

Up! Set out across the wadi Arnon! See, I give into your power Sihon, king of Heshbon, and his land. Begin the occupation; engage him in battle. --- Deut. 2:24

Then I sent messengers...to Sihon, king of Heshbon, with an offer of peace... --- Deut. 2:26

I also charged Joshua at that time, saying...Do not fear them, for it is the Lord your God who will battle for you. --- Deut. 3:21-22

Although the Omnipresent had not commanded me to proclaim peace unto Sihon, I learned to do so from what happened in the wilderness of Sinai, i.e. from an incident that relates to the Torah which pre-existed the world. For when the Holy One, blessed be He, was about to give it (the Torah) to Israel, he took it round to Esau and Ishmael. It was manifest before Him that they would not accept it, but yet He opened unto them with peace. Similarly I first approached Sihon with words of peace. — Another explanation: Moses said to God, "I learned this from You... You could have sent one flash of lightning to burn up the Egyptians, but You sent me from the wilderness to Pharaoh, to say gently, *Let my people go*. --- Rashi, based on **Yalkut Shimoni** 764:27.

The verses come out of order. It is as if Moses had referred to what preceded the Divine command to engage in battle: "I had (previously) sent messengers with an offer of peace. --- Nachmanides.

Moses did not go to war without first sending messengers of peace. The Holy One, Praised be He, said to him: I spoke to you of fighting with him, but you initiated discussion of peace! I hereby establish your decree, that whenever we face the possibility of war, we will always begin by discussing peace, as it says: *When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer it terms of peace.* (Deut. 20:10) --- **Midrash Devarim Rabbah** 5:12

Some suggest that this message of peace was the result of an unrecorded instruction from God to Moses. But I have found no evidence of this. Rather, this peace offering was a diversion from God's instruction – which actually was to find an excuse to go to war with Sihon – and Moses did this in order to communicate to the other nations that there is a genuine alternative to warfare. However, if Sihon had acceded to Moses' request, would Moses then not have fought with him? Surely this would have constituted a violation of the word of God! And if he had made war with them in spite of their peaceful agreement, this would undoubtedly have constituted the breaking of his word. --- Abravanel

Rava said: the wars fought by Joshua to conquer Canaan were unquestionably an obligation (i.e., commanded by God.) The wars fought by King David and his successors to expand the boundaries of the land, were unquestionably discretionary. --- Talmud, **Sotah** 44b

Shun evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. (Ps. 34:14) But the Torah never stipulates that we should "pursue" the mitzvot!...With other commandments, we only are required to perform them, but you are not obliged to pursue them. But concerning peace, it tells us: "Seek peace" in your own place, "and pursue it" elsewhere. Israel did likewise. Although the Holy Blessed One had said to them *Begin the occupation; engage him in battle*, they pursued peace. --- **Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah** 19:27; **Midrash Tanchuma** on **Chukkat**

Great is peace, for even the dead require peace. Great is peace, for even when Israel must make war, it asks for peace. Great is peace, for even those who dwell on high require peace, as it says: **Oseh shalom bimromav**, *may the One who makes peace in the high realms...*" (Job 25:2) Great is peace, for it concludes the blessing of the Kohanim ("*May He lift His countenance up unto you, and grant you peace.*"). --- **Sifrei**, **Shoftim** 56

Who is mighty?...Some say, the one who makes his enemy into a friend. --- **Avot d'Rabbi Natan** 23