

Numbers 21:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let me pass through thy land: we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but we will go along by the king's high way, until we be past thy borders.

Analysis

Israel's request to the king of the Amorites 'Let me pass through thy land' demonstrates their attempt at peaceful passage. The promise 'we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well' pledged non-interference with Amorite property. This respectful approach shows that Israel, despite their military strength (600,000+ fighting men), sought peace when possible. God's people are called to pursue peace where conscience permits, living peaceably with all men as much as possible (Romans 12:18).

The commitment 'but we will go along by the king's high way, until we be past thy borders' specified use of public roads, the established trade routes connecting regions. The 'king's highway' was a major north-south route through Transjordan. By promising to stay on public roads and not trespass on private property, Israel offered terms that should have been acceptable to a reasonable ruler. The request demonstrated wisdom in diplomacy—neither demanding passage as a right nor accepting unnecessary conflict when peaceful transit was possible.

Yet Sihon refused (verse 23), forcing military confrontation that resulted in Israel's victory and possession of Amorite territory. The Amorites' refusal of Israel's peaceful offer brought divine judgment upon them—they could have avoided destruction by granting passage, but their hardened resistance sealed their fate. This illustrates a recurring biblical pattern: those who resist God's people and

purposes bring judgment upon themselves (Genesis 12:3), while those who bless them receive blessing (Rahab, Ruth).

Historical Context

The king's highway was an ancient trade route running north-south through Transjordan, connecting Arabia to Damascus and beyond. Archaeological evidence confirms this route's importance in the Bronze and Iron Ages. Israel's request to use this public road rather than cutting through fields and vineyards would minimize economic impact on the Amorite kingdom. The diplomatic nature of the request reflects common ancient Near Eastern protocol when one nation sought passage through another's territory. Sihon's refusal and subsequent attack on Israel (verse 23) violated normal diplomatic conventions and demonstrated the hardening God had brought upon him for judgment purposes.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Israel's diplomatic approach to the Amorites demonstrate the biblical principle of pursuing peace where possible while remaining ready to fight when necessary?
2. What does Sihon's refusal of Israel's reasonable request teach about how God uses human sin and hardness to accomplish His sovereign purposes in judgment and redemption?

Interlinear Text

נֶעֱבֹר	בְּאַרְצֶךָ	לֹא	נִטֶּה	בְּשָׂדֶיךָ	
Let me pass	through thy land	H3808	we will not turn	into the fields	
H5674	H776		H5186	H7704	
וּבְכֶרֶם	לֹא	נִשְׁתֶּה	מֵי	בְּאֵר	בְּדֶרֶךְ
or into the vineyards	H3808	we will not drink	of the waters	of the well	high way
H3754		H8354	H4325	H875	H1870
הַמֶּלֶךְ	נִלְךָ	עַד	אֲשֶׁר	נֶעֱבֹר	גְּבֻלְךָ:
by the king's	H1980	H5704	H834	Let me pass	thy borders
H4428				H5674	H1366

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 20:17 (Kingdom): Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders.