

DEUTERONOMY 3

Deuteronomy 3:1–7

Victory over the second Amorite king.

3:2. “*fear him not: for I will deliver him.*” This is the same exhortation the Lord had given the children of Israel nearly forty years earlier (Deuteronomy 1:21, 29) and again more immediately with their victory over the first Amorite king (2:24). It might seem a redundant message considering the Israelites had so recently witnessed the Lord’s powerful hand. Despite such recent confirmation of His power, fresh challenges required fresh faith in the Lord. As they were about to face one of the literal giants of the land in King Og of Bashan, this reminder was needed (see note for 3:11).

One hallmark of the Lord’s wisdom is repetition with His children. Repetition can be found throughout the scriptural records but is particularly manifest in Deuteronomy (note the emphasis on “all” [Hebrew *kol*], found thirteen times in the first fourteen verses). The Lord not only repeats true teachings but also requires His prophets to do the same (see notes for 3:21–22 and 3:28), and He expects the same from parents of children also (see note for 4:8).

3:3. “*the Lord our God delivered into our hands.*” One of Moses’s constant refrains is that the Israelites’ victories are pure gifts from God. True today as well as anciently, without this humble recognition, our natural man tends to take personal credit or to erroneously attribute success to any other source than the Lord Jesus Christ. If we thus displace the only true object of our faith, His miracles diminish and even cease (see Mormon 9:20; also see notes for Deuteronomy 8:14ff.).

3:6. *“we utterly destroyed them.”* See note for Deuteronomy 2:34.

3:6. *“even as we did unto Sihon.”* In both cases, the Israelites conquered just as God had promised they would (see 3:2; also 2:24, 31).

Deuteronomy 3:8–17

Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh received land inheritances on the east of Jordan.

3:11. *“of the remnant of giants.”* Og seems to have been a physical giant. The cubit dimensions we have of his bed measure thirteen and a half feet long by six feet wide, making it big enough to fit a gigantic human being. We are reminded of this when the original Israelite scouts claimed that the inhabitants of the promised land were “greater and taller than we; . . . we have seen the sons of the Anakims there” (Deuteronomy 1:28). Compare the Numbers account: “There we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, . . . and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight” (Numbers 13:33), which gives insight into the challenge the Israelites perceived in facing such daunting combatants. In this way, Moses’s rather pithy account here in Deuteronomy of conquering all their armies and cities (which their faithless forefathers had originally described as “walled up to heaven” in Deuteronomy 1:28) emphasizes the miraculous power of God. Here Moses emphasized that the Lord is powerful enough to overcome every obstacle, no matter how enormous or impossible it may appear.

3:12–13, 16. *“and the cities thereof, gave I unto the Reubenites and to the Gadites . . . unto half the tribe of Manasseh.”* We learn in Numbers 32 that these tribes who had many herds had requested to receive the livestock-friendly lands of Bashan and the northern parts of Transjordan. This provides context for Moses’s requirements that they still provide military support for the rest of the conquest after settling their wives, children, and herds (see Deuteronomy 3:19).

Deuteronomy 3:18–29

The Lord commanded that Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh provide fighting men to stay in the troops for the rest of the western conquest and that Moses encourage Joshua to lead the rest of the campaign. He also reaffirmed that Moses would not accompany Israel across the Jordan.

3:21–22. *“Thine eyes have seen. . . . Ye shall not fear.”* Moses reminded Joshua that he had seen that the Lord is powerful enough to conquer Israel’s enemies, encouraging him to have the faith that the

Lord will continue to “fight for you” (verse 22). Looking back on God’s saving acts promotes faith for future battles, providing a template for overcoming the temptation to “fear them” (verse 22).

Elder David A. Bednar has highlighted the faith-building effect of remembering our personal experiences with the Lord’s deliverance so that we can press forward through each new trial in our mortal probation. He defined

three basic elements of faith: (1) faith as the *assurance* of things hoped for which are true, (2) faith as the *evidence* of things not seen, and (3) faith as the principle of *action* in all intelligent beings. . . .

Faith as the evidence of things not seen looks to the past and confirms our trust in God and our confidence in the truthfulness of things not seen. We stepped into the darkness with assurance and hope, and we received evidence and confirmation as the light in fact moved and provided the illumination we needed. The witness we obtained after the trial of our faith (see Ether 12:6) is evidence that enlarges and strengthens our assurance.

Assurance, action, and evidence influence each other in an ongoing process. . . . These three elements of faith—assurance, action, and evidence—are not separate and discrete; rather, they are interrelated and continuous and cycle upward. And the faith that fuels this ongoing process develops and evolves and changes. As we again turn and face forward toward an uncertain future, assurance leads to action and produces evidence, which further increases assurance. Our confidence waxes stronger, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.¹

3:24. “*what God is there in heaven or in earth?*” Moses’s exuberant (and for us modern readers, rhetorical) question highlights the difference between monotheistic Israel and their polytheistic neighbors. The ancient world’s cultures were full of many beliefs and faith traditions, often featuring a multiplicity of deities.

In the Exodus account we are shown that the Egyptians deified nearly everything, including the sun, frogs, and flies in their pantheon of gods. These false deities were decisively shown to be no gods at all in the ten plagues—“that thou mayest know that there is none like unto the Lord.”² Even Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law was impressed when he heard “how the Lord delivered them” (Exodus 18:8) and faithfully declared, “Now I know that the Lord [YHWH] is greater than all gods [*‘elim*]” (Exodus 18:11).

¹ David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith” [address to Church Educational System educators, February 3, 2006], church ofjesuschrist.org.

² Exodus 8:10, 22; see also Exodus 7:5, 17; 9:14, 29; 12:12; 14:4.

Though modern culture has swung the faith pendulum from pantheism to secularism, the opportunity and challenge remains the same: will we “hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord”? (Deuteronomy 6:4).

3:26. “the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes.” This is the second time Moses referred to the Lord’s excluding him from eventually crossing the Jordan River and joining Israel in the promised land (see Deuteronomy 1:37; he referred to it for a third and final time in 4:21). This reference in chapter 3 has no immediate explanation beyond the context noted in chapter 1 with the scouting of the promised land by the tribal spies. The comment in chapter 4 is in reference to the Exodus from Egypt in general, which does not provide any explanatory insight. The account in Numbers chronicled an event not mentioned in Deuteronomy as the reason for the prophet’s ban on entering the promised land (see Numbers 20:10–12). Considering the only Deuteronomic context for Moses’s exclusion is the incident with the spies, it suggests Moses may have displeased the Lord by capitulating to the people’s suggestion to send spies (Deuteronomy 1:22–23). Again, our account here differs from the Numbers account, which reported that the Lord did direct Moses to send spies, but only to “search the land” (Numbers 13:2); perhaps the exclusion was because Moses added instructions for the spies to qualitatively judge the land and its people, including an assessment of their fortifications (Numbers 13:18–20). Either action could be seen as “adding” to the word of the Lord (prohibited in Deuteronomy 4:2), contributing to the people’s doubt and therefore displeasing the Lord.

Despite any momentary error by Moses that kept him from joining Israel in the promised land, we clearly see the Lord’s steadfast love and mercy as we learn of Moses’s post-mortal ministry—when Moses ministered both as a translated being to Jesus, to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17) and again as a resurrected being in our dispensation to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple (Doctrine and Covenants 110). For further information on Moses’s translation see notes for Deuteronomy 34:5–7, 10.

3:26. “let it suffice thee.” The Lord kindly acknowledged Moses’s yearning to enter the promised land with his people. Even so, for His divine purposes, it was not to be. One day God will fully unfurl His divine economy, but in the meantime He kindly yet firmly directs us to “be still and know that [He is] God” (Psalm 46:10). Like Moses, we are wise to be satisfied with the portion He allots as we believe and trust that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

3:28. “charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him.” This scene is reminiscent of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young as we see Moses pass the prophetic mantle to Joshua. Joseph had the seminal work, like Moses, but it would be Brigham whom the Lord would use to take modern Israel into

their promised land, like Joshua. Both new prophets led their respective people into a remarkably similar land that featured a freshwater lake feeding into a dead and salty sea via a river called the Jordan.³ Both involved people of the covenant led by Jehovah's new prophet after a dispensation head, succeeding in the next phase of the work because of the Lord's continuous blessings.

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³ For fascinating geographical and socio-religious parallels, see David S. Boyer, "Geographical Twins a World Apart," *National Geographic Magazine*, December 1958, 848–859; Lynn Arave, "Does Utah of Yore Mirror Holy Land?," *Deseret News*, September 25, 2004, <https://deseret.com/2004/9/25/19852418/does-utah-of-yore-mirror-holy-land>.