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## **Deuteronomy 2:1-7, ESV.**

*2 “Then we turned and journeyed into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea, as the LORD told me. And for many days we traveled around Mount Seir. <sup>2</sup> Then the LORD said to me, <sup>3</sup> ‘You have been traveling around this mountain country long enough. Turn northward <sup>4</sup> and command the people, “You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful. <sup>5</sup> Do not contend with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. <sup>6</sup> You shall purchase food from them with money, that you may eat, and you shall also buy water from them with money, that you may drink. <sup>7</sup> For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing.”*

### **The Sanctuary of God.**

These words in today’s quote are from the mouth of Moses, spoken to his people in the desert, before entering Canaan, the Promised Land:

*<sup>7</sup> For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing.*

The Israelites have spent forty years in the desert, and they are at the doorstep of their new home. But before they can enter and settle down, there will be war.

The story here is picking up from the end of the Book of Numbers. Moses is giving a lengthy speech, bolstering moral, assuring unity and obedience before they

begin what could be a brutal fight. Moses will not be going with them, as God has decided that he will die before they enter Canaan, and Moses wants above all else for his people to remember that God has guided and protected them for forty years. You can tell from the details in today's passage how carefully God guided the Israelites, giving them precise directions: *'You have been traveling around this mountain country long enough. Turn northward* . It has been a tremendous journey, but now, more than ever, they must remember that God deserves their absolute, unwavering trust. Even though they have been in the most inhospitable environment imaginable, they have had food and water, and their population has multiplied. God has not forgotten the promise of land to live on, a promise that is a core aspect of God's covenant with the Israelites. This promise is about to be met, but the Israelites must remain strong and obedient to their God. As an aside, many people believe – and I tend to support this – that the invasion of Canaan was probably not all that bloody, that the escapees from Egypt merged with the Canaanite population and the Israelites emerged from that combined population. But we are reading a faith story and will take it as it is written.

I'm going to switch gears. My sister Mary was four years ahead of me in school. She was and is enormously gifted intellectually. As a student, I walked in her footsteps. She was my role model in high school. I went to the same college

as she did. She got an undergraduate degree in Chemistry and a Ph.D. in Biochemistry. I eventually got an undergraduate degree in Mathematics and a Ph.D. in Computer Science. She became a professor. I became a professor. I always looked up at her in awe of her powerful mind. When Mary was in high school and I was in grammar school, she applied to be a foreign exchange student. As I recall, there was a period of time when she knew she was going to go somewhere, but she had not yet been given her assignment, the country in which she would be studying. Wherever that was, she would go there and live with a family, and she would attend school with students in that nation.

I'm switching gears again. Not long before my sister and I were born, my father was a young man, serving as a Sargent in the U.S. Marines in World War II. My father was a sharpshooter. He had started out in the Army Air Corps and had been shipped to England to do training runs over the English Channel. The war was raging, however, and he was itching to get into combat. There was a need for sharpshooters in the Pacific. So, he was transferred to the Marines, was made a Sargent, and put in charge of a unit. But when his unit landed on Guadalcanal, they had no proper maps of the island. They were frequently lost. There was literally unbearable heat. They carried only enough food for a handful of days, and perhaps a single canteen each. They quickly ran out of food. Marines began

losing weight. At one point, my father and his men were cut off from the rest of the Marine forces. They were starving to death, even as they found themselves in intense firefights. My father was protective of his men, and so he decided that he had to get them food. At night, he would slip out, find a Japanese straggler and kill him. Then he would steal the Japanese soldier's rice pouch and take it back to his men. They survived entirely on rice my father took from Japanese soldiers. Eventually, they found their way back to the rest of the rest of the Marine units. My father fought in battles, killing Japanese soldiers with his rifle and his long barreled .38. He wanted very badly to help his generation annihilate the evil force that was trying to take over much of the world. He was proud to be a Marine.

After the war, my father met my mother. He was still a Marine and still wearing a uniform, despite having to walk with a cane from having been hit with shrapnel on some other island. He was awarded a Purple Heart for that. For the rest of his life, because he had metal inside of him, he would grunt whenever he climbed behind the steering wheel of a car. One day, when my parents were getting serious about each other, my mother decided to make a special treat for my father. So, when he got to her place, she fed him a nice meal, and then after dinner, she put in front of him a special desert she had made – rice pudding. My

father froze, and as my mother described it to me many years later, he seemed catatonic for at least a full minute. He paled. He shook. He asked her in a whisper to please take the rice away. She did so. It was a couple of months before he could explain why he couldn't bear the sight of rice. The one thing we never ate in our household was rice. No rice, not a grain of it in the house. Ever.

Back to my sister. One day, the big letter came in the mail. One of us brought it into the house and called to my sister. She was about to learn what nation she was going to. Mind you, this wasn't really that long after World War II, just a couple of decades. We all stood around as Mary opened it, as I recall. Mary read the name of the country: Japan. I remember looking over at my father, to see how he would respond. He rarely talked about the war. He was a very calm, gentle man. He looked passive for a moment, no expression. We were all silent. Slowly, he nodded. He smiled. I don't remember if he said this at that moment or whether he said it to me later. But my father said something like: "It's beautiful. We fought that war. I killed all those Japanese. And now my daughter is going there to study. This is how God wants wars to end. They're our friends now."

The Israelites spent a generation in the desert. Those who were alive when they started out from Egypt were not the ones who arrived in Canaan. But the entire time, God guided them. The entire time, they were within the Sanctuary of

God. My father wasn't broken by the war. He never lost his humanity, his decency. He never was angry or bitter. He did not see Japanese people as the enemy, as evil, as people he still wanted to kill. This is how we live when we accept the protection of God's Sanctuary. That Sanctuary is everywhere, and within it is the protection and guidance of God. If we willingly live within that Sanctuary, we will always find ourselves in a beautiful place. It might take a generation to get there, like it took the Israelites in the desert and like it took my father, but we will make it.

To continue to grow in your faith, you find yourself having to do two things. First, you must always be ready to change something about yourself; we are never perfect and there is always something corrupt within us. The second thing is that we must be proactive about our faith. We don't wait for opportunities to drop in our laps. We take advantage of circumstances that allow us to live like Christ. As for the first thing, sometimes the changes we make in ourselves are, in a sense, non-changes. We must resist the temptation to become something we should not be. We have to fight to maintain a certain level of innocence. My father refused to become hateful. He held no ill will toward Japan nor the people of Japan. He wasn't still fighting the war in his mind. As for the second thing, sometimes the proactive things we need to do to live our faith are very simple and are, in a sense, non-actions. My father smiled and gently welcomed the news that his daughter

would study in Japan. He didn't try to stop my sister from going to Japan. He knew that to practice his faith, he had to do what he had done all his life, and that was to obey God's command to be loving of all people. He saw my sister's assignment to go to Japan as a sign from God reminding him that he should love without bias.

In the beginning of Deuteronomy, where our quote comes from, we learn that unity among the twelve tribes of Israel will dramatically impact whether they are successful in claiming the promised land. Again, the invasion of Canaan may be a faith story and not true history. But whether the story is literal or an allegory, it tells us that when bad things happen, when we are up against terrible challenges, God will be with us. We have a Sanctuary here in our church which symbolizes the Sanctuary that God provides for us everywhere. It was powerful symbolism that God protected the Israelites for forty years in the desert, at a time when survival there was extremely difficult.

A major theme that comes through the early part of Deuteronomy is that the Israelites don't know what will happen. They are stepping into something scary. And as it turns out, they will not be warmly received by the residents of Canaan. As the story goes, many mighty armies reside there, and they will unify and rise up against the Israelites. God asks two things of the Israelites. He wants them to not lose their faith in God, to not let what they were about to face change their view of

the Sanctuary provided by God. They were to maintain their trust in God. And second, God wanted them to continue to be proactive in their faith as they had been during their long journey in the desert. Yes, their faith had at times wavered in the desert. But all in all, they listened to God. And now, they were to continue to obey; they were to continue to do as God commanded.

One of the biggest successes we can feel as people of faith is when we refuse to let ourselves be made vengeful, cynical, or hurtful, and when we continue to let God lead us, despite what happens in our lives. We live in a Sanctuary that is with us no matter where we go, no matter what we do, no matter what happens to us. All we have to do is accept the protection of that Sanctuary, fight to remain as innocent as possible, and continue to let the teachings of Christ drive our daily behavior. If we do those things, we will find that in the end, after we have wandered far and wide, after we have been through scary times, we will emerge in the Promised Land, with God's sanctuary still wrapped around us. But yes, sometimes God waits before speaking to us. God can wait an entire generation.

There is powerful DNA evidence that the Canaanites survived, that they were not wiped out, and that in fact, they are perhaps the ancestors of the Jews and the Arabs. So, yes, the biblical division between Israelites and Canaanites is mirrored today by the enmity between Jews and Arabs. I believe the day will come with

Arabs and Jews in the Middle East become deep friends. That's what God wants – for all enemies to be friends. What we must do as people of faith is remember that God wants every enemy of ours to become our friend – so why not just start out by having them be our friend in the first place? Please pray with me.

*God, the beauty of this sanctuary draws me in. This sanctuary was painstakingly built with the labor of human hands. In contrast, your ever-present sanctuary is a gift given to us without any work on our part. The reason we build beautiful sanctuaries is so that they remind us of your glory and your strength, and of the beauty and astonishing power of the Holy Spirit's presence within us. Let us see the sanctuary you provide so freely for us, no matter where we are, as a true sanctuary - a place of safety and refuge, of forgiveness and grace, of warmth and love, of companionship and humanity.*

*God, help us to always see that if we accept the protection of your sanctuary, we will always end up in a beautiful place. If we refuse to become corrupted and if we continue to let you guide us, the path we take will lead to a surprisingly perfect place, even if it takes some time. And may all enemies become friends one day. Amen.*