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Moshe Remembers the Conquest of Sihon 2: 26-37

Moshe Remembers the conquest of Sihon DIG: Verse 30 informs us that ADONAI stiffened the spirit of King Sihon, and hardened his heart. What does this reveal about YHVH? Recall Ha'Shem's dealings with Pharaoh (Exodus 9:12, 10:20 and 27, 11:10, and 14:4). Explain why Isra'el would once again experience this hardening by an opposition leader before entering the Promised Land. How do you think the Israelites felt as they prepared to confront Sihon? How complete was the destruction of King Sihon and his people? Why were the women and children killed? What do these Scriptures reveal about how the LORD works to prepare his people to carry out His plan?

REFLECT: What part of your life seems directionless? How do you go about seeking God's will in that area? If YHVH solves life's problems in different ways, what advice would you give to someone approaching God with a problem? Why is it sometimes difficult for us to discern His guidance? In what ways can you guard against hardening your heart to the direction of ADONAI?

Moses sent messengers to Sihon, king of Heshbon, requesting safe and unhindered passage through his territory, but was firmly refused (because YHVH had hardened Sihon's heart). In the battle between Isra'el and Sihon, the Israelites completely destroyed all of his people and took his territory (but not the territory of the Ammonites).

After a peaceful journey through the previous lands, **Isra'el** came to the point of conflict. **Sihon's land** was to be possessed (**2:24**) and would become part of **the Promised Land**. **They** were not to provoke battle or take aggressive military action; in the plan and promise of **ADONAI**, the means of victory would become clear.⁷⁵

The Israelites could only reach **the Promised Land** by traveling through **King Sihon's** territory. As **he** did with the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites, **Moshe**

first made **Sihon** an offer of goodwill, promising to pass through **his land** peacefully and pay for whatever **food** and **water the people** consumed. The request was certainly reasonable. **So, I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon with words of shalom** saying: **Let me pass through your land - I will go only by way of the road. I will not turn to the right or to the left. You will sell me food for money so that I may eat and give me water for money so that I may drink. Just let me pass through on foot - as the sons of Esau dwelling in Seir and the Moabites in Ar did for me - until I cross over the Jordan River into the land that ADONAI our God is giving to us (2:26-29).**

However, **YHVH** wanted **Isra'el** to defeat **Sihon** and seize all of **his land**, so **ADONAI Elohei-Tzva'ot: the LORD God of heaven's** angelic armies, **hardened the king's heart** as **He** had **hardened the heart** of **Pharaoh** in **Egypt**, which is the classic case study. Why did **Isra'el** take **the land of Sihon**? At one level, it was because **Sihon** chose to reject the peaceful request of **Isra'el** to travel through **his land** - a decision for which **he** was fully responsible. But on another level, it was because **Ha'Shem** had already given **Sihon's land** into the hand of **the Israelites**. Neither decision outweighs the other. It is characteristic of Deuteronomy and the Hebrew Scriptures generally to affirm with equal strength the divine will and purpose with the human responsible choice.⁷⁶

But, Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, because ADONAI your God stiffened his spirit and hardened his heart like He hardened the heart of Pharaoh in Egypt (see the commentary on **Exodus, to see link click [Bb](#) - God and the Struggle with Pharaoh**), **in order to hand him over to you this very day (2:30)**. If we compare **Sihon's** case with that of **Pharaoh** in **Exodus** there are many parallels. In either case **the hardening** of the man's **heart** was quite as much by his own act as by the decree of **God**, for both **Pharaoh** and **Sihon** were unaffected by the demands of **YHVH** which came through **His** servants. Neither would bend his will to the will of **the LORD** and each refusal produced a further **hardening of the heart**. Therefore, the demands of **Ha'Shem**, once rejected, became a **hardening** influence on **Sihon's** heart, so that **he** was unable to respond favorably to **Isra'el's** request.⁷⁷ The point of the parallel with **the Exodus** is to show that the conquest of **the Land** of Promise continues the history of the deliverance that began there. No human power can stand against **God's** will to save **His people**. This is still an important reminder for us today.

ADONAI said to me: **See, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to**

you - begin to take possession in order to take hold of his land (2:31).

Ha'Shem's order here summarizes the pattern that **Isra'el** would follow in **their** conquest of Canaan. The point of the parallel with **the Exodus** is to show that the conquest of **the Land** of Promise continues the history of the deliverance that began there. **YHVH** would tell **Joshua** which city or people to attack; **He** would assure **the Israelites** of victory; and **He** would go with **them** to help **them** win the battle. **Isra'el's** defeat of **Sihon** and **Og** was especially important because it would send a message ahead to the nations in Canaan, and bring fear to their hearts (**11:25**). By the time **Joshua** was ready to enter **the Land**, the news of **Isra'el's** invincible march had already gone before **them (Joshua 2:8-11)**.⁷⁸

See (Hebrew: *ra'ah*), **I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you**, a change from plural to singular, signaling a change in the organizational structure of **Moses'** historical prologue (see [Aj](#) - **The Historical Prologue**). No longer will **sons** bear the sins of **their** fathers, walking in circles and waiting for the old to die. Each person must now assume the burden of his or her own disbelief and face the giants when **Ha'Shem** orders warfare.⁷⁹



Then Sihon came out against us - he and all his people - to battle at Jahaz (2:32). It was when **Sihon** abandoned the protection of the **high** walls of Heshbon, and advanced out into the open country, that **Isra'el** defeated **him** in battle. Driven on by a strange stubbornness, **Sihon** threw away **his** one chance of survival.⁸⁰

Exactly what **Ha'Shem** promised would happen, in fact, came to pass!

ADONAI our God gave him over to us, and we struck him down along with his sons and all his people. The people of God did not sit back and observe the acts of **God**; **they** entered the battle and experienced the presence of **the LORD** in

their active obedience and commitment.⁸¹ **We captured all his cities at that time, and utterly put under a *cherem* ban of judgment every city - men, women and children.** The Amorites were destroyed completely this time, and **Moshe** recounts: **We didn't leave a single survivor. We took only the livestock as plunder for ourselves, as the spoils of the cities we captured (2:33-35).**

There are several examples of the *cherem* judgment in the TaNaKh (**Numbers 31:15-17; Deuteronomy 3:6-7, 7:2, 20:17, 26:16-17; Joshua 10:11 and 11:12; Judges 21:11; First Samuel 15:3 and 27:9-11; Jeremiah 25:9**). Probably the best-known example is that of **Achan**. The entire city of Jericho was declared *cherem*, or *devoted to destruction* by **the LORD Himself**. That meant everything in Jericho wasn't to be touched. But when **Achan** kept **a beautiful robe, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, the Israelites** were unexpectedly defeated in **their** next battle of **Ai** because of **his** disobedience. Because **Achan** had touched that which was *cherem*, **he** became *devoted to destruction*. As a result, **Joshua, together with all Isra'el, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor and stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them (Joshua 6:18 to 7:28)**. The same fate awaited anyone who sacrificed to foreign gods.

Liberal critics of the Bible are horrified that **Isra'el** destroyed entire nations, killing "innocent people," and confiscating their cities and their lands. But how "innocent" were those people? These critics of **Scripture** (and **the LORD**) ignore the fact that **the nations Isra'el** encountered east of **the Jordan River**, and in Canaan itself, were incredibly wicked. They were immoral people who sacrificed their own children to the false gods they worshiped. Male and female prostitutes served in their temples and fornication was an important part of the Canaanite religion. And like an aggressive cancer, **Ha'Shem** knew that radical surgery was needed. Little Amorites would grow up to be big Amorites (see [Ag - The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh](#)).

These **people** were not left without a witness from **YHVH** in **creation** (see the commentary on [Romans A1 - The Evidence Against the Gentile Pagan](#)), as well as through the lives of **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**, who had lived in Canaan. Furthermore, the news of the destruction of **Sodom and Gomorrah** (see the commentary on [Genesis Fa - It Rained Down Sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah](#)), **the plagues** of **Egypt** (see the commentary on [Exodus Bj - The Ten](#)

Plagues of Egypt), and **Isra'el's** deliverance through **the Sea of Reeds (Joshua 2:8-11)**, came to the ears of these **people** and bore witness that **Ha'Shem** alone is the one true **God. The LORD** had been long-suffering with these wicked nations even in **Abraham's** day, but now **their** time had run out and **their** judgment had come (**Genesis 15:16**). If these evil civilizations had not been exterminated, **Isra'el** would have been in constant danger of being tempted by pagan idolatry. In fact, that's exactly what happened during the period of **the Judges**, and **Ha'Shem** had to discipline **His people** to bring **them** back to **Him**. **Isra'el** had important work to do on the earth in producing the written TaNaKh, and bringing **the Messiah** into the world, and imitating the pagan nations would have polluted **Isra'el** and threatened **ADONAI's** great plan of salvation for mankind.⁸²

The land won is now described in a manner that reminds us of the account in **Joshua 10:40-43**. The battle and accompanying destruction extended far beyond the battlefield of **Aroer**. **From Aroer** (the southern limit of the victory) **which is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon and the city by the wadi, all the way up to the Gilead** (the northern limit), **there was not a town too high for us**. The fact that **the cities** had **high** walls, or that **Og** was a **giant (2:11)**, didn't seem to create any problems that **the generation of the Exodus** had feared (**Numbers 13:28**). In obedience to **YHVH's** command, **Isra'el** did not encroach on **the land of the Ammonites**, avoiding even the banks of **the Wadi Jabbok**. **Only you did not come near the land of the sons of Ammon - all along the Wadi Jabbok and the cities of the hill country. and wherever ADONAI our God had commanded**. Whereas the failure at **Kadesh-barnea** (see [AI - Events at Kadesh-barnea](#)) had served as a severe warning in **Moshe's** address, the victory over **Sihon** is employed as a source of strength and encouragement.⁸³ **ADONAI our God gave everything over to us (2:36-37)**.

*Dear Wonderful **Father**, We love and worship **You!** How wonderful that **Your** love opened the gates of Heaven to all who chose to love and worship **You**, no matter if they are: male or female, rich, or poor, brown, black, white, any skin color, any age etc.*

*How wonderful that both **Your** divine will and human responsibility are true. **You** want everyone saved, yet **You** patiently wait for each one to turn from their pride and choose to love and follow your son as **Lord**. **The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some consider slowness. Rather, He is being patient toward you - not wanting anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9)**.*



Your Awesome grace offered **Yeshua's** blood as our sacrifice, **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21)**. The key to Heaven's door is **Messiah's** blood and our faith turns the key to open the door. **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves - it is the gift of God. It is not based on deeds, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)**. We love **You**, worship **You** and praise **You** for opening the door to salvation to all who choose to love **You**. In **Your** holy **Son's** name and power of resurrection. Amen