

## Deuteronomy 3:23-29

Dr. Steven R. Cook

“I also pleaded with the LORD at that time [as Israel approached the land of Canaan], saying, <sup>24</sup> ‘O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand [in victory, as they advanced toward Canaan]; for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as Yours? [cf. Ex 15:11; Psa 86:8; 89:8] <sup>25</sup> ‘Let me, I pray, cross over and see the fair land that is beyond the Jordan [to the west], that good hill country and Lebanon [which God told Moses thirty eight years earlier he would not enter].’ <sup>26</sup> “But the LORD was angry with me on your account [Israel’s constant complaining upset Moses, and in his anger, he disobeyed the Lord; Num 20:1-13], and would not listen to me [i.e. rejected Moses’ prayer]; and the LORD said to me, ‘Enough! Speak to Me no more of this matter [i.e. don’t ask again]. <sup>27</sup> ‘Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift up your eyes to the west and north and south and east, and see it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan [cf. Deut 1:37; 31:2. On another occasion God told His prophet, Jeremiah, not to pray; see Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11]. <sup>28</sup> ‘But charge Joshua and encourage him and strengthen him [encouragement was needed to do God’s will; cf. Deut 1:38; 31:1-8, 23], for he shall go across at the head of this people [as Israel’s theocratic administrator], and he will give them as an inheritance the land which you will see.’ <sup>29</sup> “So we remained in the valley opposite Beth-peor.” [Though not what he wanted, Moses accepted God’s answer and remained near that place until his death; see Deut 4:22; 34:1-6]

### Summary:

In this pericope, Moses explains why he was not permitted to enter the land of Canaan (Deut 3:23-27), and how Joshua was selected by God as Israel’s new theocratic administrator (Deut 3:28-29). The military victories of Sihon and Og were objective measures of God’s working in and through His people as they advanced toward Canaan (Deut 2:16—3:22). Moses was undoubtedly excited to see God moving His people toward Canaan. Knowing that God is characteristically gracious and merciful (Ex 34:6; cf. Neh 9:17; Psa 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jer 3:12-13), it is likely Moses thought there was some hope that God would change His mind about letting Moses enter the land. Moses revealed his prayer, saying, “I also pleaded with the LORD at that time, saying, ‘O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand; for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as Yours?’” (Deut 3:23-24). Moses then asked God, “Let me, I pray, cross over and see the fair land that is beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon” (Deut 3:25). But God’s answer was not what Moses wanted to hear, as he explains God’s answer, saying, “But the LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me; and the LORD said to me, ‘Enough! Speak to Me no more of this

matter” (Deut 3:26). The reason God was angry with Moses was because he let Israel’s constant complaining upset him, and in his anger, he disobeyed the Lord’s command (see Num 20:1-13).

God would not listen to Moses, that is, He would not grant his request. In fact the Hebrew sentence implies that Moses had kept on asking God for permission, and that God became “furious” (an intensive form of *‘ābar*) with him. This conversation reveals something of the intimacy of Moses’ relationship with God.<sup>1</sup>

The lawgiver’s urgent appeal was to no avail, however, for the Lord was angry with Moses “because of” (*lěma’an*; cf. 1:37) the people. He does not (and cannot) shirk responsibility for his intemperate smiting of the rock in the desert (Num 20:9–11), but he was insistent that what he did was motivated by their incessant complaining and by his desire to meet their demands for water. In sharp words of rebuke (“enough of this!”), the Lord forbade further discussion (v. 26). The matter was settled.<sup>2</sup>

Though God could have granted Moses’ request and allowed him to enter the land, He chose not to, telling Moses not to ask again.<sup>3</sup> The Lord is free to be gracious to whomever He pleases, saying, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion” (Ex 33:19). But God is also a righteous Judge, dispensing judgment according to omniscience, wisdom, and sovereignty. God then told Moses, “Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift up your eyes to the west and north and south and east, and see it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan” (Deut 3:27). Though the Lord refused Moses’ request to enter the land of Canaan, the Lord allowed him to taste some of Israel’s military conquest. He also allowed Moses to see the land from the top of Mount Pisgah, with the reassurance that his leadership efforts would not die with him. The Lord’s people would go forward.

God then instructed Moses, saying, “But charge Joshua and encourage him and strengthen him, for he shall go across at the head of this people, and he will give them as an inheritance the land which you will see” (Deut 3:28). God had selected Joshua as Moses’ successor. As Israel’s new theocratic administrator, Joshua would need encouragement to do God’s will, and Moses would be the one to do it (cf. Deut 1:38; 31:1-8, 23). Moses concludes, saying, “So we remained in the valley opposite Beth-

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<sup>1</sup> Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 268.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 111–112.

<sup>3</sup> On another occasion, God instructed Jeremiah not to pray (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11).

peor” (Deut 3:29). Though not what he wanted, Moses accepted God’s answer and remained near that place until his death (cf. Deut 4:22; 34:1-6). But Moses was not idle; rather, he preached messages to Israel, which provide the content of the book of Deuteronomy. With the closing of this first part of his address, Moses then expounded the laws he’d given to the first generation of Israelites. Warren Wiersbe comments:

All that Moses said in the first part of his farewell address prepared the way for his exposition and application of God’s law, for history and responsibility go together. God had done mighty things for the people, both in blessing them and in chastening them, and the people of Israel had a responsibility to love God and obey His Word. Throughout this address, Moses will frequently remind the Jews that they were a privileged people, the people of God, separated unto the Lord from all the nations of the earth. It’s when we forget our high calling that we descend into low living. The church today needs to catch up on the past and be reminded of all that the Lord has done for His people—and all that His people have done and not done in return for His blessings. If a new generation of believers is to march into the future in victory, they need to get back to their roots and learn again the basics of what it means to be the people of God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Equipped*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub., 1999), 24.