

Numbers 20:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him.

Analysis

Edom 'refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him.' Despite kinship (Edom was Esau's descendants), Edom denied passage. Israel respected this refusal rather than fighting relatives, demonstrating restraint and honoring blood ties. The Hebrew 'natah' (turned away) shows peaceful withdrawal despite having military power after defeating Egypt. This teaches wisdom in choosing battles - not every wrong requires confrontation. Paul later counseled, 'if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men' (Rom 12:18). Sometimes God's will involves going around obstacles rather than through them.

Historical Context

This occurred as Israel journeyed from Kadesh toward Canaan (v.14-21). Edom occupied territory south/southeast of Dead Sea. God had commanded Israel not to provoke Edom (Deut 2:4-6) due to kinship through Jacob and Esau. Israel's request for passage with promise of payment for water and staying on the King's Highway showed good faith (v.17-19). Edom's armed refusal forced Israel's lengthy detour around Edom's territory. Later history recorded ongoing tension - Edom refused aid when Babylon attacked Jerusalem (Obadiah 10-14, Ps 137:7), bringing prophesied judgment. However, in this instance Israel practiced patience with difficult relatives.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Do you demonstrate restraint with difficult people, choosing peace over assertion of rights?
2. How can you discern when to press forward versus when to peacefully withdraw and seek alternative paths?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּמָּא אוֹ	אֶד וְ	נָתַן	אֶת	יִשְׂרָאֵל	עָבַר	בְּגִבְלוֹ
refused	Thus Edom	to give	H853	Israel	passage	through his border
H3985	H123	H5414		H3478	H5674	H1366
וַיִּט	יִשְׂרָאֵל	מַעְלִיו:				
turned away	Israel	H5921				
H5186	H3478					

Additional Cross-References

Judges 11:18 (Parallel theme): Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab.

Deuteronomy 2:29 (Parallel theme): (As the children of Esau which dwell in Seir, and the Moabites which dwell in Ar, did unto me;) until I shall pass over Jordan into the land which the LORD our God giveth us.