

Deuteronomy 2:16-23

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-2/deuteronomy-216-23/>

In recounting Israel's history up to this point, Moses reminds them of the time when God told them not to molest the Ammonites because, like the Edomites and the Moabites, they are Israel's kinsmen. Their land was given to them by the LORD.

The destruction of the disobedient generation, described here as *men of war*, represented a crucial moment in the journey toward the conquest of Canaan. The evidence is clear from the repetition of the statements “*until all the generation of the men of war perished*” (v. 14), “*until they all perished*,” (v. 15), and “*when all the men of war had finally perished*” (v. 16). In all these three instances, the reference was about the rebellious people of whom God had said, “Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give your fathers,” ([Deuteronomy 1:35](#); [Numbers 14:30](#)). This first generation died in the wilderness without seeing the Promised Land.

In [Numbers 1](#), those who were numbered were men “twenty years old and upward, whoever was able to go out to war in Israel.” And in [Numbers 14:29](#), those disallowed from entering the Promised Land were counted according to their “complete number from twenty years old and upward.” Thus, the *men of war* were the same as those twenty years and older at the time of the census. The message was clear: those who were disallowed the possession of their inheritance were those who had refused to fight for it, as God had directed. He raised up a new generation and asked them to enter and fight. It takes courage to walk in obedience. Allowing fear to keep us from obedience causes a loss of rewards.

Therefore, *when all the men of war had finally perished from among the people*, the LORD spoke to Moses to instruct him on how the new generation of Israelites was to behave as they pressed on to conquer Canaan. The LORD said, “*Today you shall cross over Ar, the border of Moab.*” Here, the text alludes to a region in *Moab* called *Ar* to refer to the whole land of *Moab*.

In this section, the instructions concerned the *sons of Ammon*. God said to His people, “*When you come opposite the sons of Ammon, do not harass them nor provoke them.*” The verb translated as “to harass” basically means “to treat someone as an enemy,” or “to show hostility to someone.” The verb “to

provoke” means “to engage in strife with someone.” God used these two verbs together to strengthen His command to His people so that they would not engage in war with *the sons of Ammon*. Israel was to show respect to the Ammonites because they were Israel’s kinsmen, just like the Edomites and the Moabites (2:1-15). God said, “*For I will not give you any of the land of the sons of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot as a possession.*” It was just as important to walk in obedience to whom God had said not to fight as it was to walk in obedience to whom God had instructed them to fight.

It will be recalled that when the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their evil deeds, Lot and his daughters “escaped to the mountains”(Genesis 19:17). The daughters of Lot made themselves pregnant by the drunken Lot and gave birth to children. The older daughter gave birth to a son named “Moab,” who became the Moabites, and the younger gave birth to “Ben-Ammi,” who became the Ammonites (Genesis 19:30-38). Thus, like the Moabites, the Ammonites were closely related to the Israelites. God instructed His people not to *harass them, nor provoke them*, because He was the one who gave them the land as their inheritance.

Then, like the previous section, Moses again interrupted the flow of the narrative to give some background information about the first inhabitants of the land of Ammon. Like Moab, the land of Ammon had been *regarded as the land of the Rephaim*, for they were the ones who *formerly lived* there. But whereas the Moabites called them Emim (v. 11), *the Ammonites called them Zamzummin*. As in the previous section (vv. 9-15), the narrator tells us that these people were *great, numerous, and tall as the Anakim*. However, the all-powerful God *destroyed them* in order to make room for the *Ammonites* (and for the Edomites, as indicated in v. 22). Since it was the LORD who *destroyed the Zamzummin* to give the land to the *Ammonites*, He told the Israelites to be favorable to the Ammonites.

Moses compared what the LORD did for the *Ammonites* to what He did for the *sons of Esau*. He said, “*just as He [the LORD] did for the sons of Esau, who live in Seir, when He destroyed the Horites from before them.*” The implication of the comparison is that *the sons of Ammon* too had the right to dispossess *the Zamzummin* and settle *in their place*, because God was the one who gave them their land, just as He gave Seir to *the sons of Esau*.

The purpose of this background information was to remind the Israelites of the inviolability of the land of Ammon because it was allocated to their current inhabitants by the LORD (Deuteronomy 32:8). This contrasts with the

treatment God prescribed for the Amorites. In [Genesis 15](#), God told Abraham his descendants would return from Egypt to deal with the Amorites after four generations, because “the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete” ([Genesis 15:16](#)). God provided a substantial window of time for the Amorites to repent before imposing judgment.

Before transitioning to the Amorites with whom Israel was to fight (vv. 24-25), the narrator briefly introduced new peoples (the Avvim and the Caphtorim). The Caphtorim (*from Caphtor*) *destroyed* the Avvim and *lived in their place*. It is interesting to observe that the Avvim were also from the Rephaim since the text says they *lived in villages as far as Gaza* ([Joshua 11:22](#)). Human history is filled with various groups displacing other groups. In some instances, God was dispensing justice through other peoples, even though it is unlikely their motives were righteous. All this information shows the power of God at work.

Biblical Text:

¹⁶ “So it came about when all the men of war had finally perished from among the people, ¹⁷ that the Lord spoke to me, saying, ¹⁸ ‘Today you shall cross over Ar, the border of Moab. ¹⁹ ‘When you come opposite the sons of Ammon, do not harass them nor provoke them, for I will not give you any of the land of the sons of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot as a possession.’ ²⁰ (It is also regarded as the land of the Rephaim, *for* Rephaim formerly lived in it, but the Ammonites call them Zamzummin, ²¹ a people as great, numerous, and tall as the Anakim, but the Lord destroyed them before them. And they dispossessed them and settled in their place, ²² just as He did for the sons of Esau, who live in Seir, when He destroyed the Horites from before them; they dispossessed them and settled in their place even to this day. ²³ And the Avvim, who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and lived in their place.)