

Know Your Spiritual Enemies: The Amorites

A Sermon by the Rev. Malcolm G. Smith

November 19, 2023

Readings

Numbers 21:21-25, 32-35 (NKJV, modified)

²¹ And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, ²² "Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into the fields or into the vineyards; we will not drink the water from wells. We will go by the King's Highway until we have passed by your borders." ²³ But Sihon would not give Israel passage within his border. So Sihon gathered all his people together and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and he came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. ²⁴ And Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land.... ²⁵ So Israel took all these cities, and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all its villages.

³² Then Moses sent to spy out Jazer; and they took its villages and drove out the Amorites who were there. ³³ And they turned and went up by the way to Bashan. So Og king of Bashan went out against them, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. ³⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Do not fear him, for I have delivered him into your hand, with all his people and his land; and you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon." ³⁵ So they defeated him, his sons, and all his people, until there was no survivor left him; and they took possession of his land.

John 17:1, 14-18 (NKJV, modified)

¹ Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said:... ¹⁴ "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."

Divine Providence 100, 106, 120

It Is a Law of Divine Providence That We Should Put Away Evils in Our External Self, Regarding Them as Sins and Doing So as If of Ourselves, and That This Is the Only Way the Lord Can Put Away the Evils in Our Internal Self and in Our External Self at the Same Time

There are many kinds of loves, but two of them are like lords or kings, namely, heavenly love and hellish love. Heavenly love is love toward the Lord and love for the neighbor, while hellish love is love of self and love of the world.

The Lord cannot cleanse us from any compulsion to evil in our spirits or internal selves as long as we keep the external self closed. Each of the evils that we use to keep our external selves closed seems to be a single item, but there are infinite elements within it. When a person puts away a seemingly single evil like that, then the Lord puts away the infinite elements that it contains. The Lord then cleanses us from the compulsions to evil in our internal selves and from the evil practices themselves in our external selves.

Introduction

- This is the fifth talk in this series on knowing your spiritual enemies, in which we look at the spiritual significance of the different enemies that the people encounter in the stories in the Lord's Word.
- And so you might find that they start blending together a bit – Amalekites, Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites...
- The enemy we're going to focus on today is the Amorites and I'm going to give you a way of remembering what they mean.
 - It's not accurate but it might be helpful.
 - The root of the word that Amorites comes from seems to be the Hebrew word *amar* which means to speak or boast.
 - But *Amor*-ites also sounds like the word for love in Latin, French, and a bunch of other languages, *amor*.
 - The teachings of the New Church tell us that the Amorites mean evil loves – hellish love of self and hellish love of worldly things (*Secrets of Heaven* 1857, 6306, 6859).
 - So Amor-ites = hellish-love-ites
- Part of what we're going to see as we go through the stories about the Amorites is that those hellish loves are the context of our spiritual work – the place where we get to work on trying to be the people the Lord wants us to be.
 - The land of the Amorites is the children of Israel's entry point into the promised land.
 - Once the children of Israel do the initial conquering of the nations in the land, they are still living in the land of the Amorite.
 - And there is still more work to be done to drive out the Amorites and there is always the temptation to fall into worshipping the gods of the Amorites.
 - We're going to look at each of these times in the children of Israel's interactions with the Amorites.
- Let's get into how the Lord can help us to understand and fight against our spiritual enemy the Amorites.

Recap

- The last time we were talking about spiritual enemies was back in August.
- We were reading then about the children of Israel coming up towards the Promised Land but having to go around the nations of people who were from their family tree – they had to go around the Edomites, around the Moabites, and around the Ammonites.
 - The Lord had been very clear with them that they were not allowed to take anything from those nations without asking and they weren't allowed to go through their land without permission.
 - They asked for permission to go through and they were told no and so they had to go around.

Sihon and Og

- But then they came to the land of the Amorites.
- And the Amorites had been there a long time.
 - The Amorites are listed as a descendant of Noah's son Ham and grandson Canaan (Genesis 10:16) and they're also mentioned in a prophecy to Abram about what his descendants would have to deal with (Genesis 15:16).
- At the time when the children of Israel were coming up to the edge of the Promised Land, there were two great kings of the Amorites in that area: Sihon and Og.
 - The children of Israel came first to the territory of Sihon and again asked if they could pass through the Amorites land peacefully and not take anything from them.
 - As we read in our lesson, this time the enemy nation didn't just say no to them coming through, instead the Amorites attacked them!
 - And so the children of Israel fought back and defeated the Amorites and took their land.
 - Shortly after that they came to the territory of King Og of the Amorites.
 - He also attacked the children of Israel and they defeated him too and took his land as well.
 - The territory that they took before they crossed the Jordan river became the inheritance of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh.
- Defeating Sihon and Og was no small thing.
 - Some of the Amorites, including King Og, were giants from a group called the Rephaim.
 - The prophet Amos says that their "height was like the height of the cedars," and they were "as strong as the oaks" (2:9).
 - And King Og is said to have had an iron bed that was 9 cubits, or nearly 14 feet long (Deuteronomy 3:11).
 - And the territory of these Amorite kings was large – King Og is said to have had sixty cities, "fortified with high walls, gates, and bars" (Deuteronomy 3:4,5) but the children of Israel conquered them all.
- In terms of what they represent, these are *the* big spiritual enemies: hellish love of self and hellish love of worldly things.
 - These are the main loves of people in hell.
 - They are the loves that motivate people to hurt other people, mistreat them, take their things.
 - These are the selfish loves that cause wars, destroy marriages, cause rifts in families and communities that last for decades.
 - But the children of Israel defeated them and took their land.

A Normal Miracle

- Here's the miraculous thing: you can defeat them too.
- You were born into a world in which there are Amorite kings ruling.
 - Hellish love of self and love of worldly things are very strong – in the world around us and even inside our own hearts.
- And these loves can attack you when you're just trying to do what you need to do.
 - You're just trying to get where you're going and suddenly you find yourself really upset and wanting to hurt people or really wanting to take something that isn't yours.

- But the miracle is that you don't always act on those loves.
 - All of us have part of us that only wants what's best for ourselves.
 - All of us has a part of us that wants to tell everyone else what to do.
 - All of us has a part of us that wants to be allowed to break every rule to get what we want.
 - But you don't always act on those desires.
 - Often you choose to do something different: you choose to stop yourself; you choose to be generous; you choose to act on your love for other people; you choose to try to do what the Lord wants you to do.

- Because of the influence of the hells we should really expect all people to be at each other's throats all the time – fighting, stealing, murdering, manipulating, destroying.
 - But instead, every single day, billions of people choose to do something different – they choose to be caring, honest, gentle, forgiving, and useful.
 - It's normal but it's a miracle and it's something we should be grateful for.

- When we're coming up on Thanksgiving we often think about what we're grateful for.
 - When Joshua had finished leading the people in conquering the land, he gave a farewell speech to the people and reminded them about all that they had.
 - In that speech, the Lord says to the people through Joshua, "I have given you a land on which you did not toil, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant" (Joshua 24:13).
 - Our list of things we're grateful for should include being grateful for a place to live and food to eat.
 - But we can also be grateful for all the goodness in the people around us, and the goodness within ourselves.
 - Think of the goodness and kindness in people that you get to spend time with – you didn't toil to make that happen.
 - And think about the goodness within you – your good ideas, your kind heart, your desire to do things right, your desire to work hard, your desire to have fun and joke around with other people.
 - Those things are such blessings and, again, you didn't put those things there.
 - They were given to you by the Lord as a gift – a land flowing with milk and honey for you to live your spiritual life in (Exodus 3:17).

- The power of hell is incredibly strong and sometimes we do give in and do selfish, hurtful things.
 - But the Lord Jesus Christ is even stronger and He can help us to get better and better at not acting on the hellish loves within us.
 - Noticing and feeling grateful for the goodness that the Lord has already given us can strengthen us for the fight – we have something worth fighting for, something worth protecting.

Amorites Inside the Land

- In the story, the children of Israel conquer the Amorites outside of the Promised Land; then, led by Joshua, they cross the river Jordan and conquer Jericho, then Ai, and then go all around the land, conquering various enemies, including defeating five more kings of the Amorites (Joshua 10).
- The existence of Amorite kings outside of the land and Amorite kings inside the land seems to parallel what our reading from *Divine Providence* was describing about evils in our external self and evils in our internal self.
 - The passages say that it's one of the laws of how the Lord works with us that we should work to stop doing evil actions because we see them as sins against the Lord and that we should do this, acting as if we're doing it on our own (because that's how it feels).
 - If we do that, then the Lord can work on the inside of us and clean out the compulsions and lusts that would lead us to do evil things and He can also clean up our external behavior too.
 - We do our part to fight our hardest to stop doing harmful things and breaking the Lord's commandments and then the Lord can work to help us stop wanting to do evil things.
- This is a really hopeful and helpful teaching because it gives us clear marching orders – it tells us where we need to focus our attention: cleaning up what we do and what we say.
 - And it can help us to not worry too much about our selfish motivations.
 - If you look for it, you will sometimes find some pretty ugly, nasty motivations within yourself.
 - But you can know that it is not your responsibility or within your power to clean those things up.
 - Your job is to acknowledge that acting on those ugly things is a sin against the Lord and focus on not letting them come out in your actions and then trusting that the Lord will be able to gradually clean up what's going on inside you.
- There is an important thing to know though, about our efforts to clean up our behavior.
 - If anyone refrains from evils for any other reason than that they are sins, they do not refrain from them, but only prevents them from appearing before the world (*Divine Providence* 118; *Doctrine of Life* 108-113).
- The teachings of the New Church make it clear that there are lots of good-looking actions that we can do that won't really get us anywhere spiritually, unless we are doing the real spiritual work of repentance:
 - [Some people] believe that doing good is what purifies [a person of their evils]; others believe that it is knowing, speaking and teaching about matters having to do with the church; others, that it is reading the Word and religious books; others, that it is going often to church, hearing sermons, and especially partaking of the Holy Supper....

None of these, however, purifies a person at all unless they examine themselves, see their sins, acknowledge them, condemn themselves on account of them, and repent by desisting from them. Moreover, all of this a person must do as though of themselves, and yet with an acknowledgment at heart that they do so from the Lord. (*Divine Providence* 121)

Conclusion: Joshua's Farewell Speech

- To get one final perspective on our role in fighting against the Amorites, let's go back to Joshua's farewell speech.
 - Two things are very clear in the speech:
 - that the Lord is the one who really did all the conquering for them;
 - and that they still have a responsibility to do their part to follow the Lord.
- Joshua reviewed what had happened with them.
 - He said, "And you dwelt in the wilderness a long time. And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan, and they fought with you. But I gave them into your hand, that you might possess their land, and I blotted them out from before you. And you crossed over the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the citizens of Jericho fought against you—also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I delivered them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, also the two kings of the Amorites, but not with your sword or with your bow" (Joshua 24:7,8,11,12).
 - It was not their efforts that defeated any of the Amorites.
- But it still 100% mattered what they chose to do.
 - Next Joshua says, "Now therefore, fear Jehovah, serve Him in integrity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served that were across the river and in Egypt. Serve Jehovah! And if it seems evil in your eyes to serve Jehovah, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were across the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah" (24:14,15).
- Even when we have made a lot of progress in our spiritual lives, we will still be living in the land of the Amorites, we will still be living in an area that used to be under the dominion of the kings of the Amorites.
 - If we're not vigilant to keep serving the Lord, we can very easily fall into serving the gods of the Amorites again.
 - We are sent *into* the world by the Lord but we need to work hard to not be "of the world" (John 17:14-18).
 - We need the Lord to sanctify us by the truth of His Word and keep us from the evil one.
 - And there is still more conquering to do.
 - At the end of his life, Joshua commanded the people to do more driving out of enemies that still remained in the land (Joshua 23).

- In our lives it's worth reflecting on what territory is under what rule.
 - There may be some areas of our lives where the Lord is in charge and there may be other areas where the hellish love of self and love of worldly things still have a stronghold.
 - Maybe in your private life you have the Lord as your priority but in your professional life you still live by the priorities of the world.
 - Or maybe it's the opposite, you've got good discipline while at work but, when you get home, then you struggle to actually live according to your priorities.
 - Or maybe the strongholds of the Amorites are context-specific – like when you're hanging out with certain friends, or when you're on your phone or computer, or in the area of how you spend your money.
 - Is there an area of your life in which it feels evil in your eyes to serve the Lord?
 - Is there an area of your life, where you feel like the Lord might want you to try to capture more land from the Amorites?
 - If it's feeling like you have a lot of work to do, don't worry, the Lord promises that He will drive out the enemies "little by little" (Exodus 23:30), so you've still got plenty of time.
- The Lord can help you to understand and defeat the spiritual enemy of the Amorites, no matter how many kings and armies they have.
 - Who will you choose to serve today?
- *Amen.*

If you would like to talk more about this topic, get in touch with Malcolm at malcolm.smith@brynathynchurch.org.