our low estate; for his mercy endureth for ever; And hath redeemed us from our enemies; for his mercy endureth for ever; ... O GIVE THANKS UNTO THE GOD OF HEAVEN; for his mercy endureth for ever.” (Psa. 136:1,16-26)

When King Solomon – some 500 years after the Conquest of Canaan – divided his kingdom into units for better and smoother civic governance purposes, they were still referring to the land east of the Jordan river as the country of Sihon and Og – a powerful recognition of the wonders of God wrought for Moses and Israel at the Battles of the Arnon; to wit:

“Geber the son of Uri was in the country of Gilead, in the country of Sihon king of the Amorites, and of Og king of Bashan; and he (Geber) was the only officer which was in the land.” (1 Kgs. 4:19)

And, some 1000 years after the Conquest of Canaan, a significant part of revival under Nehemiah, was repenting and acknowledging the goodness and mercy of God in blessing Moses and Israel in giving them such a glorious victory in the Wars of the Arnon; to wit:

“Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners; so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan.” (Neh. 9:22)

And now, Beloved, some 3,500 years since the Battles of the River Arnon, let us frame up a prayer for the same such victories of mercy to the God of Battles and Wars.

“The Lord is His Name.” (Ex. 15:3)

I love you.

Amen.