

WHEN THE TABLES TURN

“When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he fought against Israel, and took some of them captive. And Israel vowed a vow to the LORD and said, ‘If you will indeed give this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities to destruction.’ And the LORD heeded the voice of Israel and gave over the Canaanites, and they devoted them and their cities to destruction. So the name of the place was called Hormah.” NUMBERS 21:1-3

You can see it if you look for it. The subtle shift of momentum in a game or in a battle. I’m reminded of a fictional story of Rocky Balboa who defeats Ivan Drago in an international boxing match in Rocky IV. Drago dominates for most of the rounds, pounding the much smaller Rocky, but was unable to deliver the final blow to the smaller boxer. Rocky happens to land a right cross that hits Drago in the face and makes him bleed. The blow switches the momentum of the match and Rocky goes on to win the match (Hollywood nostalgia, I know). Well, that’s only a story for Hollywood, but how does it compare to the story of the Hebrews? Let’s find out what God wants to teach us here in Numbers 21.

Of course, this narrative story of the Hebrews’ 40 years of wandering in the desert wilderness isn’t Rocky. Indeed, Rocky is fictional and this is a true account of the Hebrews’ struggle in the desert. According to God, they have doubted and complained against God ten times. They can’t seem to get their grumbling and distrust thrown out. Instead, they continue to fall in their sin. Within a few miles of the Promised Land, they were gutted by their own distrust in the God who had delivered them from the mighty hand of Egypt just a year prior. But that’s only one part of the story. Remember, they reneged (euchre term) on their fateful decision and went to fight the Canaanites anyway. There’s a connection in that event and this event in Numbers 21. Any idea what the connection is? It’s the name Hormah.

James Boice makes a comment about Hormah that helps us see the connection: “What makes that word particularly significant, however, is that thirty-eight years beforehand, when the people had tried to go into the land without God’s blessing, they had experienced a great defeat at a place called Hormah.” Boice also points out that “Hormah” means destruction. Here we see the shift in defeat to victory. The name of the place of victory for Israel was...Hormah. The Israelites began the book attempting to gain victory through their own efforts. They failed. Here near the end of the book, the beginning and end of chapter 21 show that God begins to turn the tide to victory. They were once defined by being on the receiving end of destruction; now they are beginning their assault on the wickedness of the Canaanites. That’s not all, remember this is God’s story of His commitment to keeping His promises. He has already promised to Abraham a land. Remember the story of Abraham? His only piece of property that he owned was the cave of Machpelah that he bought to bury his wife Sarah in. But God was faithful to give his descendants land.

Men, what can we learn from the story of the bumbling Hebrews that have failed? We can see that this is the story of their God. But that’s not the whole story either. This is the story of your God. You see, God doesn’t change. When He makes a promise, He commits Himself to accomplishing it. This gives us hope because He promises to save you when you trust Christ alone to save you from your sin. You can count on it, because God gives the promise!

**Spend some time thinking about some of God’s promises that are most meaningful to you.
Take some time to praise Him for His faithfulness to His promises.**

For Further Reading: NUMBERS 21:21-45