

# Deuteronomy 2:1-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-2/deuteronomy-21-8/>

*Moses continues with Israel's history and recalls their first act of obedience since they left Horeb. As the Israelites finally decided to obey God's command to set out for the wilderness, God instructed them to be respectful of the Edomites, their kinsmen. Having given the Edomites their portions, God wanted the Israelites to conquer only what He had promised to give to them.*

Deuteronomy 2 records Israel's first act of obedience since they left Horeb. After remaining "in Kadesh many days" (1:46), the people finally decided to obey God's previous command to "turn around and set out for the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea" (1:40). Thus, Moses stated, "*We turned and set out for the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea.*" This passage echoes Deuteronomy 1:19 but in reverse order. Whereas in 1:19 the Israelites traveled through the wilderness to Kadesh-barnea, in 2:1 they left Kadesh-barnea to *set out for the wilderness*.

The road through *the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea* connects Kadesh-barnea with the Gulf of Elath, that is, the eastern part of the Red Sea (1:1-2, 40). But having now arrived south of Seir-Edom, not far from Elath and from Ezion-geber (2:8), the people of Israel *circled Mount Seir* (a mountain in Edom) *for many days*. Eventually, the LORD commanded the Israelites to leave *Mount Seir* and to *turn north* because they had *circled this mountain long enough*.

Then, as the people set out to go around Edom, the LORD provided them with a series of instructions through Moses. These instructions appear in the form of warning, to teach the people about how to conduct themselves when approaching the Edomites. God asked *Moses to command the people, saying, "You will pass through the territory of your brothers the sons of Esau who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful."*

Although the Israelites were to *pass through the territory* of Edom, God warned them to *be very careful*. The reason for this warning is clear: the Edomites were kinsmen to the Israelites since they were descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob (Genesis 25). God reminded the Israelites of that family relationship when He told them the Edomites were their "*brothers*." Thus, as the Israelites were ready to move toward the land of Edom, God told

them the Edomites would *be afraid* of them. Such a fear can be explained by the fact that the Israelites were leaving en masse, hence, giving the impression that they were up to a battle against their *brothers*, as it was often the case with the Ancient Near Eastern nations. For this reason, God instructed the Israelites to *be very careful*.

Moreover, God said, “*do not provoke them*

[the Edomites]

. The verb translated as “provoke” has the idea of engaging in strife with someone. So, God told His people not to engage in strife with the Edomites. The reason is clear. God said, “*For I will not give you any of their land, even as little as a footstep because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.*” The Israelites were not to conquer any Edomite land because the LORD was the one who gave the Edomites their portions, as He had promised in [Genesis 27:39-40](#). God’s firm commitment to protect Edom (as well as Moab and Ammon, as in vv. 10-24) shows that He chose Israel to be His own possession, but He has other families of the earth for whom He cares as well. The book of Genesis makes it clear that God’s covenant with Abram includes all nations. For God said to Abram, “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” ([Genesis 12:3](#)). This explains why God commanded the Israelites not to *provoke* the Edomites.

In fact, rather than conquering the land of the Edomites or provoking them in any ways, the Israelites were to engage in honest trade with them. God specifically stated, “*You shall buy food from them with money so that you may eat, and you shall also purchase water from them with money so that you may drink.*” God commanded His people to purchase their supplies with money when they passed *through the territory* of Edom.

The God who protected His people during the wilderness wandering is also able to provide them with continued care and safety. So, He encouraged His people to press on toward Canaan by reminding them of the many blessings they received from Him, stating *For the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness*. Such blessings included God’s protection and care for Israel during the *forty years* of wilderness wandering. During that difficult time, the Israelites had *not lacked a thing* because the *LORD* their *God* had been with them.

The purpose of this encouragement was to remind Israel that the all-powerful God who delivered them from slavery in Egypt and cared for them throughout their wilderness wandering remains unchanged. The LORD was thus ready to act in the lives of His people again and again, if they would remain loyal to His covenant.

Finally, Moses reminded the people of the actions they undertook after they had received God's commands. He concluded, "*So we passed beyond our brothers the sons of Esau, who live in Seir, away from the Arabah road, away from Elath and from Ezion-geber. And we turned and passed through by the way of the wilderness of Moab.*" The people of God crossed the territory of the *sons of Esau* (Edom) by the way of the *Arabah* (the Red Sea route as mentioned in verse 1), *from Elath and from Ezion-geber*, and marched on toward the *wilderness of Moab*, east of the Dead Sea.

*Elath and Ezion-geber* were two cities located at the northern end of the Gulf of Elath. Elath could have been the Jordanian city of Aqabah. The modern Israeli town of Elath was established in 1947. Ezion-geber was probably located about eight miles south of modern Elath. The wilderness of Moab was located east of Moab ([Numbers 21:11](#)). The Israelites advanced toward the Promised Land step-by-step as they received encouragement from God through their mediator Moses.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>1</sup> "Then we turned and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea, as the Lord spoke to me, and circled Mount Seir for many days. <sup>2</sup> "And the Lord spoke to me, saying, <sup>3</sup> 'You have circled this mountain long enough. Now turn north, <sup>4</sup> and command the people, saying, "You will pass through the territory of your brothers the sons of Esau who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful; <sup>5</sup> do not provoke them, for I will not give you any of their land, even *as little as* a footstep because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. <sup>6</sup> "You shall buy food from them with money so that you may eat, and you shall also purchase water from them with money so that you may drink. <sup>7</sup> "For the Lord your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing." <sup>8</sup>"So we passed beyond our brothers the sons of Esau, who live in Seir, away from the Arabah road, away from Elath and from Ezion-geber. And we turned and passed through by the way of the wilderness of Moab.**