

Deuteronomy: Whole-hearted Love

The Cycle of Redemption

Deuteronomy 2:26-37

Please turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 2:26-37. This is the first of two texts dealing with Israel's encounters with the kings as they are coming into the land, and these are the first places where actually Israel encounters the lands that the Lord is giving to them. So we will only read the first account. This is the account of Sihon, the king of Heshbon. And you will remember last week, the last verse that we read last week is the Lord calling to Israel. Now the waiting is done. Rise up.

So I sent messengers from the wilderness of ketamine to Sihon, the king of Heshbon, with words of peace, saying, let me pass through your land. I will go only by the road. I will turn aside, neither to the right nor to the left. You shall sell me food for money that I may eat, and give me water for money that I may drink. Only let me pass through on foot, as the sons of Esau, who live in SA, and the Moabites who live in AR, did for me, until I go over into the land that the Lord our God is giving to us. But Sihon, the king of Heshbon, would not let us pass by him. For the Lord your God hardened his heart and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand as he is this day. And the Lord said to me, behold, I have begun to give Sihon, and it's his land over to you. Begin to take possession, that you may occupy it. 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. And we captured all his cities at that time and devoted to destruction. Every city, men, women and children. We left no survivors. Only the livestock we took as spoil for ourselves with the plunder of the cities that we captured from Aroor, which is on the edge of the valley of Arnon, and from the city that is in the valley as far as Gilead. There was not a city too high for us. The Lord gave the Lord our God gave all into our hands only to the land of the sons of Ammon. Did you draw near? Excuse me, did you not draw near? That is to all the banks of the river Jabbok, in the cities of the hill country. Whatever the Lord our God had forbidden us.

This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Well, this is a passage that, to modern ears, particularly modern Western ears, can be a bit troubling. And we can take some comfort in knowing that this would have also been troubling to ancient Middle Eastern ears as well. We actually read in the book of Joshua and judges that this command that the Lord had given Israel to in certain areas, not just kill the soldiers in the field, but to go and to kill the men and the women and the children, leaving no survivors. This command was a difficult command for Israel to follow through with. As a matter of fact, it has a special term that is used for it. In the Hebrew it's called the Haram bayan. Okay, so it says devoted to destruction there in our text. Actually, the word there is very specific. It's this particular devotion to destruction, and it's the word haram. And it has this idea of being set apart for a special or a holy purpose. And it says that these people who are living in the land are

set aside in this way. And it can be, of course, troubling for us to read, but it does remind us. It reminds us a bit of the larger story of redemptive history, doesn't it? Lest we get too comfortable sort of in the relative morality of the people living in the land, it reminds us of a broader story that's going on. And to understand passages like this, we have to understand the broader story. And that's basically this, that God in Genesis is creating the world for the purpose of bringing glory to himself. That's the reason we're all here, right?

As the Westminster Confession tells us, what's the chief end of man? Notice it doesn't say, what's the chief end of Christians? It says, what's the chief end of all of humanity is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. As a matter of fact, that's how the earth is made. It's made as a big house of celebration. It even has a roof. And in the ceiling there are lights there that are to point us and be signs to us of God's glory. And then what does he put in the house? He puts an image, and the image is supposed to respond back with glory of God, and then the image is supposed to fill the house, fill the earth and subdue it. So what do you have? You have one big house. At the end of the day that's filled with the worship of the Lord. That was always the purpose. That's why he made us. And yet, in the fall, we see a diversion from that plan. When we see humanity become dead in sin, become perverted in their image bearingness, not offering up worship to the Lord, but actually only offering disobedience and rebellion. We come to an impasse because the question remains how will God make the house a house of worship again? And of course, that's the story of the Bible that culminates in the end of revelation, when the church is again presented to the earth, now in the new heavens and new earth, and we come, and we fill the whole earth so that there's not a son anymore, because it's just glory, and there's not a temple anymore, because the whole earth is the temple. And we all respond in praise and worship, following through with our calling to enjoy God and His glory forever and ever. Now how do we get from point A to point B? How do we get from the fall to that final worshipping? And what we see is this, that over the course of the story of the Bible, there will be these places where God will step into creation. He'll come back into that house that he had built to glorify himself. And he will he will kind of break into it. They call it theologians talk about the Kingdom inbreaking the kingdom of God breaking in to the world. And in those glimpses of the kingdom breaking in, the Lord is moving forward, the plan of redemption. And we see it in obvious places, like the flood where the Lord steps in and with a word of judgment, right. He brings judgment against the rebellious. And yet he also lays hold of the faithful, and he blesses them. Noah and his family are preserved, while the wicked and the rebellious and the oppressive structures of this society are torn down in the flood. And then we see it again in the plagues against Egypt, where the Lord again steps in. And he does a special work moving forward, the Exodus plan. And then we see it again in the conquest, and then we see it again in the exile, and then we see it again in the restoration from exile through Messiah King Jesus, who comes and he steps into this world, and he brings the kingdom of heaven with him. And again, one day we will see it when he returns and that work is made complete. But you have to understand the conquest in light of this. This is a breaking in of the Kingdom of God. This is not an ordinary thing. This is a breaking in of the kingdom of God into earth. Now, I remember doing college ministry. Whenever we do Q and A's, this would be one of the questions that would come up right away. So what do we make of the holy war in the Old Testament? And that's one of the first points you want to remember. The holy war in the Old

Testament is not a continuous thing that continues on forever and ever, but rather it is for a specific moment and a specific time.

So before we delve into this text, I would like to give us just five points whenever we're dealing with these questions of the breaking in of the kingdom, specifically in the case of the conquest, what are five just principles that we have to keep in mind so that we can make sure that we're understanding this within the context of the whole of redemptive history. So I want to start with this.

The first principle is we deal with the questions of the conquest, and it's this God's judgment is always just. God's judgment is always just. If you ever find yourself in a position where you're saying, God, you are unjust, okay, then you've moved into a space that is not an appropriate space because God's justice is always a good and proper justice. As a matter of fact, God alone, as creator of this world and even of the concept of justice, is by definition, by character, always just justice just exudes from him. And we see that even here with the conquest, because if we go back to when this land was first promised to Abraham, we go back to his name, Abraham, at the point in Genesis fifteen where the Lord says, I'm going to give you a nation. It's going to be a whole people. They're going to be like the stars in the sky. And then he says, I'm going to give you a land. And then he lays out the measurement for that land. Do you remember what he says? He says at that point, but I'm not going to give it to you, and I'm not going to give it to your son. As a matter of fact, you won't receive the gift of this land for four generations or four hundred years. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine being a child at Christmas? And you come down and you get underneath the Christmas tree and there's a, there's an IOU under the Christmas tree and it's a bike. They said, but you're not going, this is the Christmas gift. You get the bike, but you're not going to be able to ride it. As a matter of fact, you're going to die. Bike less. Okay, in many generations, your children will receive this bike and be able to enjoy it. Now why does why does the Lord do that? He could have just given it to Abraham. There. We've already seen that he's given Abraham victories over kings like Omar and others. Why doesn't he just give him the land then? And you remember what he says? The Lord says the sin of the Amorites. Okay. He's using the term Amorites to mean all the people living in the land, but the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full. You see, what the Lord is saying is that their sin is not complete. I could give it to you now, but it would not be seen as a just thing. As a matter of fact, I'm willing to have my people be enslaved in Egypt for many generations so that when I do give them the land, it will be just now we of course, were being reformed. We might point out to the Lord in this case, well, Lord, because of total depravity, they all deserve to die anyways, right? But isn't it interesting that the Lord doesn't actually pull that he hasn't pulled the total depravity card? He says no, no, it wouldn't be just I'm going to wait until their level of oppression and wickedness has grown to such a point that people will say, it is good that they were all driven out of the land. You see, God is a God of justice. He's not handing over an innocent people to his people. It's a matter of fact. He even causes his people to wait so that his gifts will be just. I would point out you realize the implication here, too, is that this has nothing to do with ethnicity. It's not because the Amorites were Amorites and they're just bad people or something like that. This always had to do with justice, never had to do with, with ethnicity.

And that leads us to the second point that we want to keep in mind here. The Lord was more than happy, regardless of the ethnicity of the people, to show mercy to those who repent. The conquest always allows for the repentance of the people in the land. As a matter of fact, the first person that they meet when they cross over to the western side of the Jordan River as they are now moving in, they're coming to Jericho. Who do they meet? They meet a wonderful Canaanite woman, Rahab. And what happens? Not only is she, not only is she not under the ban, the harem ban that we talked about because of her faith, she is now brought into Israel. But not now. As a second class citizen. She's not now a second class citizen. Like some sort of. She's a little lesser than everyone else. She's brought into Israel, and then she's brought into the line of David, ultimately into the line of Jesus Messiah. You see the conquest always allowed for repentance. We have to recognize this.

That brings us to our third point. Not only does it allow for repentance, if you, as a village, somehow deceived Joshua. And why do we point this out? Because this happened in the conquest. So you deceive Joshua, and you came and said, Joshua, we know you're you've been called to wipe out everybody in the land, but we're not from the land. We're from outside the land. This is what the Gibeonites did. And so Joshua enters into a covenant with them. And you might say, well, as soon as their ruse was discovered, he must have slaughtered them. All right? No. When the deception was uncovered, do you remember what the Lord said? Have mercy on them. Don't do it. Honor the covenant, even though it was entered into under deceptive, deceptive promises. Now we could just stop there and say, well, that's amazing. That tells us something about the conquest that I might have missed. It does. But notice something else if you skip ahead in the Bible to that period of the returnees coming back after exile into Jerusalem, and they're starting to get they're trying to get the restoration project going. And you have Ezra and Nehemiah, and they're rebuilding the temple and the wall, and they're doing covenant renewal. You know, you get into Nehemiah and you see these lists of the people who are coming back in the work that they're doing in Jerusalem. Do you notice that there are Gibeonites mentioned by name there? See, the Gibeonites weren't just shown mercy and allowed to co-exist alongside Israel. They now are brought into Israel and they enjoy the restoration. You see, God's mercy, his favor, his blessing, even in the midst of conquest is an incredible, extravagant blessing.

Fourthly, the conquest is limited to a particular place and time in history. It is for this specific piece of land that is being given. We even see this in the passage today. If you see how that description is, we'll come back to it later. But in verse thirty six or thereabouts, he describes exactly what lands they took. It is right in between Moab and Ammon. They are given a thin sliver of land. And notice Israel is not able, even though they could have. They are not able to step over those parameters. It is a very specific place and it's at a very specific time. As a matter of fact, the prophets of the Old Testament do not call Israel to conquest. They consider that time to have passed. It's a very specific moment in time and a very specific space. More importantly, Jesus himself rebukes his followers when they seem to think maybe we're supposed to do conquest again when they pull out swords and try to try to attack the Romans. What does Jesus say? No, not that way. That time is gone. So it's from a very specific time during the period of the conquest, in a very specific place.

Fifthly, and perhaps the most importantly, we must remember this the God of the conquest, the God of the Bible, not only grants life and takes it away in death, he also knows every human's heart. This is not a man made project. This isn't Moses picking and choosing which nations he wants to get for himself so that he can have the most natural resources. You know, of all the people in the land, this isn't some kind of thing ginned up by humans. Rather, this is coming from the God of justice, who knows every single human heart. What does the psalmist say in Psalm forty four? He goes, don't you know this, Lord? You know the secrets of every heart. There's not one Amorite, there's not one Canaanite, there's not one parasite. There's not one Jebusite who falls at the end of an Israelite sword, who was meant for salvation but somehow slipped through the cracks because of the conquest. The Lord knows the hearts of every single person. And so when he brings about his judgment on this nation through this, in this very unique way, during this in-breaking of the kingdom, when he brings his judgment against a nation, we know that it is just and that it is informed.

So let's take a look at this passage briefly. Verse twenty six to twenty nine. We see the first movement of this cycle of redemption. You notice the title of this sermon is The Cycle of Redemption. It actually argue. What we're seeing here is the cycle of our salvation, not just in the, you know, for ancient Near Eastern kings and peoples, but for us today. Notice in verse twenty six through twenty nine, we get an introduction of this cycle of redemption. Here the Lord is bringing his people to a nation scion of Heshbon, the Amorite. He's bringing them up against him. He's already said that he is promising scions land to Israel, and yet notice how they are supposed to engage with Zion. They're not supposed to run in to this region with their guns blazing, swinging their swords. What are they supposed to do? They are supposed to come first, suing for peace. They're supposed to come first and make an offer. And notice the offer is one of subservience. They're saying he could come in and say. We'll do whatever we please. We'll camp where we want. We'll settle in, settle in your valleys. We'll take advantage of your land. But notice they don't say that. They say we will walk in single file. We won't even get off the highway. Okay, we won't stop at the rest stop. All right, we'll go single file. And if we do need anything, we will pay you for it. So you can enrich yourself off of our need. And we won't step to the left or to the right, even though we could. We won't. So that we can go and obtain the land that the Lord has given us. What should I do? He should have said absolutely. I want to be a part of this great victory that you're that you're enjoying at the hands of your Lord. We could then see Sihon kind of to say, we see the way that we see Hiram later from Lebanon or from Tyre, who is just a just a friend of Israel. But notice how Sihon responds. It's not with a reception of that peace. Rather, it's a rejection of it. This should help us, because we need to remember that we should have the same boldness and proclaiming God's Word to a world that is often hardened by it. We don't offer the gospel just to people we think might be viable options for the gospel, for the salvation that the gospel offers. We proclaim the gospel to even those who will be hardened by it. In the reformed world, we have this high view of God's sovereignty. We recognize that God is active in salvation, both in giving us life Rebirth. I no longer live. Christ lives within me. How can I believe unless the spirit has enlivened me? Jesus says, how can they come and believe in me if the spirit hasn't drawn them to me? We recognize God's sovereign hand and salvation. We also recognize that God hardens. Notice it's not up to us to know who he is softening and who he is hardening. Notice we don't get. We

should not confuse our doctrine about God's sovereignty with this idea that maybe we somehow have a list of who's going to be saved and who isn't. We don't. What is your job, Christian? Sue for peace. Always Sue for peace. Always give them the offer. You never know. You never know. You see, we do not know who the Lord has called and who he has hardened. And there will be people who become Christians, who become Christians, who are becoming Christians for no good reason. It's just the spirit is at work and there will be others who will be hardened no matter what. And that's okay. What's our job? Our job isn't to manipulate and to get people just to kind of twist. We're not responsible for the results. We're responsible for the offering of the peace, for the offering of the good news of the gospel. But that, of course, leads us to the second part here in verse thirty, the hardening of the heart. Okay. Notice the hardening of the of Simon's heart. He receives this suing of peace, but he is hardened against it. Now it actually says that the Lord is hardening his heart. And that's a that's a recollection of what we saw the Lord also doing with Pharaoh in Egypt. Remember, the conceit of the Exodus is that Israel is my firstborn son, says, says the Lord about Israel. Pharaoh, let him come out, that my firstborn son, let him come out into the desert and worship me. But remember, the Lord tells Moses, I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that I can show my mighty works in all of Egypt. And then as we read the story, sometimes it says, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. Sometimes it says in Pharaoh hardened his heart. And that's instructive for us, too, because the Lord is not he's not hardening Pharaoh's heart. But otherwise Pharaoh would have been a faithful, compliant king or something like that. The Lord is hastening. He is expediting Pharaoh unto his judgment, out of the own hardness of his heart that he has. But why does the Lord do that, and is to show his glory in Egypt? And guess what? It works. It works as Israel comes out of Egypt. You remember how they're described? They're called a mixed multitude. Not only are they the descendants of Abraham who are like the stars of the sky, they also include all these Egyptian believers because it worked. So the Lord used the hardness of Pharaoh's heart to show his glory, just as he uses the hardness and even Hastens the judgment to come on. Sihon. Here. You see, there are those again, like we said, who have every reason to believe. But don't. And there are those who have no good reason to believe but do. If you're sitting here this morning and you're thinking, am I one of those who don't believe? I would say that's not the kind of question that unbelievers ask, right? If you're saying, wait a minute, is the Lord hardening my heart? Okay. He may be he may be drawing your attention to a hardness of heart. That's good. Repent. Believe. Because dead people don't worry about whether or not their hearts are hardened. I would argue that that's the Lord being at work in you. And then we continue on now, having hardened the heart of science so that now the battle takes place, we get to see in verses thirty one to thirty seven the flip side of the coin of salvation and justice. Because of sin, because of the need for God to show his justice around the face of the earth. Just note this everywhere that God's people are blessed in salvation, there is a flip side of judgment everywhere that they receive a blessing, a word of life. There is the flip side of the curse or the word of death. Now, this can be kind of hard for us to understand in our setting. And yet, if you've lived in a setting where you've been subjected to oppression or to exploitation or to abuse, it's not hard for you to see how salvation that is, the removal of the oppression, the removal of the abuse, the removal of the of the exploitation to have that removed is what salvation is. But how is that going to happen? Well, something has to happen to the abuser, the

oppressor, the exploiter. Right? That's the judgment, okay? For us to be freed of sin, what has to happen? Sin has to be conquered for us to be freed of Satan's deception, what has to happen? Satan has to be conquered for us to be freed of the of the realm of death. What has to happen? Death has to be killed, right? As Dunn says, death. You are dead. You see, it's the flip side of the coin. Salvation and blessing is always the flip side of judgment now, in this world of sin. And so we see the same thing happen here for the land to be purified of its evil and wicked oppressor nation, the Amorites, they have to be judged so that Israel might come in and take the place of them, and rule in justice, and in goodness, and in holiness and in truth. So notice for Israel to receive the blessing, the judgment against Sihon has to happen. Now, we could even say here we could we could talk like the Gibeonites or like Rahab. Could Sihon have repented? Could he have then joined in with, you know, entered into some kind of alliance with Israel? Absolutely. That's how he could have. We can do that counterfactual. That's how he should have responded. But he doesn't. And so as a result, he finds himself under the judgment of the Lord. As I said already, notice it's very specific. It's from that river Arnon up to the river Jabbok. It's a very thin sliver of land in between Moab and Ammon. And Israel is not allowed to go one step further because the judgment isn't coming against those nations. Now, we have to admit this. This way of expanding a kingdom sounds a bit odd to us, and yet it probably shouldn't. If you're a student of history, you actually know why this was troubling for Joshua. This is also, in many ways, the way in which empire was developed for most of human history. As a matter of fact, what Joshua is called to do here is strict. But notice he's not allowed to do a lot of the things the other empire builders were allowed to do. Empires like the Assyrians and the Babylonians and the Persians and the Greeks and the Romans. And before you think the Assyrians were the worst, just know this. The Assyrians just wrote about what they did. They used it as kind of a psyops against the people they were fighting. They'd write about the terrible things they did. But historical record shows that people like the Greeks and the Romans were much worse than the Assyrians. Interestingly. Interestingly, though, notice that Joshua is not allowed to do all the stuff that you can do if you're a conquering army coming into a land. Joshua can't do whatever he wants to those he's had victory over. The Lord is very specific about how they are to operate following the Empire building. And yet, as soon as Jesus comes, as soon as Messiah King Jesus comes and establishes his beachhead in Galilee and Zebulun in the region of Naphtali, where he says, repent and believe the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God is at hand. Notice that old ancient Near Eastern way of campaigning and building an empire that is cast off, and instead of the kingdom of Jesus expanding over the face of the earth at the point of a spear, or the point of a sword, or at the barrel end of the barrel of a gun. Rather, the kingdom expands through the proclamation of the word and the persuasion of human hearts. This is central to your gospel. Jesus said, put away the sword, Peter. Put away the sword. Put away the spear. It is about the proclamation of the word. But can you remember how the author of Hebrews says, and the word is what? A double edged sword. But it's more powerful than mere swords of metal. It cuts down between the marrow and the bone. Right? Hebrews four twelve. It divides even the soul. And guess what? The word was a much more powerful weapon. I know there was a meme going around recently about how often men think about the Roman Empire, and I have to admit, I probably think about the Roman Empire more than I should. It's true. And yet, who among us, you know, gives our allegiance to Caesar?

Who? Who among us can, remembers and worships and celebrates Cyrus, the king of Persia? How many of us remember the great victories of Pompey the General? Okay. And yet look all over the face of the earth where those the ruins of those empires stand like Ozymandias statue. As we walk around that earth, we see the kingdom of Jesus Christ advancing in leaps and bounds in countries that the Romans couldn't have imagined. It's not just a matter of method either. It is the gospel message itself. So I want to encourage you, as we consider the conquest, what does it do for us who are now a part of this great commission, this new spiritual battle of expanding the Kingdom of Jesus through the proclamation of the gospel and the work of the church? What does that mean for us? When we look at the conquest, it reminds us that this is still a life or death endeavor. When you receive the gospel, when the Lord sues for peace with you, you don't have an army standing outside of your neighborhood, you know, waiting to see how you'll answer, or outside of outside of the church, waiting to see if you'll say the right thing or not. But we should not let that dull our senses that this is still a life or death ordeal. Jesus says, if you're if you're, what is it? What's keeping you out of the kingdom? Is it your left arm? Cut it off. Is it your eye? Pluck it out. It's better, it's better. It's better to go into the kingdom with one arm than to stay outside of the kingdom, to be an Amorite with both arms. The final judgment is yet to come. When the Lord sues for peace, he is offering you be a part of my kingdom. Don't be a part of the judgment. Or rather, have it this way. Let the judgment be placed on your head right now. But have you be protected under the shield of Christ's death on the cross, that he receives the judgment that you deserve, so that you can receive the freedom and the inheritance that he deserves? You see, there is a sense in which Jesus is being hyperbolic when he says, cut your hand off. If it if it causes you to sin, pluck out your eye if it causes you to sin. And yet he's also being very logical. You remember the story, the movie one hundred and twenty seven hours, about Aaron Ralston, the hiker who's out in Utah, and he and he's down in the slot canyons of Utah, which I've run around into. And there are a lot of fun, but they're very they're very far away and remote. And he fell and he wasn't even a large fall, but he falls in such a way that a boulder pinned his arm to the side of the canyon. And no one knows he's there and he's stuck down there. He's got no cell covers, he's got no way of getting out. And it takes him five days before he finally says, I realize what I have to do. And we watch it and it's gripping and it's horrible. And yet everybody understands. He's absolutely right. And when he finally amputates his arm with a with a little pocket knife, it's because he realizes it's either this or I die.

You see, the gospel is life and death, brothers and sisters. And so as you're going out into the world, don't withhold the suing for peace. Don't withhold the gospel message because you're trying to be loving or kind or polite to those around you that's not loving or kind. To withhold the suing of peace for peace. It would not be loving and kind for Israel not to offer peace. Rather, it's the most loving thing that you can do to say Our God is a God of justice and we all deserve his judgment. But he's offering us a plea deal, and it's a great deal where he takes upon himself the judgment that we deserve so that we might receive his inheritance. And I also want to say to those of you who are listening to this and you're thinking, am I one of those? Am I in the place of Zion? Am I in the place where I'm being offered the suing for peace? And I'm not sure. Is my heart hard or is it not? Like I said, we have a high view of God's sovereignty here in this church. And what we mean by that is we believe that God is active at every stage in your life.

And so if you're in this church right now and you're hearing this message right now and you're asking that question right now, I would say the Lord is at work. The Lord is at work. Don't squander the offer for peace. Don't squander the offer for Salom. Don't let the creature comforts of this modern Western life dull your senses. To this matter of life and death. Don't be counted amongst the Amorites. Be counted amongst the people of God.

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, as we come before you, we do realize that if your spirit is not in our response, dear Lord, then it profits us nothing. So we pray, Lord, that your spirit would be there for those Lord who are here, and they are wondering about whether or not they should be proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. I pray that you would embolden them to do so. For those who are here who are not sure about their relationship with you, Lord, I pray that you would continue to be at work in their lives in ways that they can't even ignore, in conversations and friendships and thoughts. Dear Lord, draw them to you.

We pray in Christ's name.

Amen.