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The Resistance of Edom
20: 14-21

The resistance of Edom DIG: Why would the king of Edom be suspicious of letting "brother" Isra'el pass through his territory? Why did Moshe decide that Isra'el wouldn't go through Edom, but would instead take a new route? Given the king's concerns, what do you think about his rebuff?

REFLECT: What are some of the long-term spiritual promises God has made to you? Which of these are you still waiting for? How patient are you waiting for them to be fulfilled? Have you ever found yourself asking God to bless your plans and agendas instead of asking Him first? Explain.

You are not to pass through my land;
If you do, I will come out against you with the sword.

The Israelites were about to begin **their** last trek in the wilderness; **the people** were ready to begin the march that would lead **them** to **the Promised Land**. When **they** came to **Kadesh-barnea** thirty-eight years before, it seemed that their plan of attack was to march northward through the land of Canaan, conquering as they went. But the evil reports of the spies and the rebellion of the people changed all that (**to see link click Bv – The Sin of Kadesh-barnea**).[400]



This time, an alternate route around Southern Canaan was sought since they had been defeated by the Canaanites and Amalekites near Hormah in the Negev (see **Cc**

– Defeat by the Canaanites and Amalekites). From **Kadesh-barnea, they** decided to move eastward through the Nahal Zin basin in the Zin Wilderness, onward across the desert toward the territory of **the Edomites**. It extended from the Wadi el-Hasa on the north of the Gulf of Aqaba (Elath) on the south and to the Arabian Desert on the east. It was characterized by reddish-purple mountains in the south along the Arabah Valley, to intermittent sections of arable land in the northern half, extending from near Bozrah. Deep valleys such as the Wadi Rum provided east-west passage across the region. **The Israelites** were seeking passage from the south along **the Kings' Highway** from its beginning on the Gulf of Aqaba, and then northward through the Transjordan table lands of **Edom** and **Mo'ab**. More likely, **their** intentions were to enter the region from the Arabah near Tamar into **the Edomite** highlands through one of the wadis, such as the Wadi Feifa toward Zalmonah or Punon, then past Bozrah, **the Edomite** capital city during the Iron Age.[401]

Although **Isra'el's** exact route remains unknown, it seems **their** most direct route from **Kadesh-barnea** to **their** destination on the eastern boundary of Canaan was through **the land of Edom**. **Thus, Moshe sent messengers from Kadesh-barnea to the king of Edom,** stating **that Edom** and **Isra'el** were **brothers.** The closest blood related nation. The reference to **brother Isra'el** was typical diplomatic language for someone considered an equal and an ally. However, the word **brother** had a double meaning in that it alluded to the ancestral relationship of **the brothers Jacob/Isra'el** and **Esau/Edom (Genesis 25:21-26** and **35:9-15).**[402] **Jacob** and **Esau** were twin brothers, and **they** are portrayed as the ancestors of **the Israelites** and **the Edomites**. Even though **Esau** had voluntarily given up **his birthright** (see **Genesis Gn – Then Jacob Gave Esau Some Stew and Esau Despised His Birthright**), even though **the brothers** had made up **(Genesis 32)** and were on good terms while alive (see **Genesis Gg – The Death of Abraham**), the descendants of **Esau** still held a grudge against **the Israelites**. **Their** sibling rivalries no doubt reflected the conflicts of **the** two **nations**.

So the first basis of the request that **Moses** makes is the **brotherly** relationship between **the two nations**. **The messengers** said: **You know** (implying that **the Edomites** had kept up with **Jewish** history and knew all about **Isra'el's** sufferings) **all the troubles we have gone through – that our ancestors went down into Egypt, we lived in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians treated us and our ancestors badly.** Then summarizing **the Exodus, when we cried out to ADONAI, he heard us, sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt. Now**

here we are in Kadesh-barnea, a city at the edge of your territory. Please let us pass through your land. The message pledged that no economic cost to the **Edomites** would be involved. **We will not go through fields or vineyards, and we won't drink any water from the wells. We will go along the King's Highway, not turning aside either to the right** (east) **or to the left** (west) **until we have left your territory (20:15-17).**

But, this first request was turned down.

In **Genesis 32**, we saw how **Jacob** elected to send **messengers** ahead to ask **Esau** for safe passage as **he** returned from Aram. As **he** attempted to reenter the Promised Land, **Jacob** knew **he** must face **Esau**. However, **Jacob's** messengers were not well received. **They** returned to report to **Jacob** that **Esau** was **coming with 400 men, armed for battle** (see **Genesis Hx – Jacob Looked Up and There was Esau, Coming with His Four Hundred Men**). So too with **the children of Isra'el** as **they** were coming back into the Promised Land after **their** long exile. **Moses** sent **messengers** ahead to **the Edomites**. **His** request was almost the same as **Jacob's**. **He** sought only safe passage for **Isra'el**. Notice the similarity between **Jacob's message** in **Genesis 32:4-5** and **Moshe's message** in **Numbers 20:14-17**.

Just as **Jacob's message** was met with hostility and the threat of violence, **Moshe's message** was met with a similar threat of war. **The king of Edom** warned: **You are not to pass through my land; if you do, I will come out against you with the sword. Isaac** had prophesied over **Esau, "By your sword you shall live" (Genesis 27:40).** Then **Moses** made **his** second request, saying: **We will keep to the highway; if we do drink the water, either we or our livestock, we will pay for it. Just let us pass through on foot – it's nothing. But Edom** said: **You are not to pass through**. Just as **Jacob** was met by a fighting force of **400 men** led by **Esau**, we read that **Edom** threatened **the Israelites** with a heavy force and with a strong hand. **Thus, Edom refused to allow Isra'el passage through its territory (20:18-21).** The reason why **the Israelites** did not use force against **the Edomites** was that **they** were forbidden by **Divine** command not to attack **them** (see **Deuteronomy Aq – Events in Seir**). **So Isra'el turned away**, southward, toward the Sea of Reeds to avoid **the land of Edom.**[403]