

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
12-22-21
Numbers 21

Defeat Of The King Of Arad The Canaanite - Verses 1-3

21 When the Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, heard that Israel was coming along the road to Atharim, he attacked the Israelites and captured some of them. ² Then Israel made this vow to the LORD: “If you will deliver these people into our hands, we will totally destroy their cities.” ³ The LORD listened to Israel’s plea and gave the Canaanites over to them. They completely destroyed them and their towns; so the place was named Hormah.

21:1 The king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South, heard that Israel was coming: As the new generation of Israel begin their approach to the Promised Land, the new generation encounters their first hostile army - Arad the Canaanite, in the South.

21:2 Then he fought against Israel and took some of them prisoners: After having some men lost to Arad, Israel vowed to God that they will utterly destroy the cities of Arad. That is, they would devote the cities of Arad unto God by completely destroying them. God then granted them victory (the LORD listened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites).

21:3 So the name of that place was called Hormah: It was at Hormah that Israel was defeated in their ill-advised attempt to enter the Promised Land by force after rejecting it by faith. Now God has brought them back to the same place, and given them the victory. A real turning point for the nation!

The Bronze Snake – Verses 4-6

⁴ They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; ⁵ they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!” ⁶ Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.

21:5 In Psalm 78, we learn the sources of Israel’s complaining: (1) Their spirits were not faithful to God (78:8); (2) they refused to obey God’s law (78:10); (3) they forgot the miracles God had done for them (78:11). Our complaining often has its roots in one of these thoughtless actions and attitudes. If we can deal with the cause of our complaining, it will not take hold and grow in our lives.

21:6 God used venomous snakes to punish the people for their unbelief and complaining. The Desert of Sinai has a variety of snakes. Some hide in the sand and attack without warning. Both the Israelites and the Egyptians had a great fear of snakes. A bite by a poisonous snake often meant a slow death with intense suffering.

Deliverance Through Looking At The Bronze Serpent – Verses 7-9

⁷ The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look

at it and live.”⁹ So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

21:8-9 When the bronze snake was hung on the pole, the Israelites didn't know the fuller meaning Jesus Christ would bring to this event (see John 3:14-15). Jesus explained that just as the Israelites were healed of their sickness by looking at the snake on the pole, all believers today can be saved from the sickness of sin by looking to Jesus' death on the cross. It was not the snake that healed the people, but their belief that God could heal them. This belief was demonstrated by their obedience to God's instructions. In the same way, we should continue to look to Christ (see Hebrews 12:2).

The Journey to Moab – Verses 10-15

¹⁰ The Israelites moved on and camped at Oboth. ¹¹ Then they set out from Oboth and camped in Iye Abarim, in the wilderness that faces Moab toward the sunrise. ¹² From there they moved on and camped in the Zered Valley. ¹³ They set out from there and camped alongside the Arnon, which is in the wilderness extending into Amorite territory. The Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. ¹⁴ That is why the Book of the Wars of the LORD says: “. . . Zahab in Suphah and the ravines, the Arnon ¹⁵ and the slopes of the ravines that lead to the settlement of Ar and lie along the border of Moab.”

21:10 Now the children of Israel moved on and camped: Besides the names of the places Israel passes through on their way towards the Promised Land, brief passages of poetry are also recorded, giving the sense of elation they must have felt.

21:14 The Book of the Wars of the LORD: From the title, “The Book of the Wars of the Lord,” some assume that this was a book about battles in which the Lord fought or perhaps were fought on His behalf. We know little about the Book of the Wars of the Lord, but we may assume that this ancient work documented geographical boundaries between nations and possibly related poetic descriptions of particular battles. It is even possible that the Moabites may have known about the Book of the Wars of the Lord. In any case, the work is cited in Numbers to help substantiate the claim that Israel did not encroach on Moabite territory.

The Journey to Beer – Verses 16-20

¹⁶ From there they continued on to Beer, the well where the LORD said to Moses, “Gather the people together and I will give them water.” ¹⁷ Then Israel sang this song: “Spring up, O well! Sing about it, ¹⁸ about the well that the princes dug, that the nobles of the people sank—the nobles with scepters and staffs.” Then they went from the wilderness to Mattanah, ¹⁹ from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, ²⁰ and from Bamoth to the valley in Moab where the top of Pisgah overlooks the wasteland.

21:16-20 At Beer (lit. Well) God provided water for the people by instructing them to dig wells. This proved to be another occasion of great rejoicing as God provided for His needy people. Moses mentioned several other sites as camping places before the nation settled down on the tableland of the Pisgah range of mountains. This area lay east of the place where the Jordan River empties into the Dead Sea. The "wasteland" (Jeshimon) is the desert directly to the northeast of the Dead Sea.

The Challenge Of The Amorites - Verses 21-23

²¹ Israel sent messengers to say to Sihon king of the Amorites: ²² “Let us pass through your country. We will not turn aside into any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the King's Highway until we have passed through your territory.” ²³ But Sihon would

not let Israel pass through his territory. He mustered his entire army and marched out into the wilderness against Israel. When he reached Jahaz, he fought with Israel.

21:21-22 Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory: As was the case with the Edomites, the Amorites would not let Israel pass through their land - even though the Israelites promised it would be of no expense or trouble to the Amorites. So Sihon gathered all his people together and went out against Israel: While Edom passively refused, the Amorites actively attacked Israel and king Sihon led the battle.

King Sihon and the Amorites defeated by Israel – Verses 24-32

²⁴ Israel, however, put him to the sword and took over his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, but only as far as the Ammonites, because their border was fortified. ²⁵ Israel captured all the cities of the Amorites and occupied them, including Heshbon and all its surrounding settlements. ²⁶ Heshbon was the city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had taken from him all his land as far as the Arnon. ²⁷ That is why the poets say: “Come to Heshbon and let it be rebuilt; let Sihon’s city be restored. ²⁸ “Fire went out from Heshbon, a blaze from the city of Sihon. It consumed Ar of Moab, the citizens of Arnon’s heights. ²⁹ Woe to you, Moab! You are destroyed, people of Chemosh! He has given up his sons as fugitives and his daughters as captives to Sihon king of the Amorites. ³⁰ “But we have overthrown them; Heshbon’s dominion has been destroyed all the way to Dibon. We have demolished them as far as Nophah, which extends to Medeba.” ³¹ So Israel settled in the land of the Amorites. ³² After Moses had sent spies to Jazer, the Israelites captured its surrounding settlements and drove out the Amorites who were there.

21:24 Then Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land: We now better understand God's favor and mercy to Israel. Before they face the hardened warriors of Canaan, God gave them smaller foes and smaller battles to fight. We see how foolish the unbelief of the previous generation was. Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites: The land of the Amorites later becomes the possession of Israel; the tribe of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh receive this land.

21:28 Fire went out from Heshbon ... woe to you Moab: The passages of poetry are meant to show what a mighty people the Amorites were, and in contrast, how glorious Israel's victory over them was.

21:29 Chemosh, the national god of Moab, was worshiped as a god of war. This false god, however, was no help to this nation when it fought against Israel. Israel’s God was stronger than any of Canaan’s war gods.

The Defeat Of King Og And The Land Of Bashan – Verses 33-35

³³ Then they turned and went up along the road toward Bashan, and Og king of Bashan and his whole army marched out to meet them in battle at Edrei. ³⁴ The LORD said to Moses, “Do not be afraid of him, for I have delivered him into your hands, along with his whole army and his land. Do to him what you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon.” ³⁵ So they struck him down, together with his sons and his whole army, leaving them no survivors. And they took possession of his land.

21:34 God assured Moses that Israel’s enemy was conquered even before the battle began! God wants to give us victory over our enemies (which are usually problems related to sin rather than armed soldiers).