

Numbers Chapter 21

Verses 1-3

“Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD”, to “utterly destroy their cities”:

The word translated “utterly destroyed” (cherem), appears as “ban” or “devoted thing” elsewhere in the Old Testament in reference to whatever is devoted to the LORD, whether man, animal, or property.

Here, and in many other instances, it refers to the cities that Israel was to destroy, especially in Joshua’s day (Jericho, Joshua 6:21; Ai, Joshua 8:26; Makkedah, Joshua 10:28; Hazor, Joshua 11:11).

In (Deut. 7:2-6), the reason for this manner of destruction is given: these cities would entice the Israelites to depart from the LORD.

Israel’s first victory over the Canaanites occurred at Hormah, the place they had previously been defeated (see 14:45).

Numbers 21:1 “And [when] king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took [some] of them prisoners.”

“King Arad”:

This raiding king came from a Canaanite city in the south (i.e., the Negev).

Arad was the name of a king, but was also the name of the place he came from.

Arad was located about 20 miles south of Hebron.

It appears, this was not an all out battle.

He probably caught some spies out looking over the land, and captured them.

Numbers 21:2 “And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.”

The Israelites made supplication to the LORD for help against their enemies, and that He would give them victory over them, and made promises to Him.

“And said, if thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand”:

Certainly and entirely deliver them, so as that a complete victory shall be obtained over them.

“Then will I utterly destroy their cities”:

Or “anathematize”, or devote them to utter destruction.

Slay man and beast, burn their houses and take their goods.

Not for a spoil or for their own private use, but reserve them for the service of God.

All which is implied in the vow made, as was done to Jericho (Joshua 6:21).

And so, it is a vow as Abendana observes.

Of what they would do when they came to the land of Canaan.

This vow to the LORD must be kept, since they made it to the LORD.

This seems cruel in modern times, but God had given these people ample time to repent, and they had not.

The Israelites, now, (children of those who were here before), realize they can win the battle with God’s help.

Numbers 21:3 “And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah.”

“They utterly destroyed them”:

Israel vowed to the LORD that if He would give them victory over Arad, they would completely destroy them, not claiming the spoils of victory for themselves.

The LORD responded to this vow and gave them victory.

The LORD was with them, and Israel did just as they had vowed to the LORD.

The LORD delivered them.

In other words, the LORD caused them to win the battle.

Verses 4-9

After their victory over Arad, Israel showed again their lack of obedience toward the LORD.

“Fiery serpents”:

Bronze serpents have been found at a variety of sites in the Near East: one interesting bronze serpent is from Timna.

Only those who believed God and looked on the bronze serpent lived.

The New Testament uses this incident as an illustration of Christ’s vicarious death on the cross and of the necessity of personal faith for salvation (John 3:14-15).

Later the bronze snake played a large role in Israel’s religious life, even until the days of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4), during which Israel fell back into the ancient pagan way of thinking, and worshiped the bronze snake as the bearer of life.

Numbers 21:4 “And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.”

“By the way of the Red sea”: (compare Deut. 2:1).

Since the way through Edom was barred, Moses turned to the south to take Israel around Edom.

Thus, Israel journeyed toward Elath on the coast of the Gulf of Aqabah.

This long, circuitous route led to impatience and frustration on the part of Israel.

This is just saying, they went the long way around to avoid Edom.

The people were discouraged, because the route they took was near the Red sea, where they had begun.

Numbers 21:5 “And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for [there is] no bread, neither [is there any] water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.”

“Loatheth this light bread”:

The people’s impatience led them to despise the manna (see 11:6).

The “light bread” they are speaking of is the manna, which miraculously fell from heaven to feed them.

This bread symbolized the body of the Lord Jesus.

What a terrible thing to say about this bread.

God had just caused water enough for the thirst of this nearly 3 million people to come from the Rock.

They are a very ungrateful people.

Numbers 21:6 “And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.”

“Fiery serpents”:

So called because these snake bites inflicted a fiery inflammation.

These serpents were sent of God to destroy these wicked people.

Their “fiery” appearance is because they are judgement from God upon these ungrateful complaining people.

Everyone who this judgement came upon, died of the serpent bite.

The serpent symbolizes Satan, generally.

God has turned loose evil upon them at any rate.

Numbers 21:7 “Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.”

“We have sinned”:

The people confessed their iniquity and asked that they might be released from the judgment God had sent.

Moses became the people’s mediator with God.

This is the first time recorded in these travels, that the people themselves ask Moses to pray for them, so God will take the serpents away.

They took the correct step toward help, when they admitted their sins.

Moses prays to God for them.

Numbers 21:8 “And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.”

Out of the cloud.

Or, it may be, Moses went into the sanctuary, and there prayed, and the LORD answered him from between the cherubim.

“Make them a fiery serpent”: Not a real one, but the likeness of one.

One that should very much resemble the fiery serpents Israel had been bitten with.

“And set it upon a pole”:

A standard, banner, or ensign, as the word signifies.

Perhaps meaning one of the poles on which their ensigns were carried.

The Targum of Jonathan renders it, on a high place, that so it might be seen by all in the camp.

“And it shall come to pass, that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live”:

Which is very wonderful, that by looking to the figure of a serpent, men should be cured of the bites of real ones.

And which bites were deadly.

The virtue of healing could not come from the figure, but from God, who appointed it to be made.

The Targum of Jonathan adds, that one bitten should live, “if he directed his heart to the Word of the LORD.”

Even to that divine Logos or Word of God, whose lifting up was figured hereby (see John 3:14).

The fiery color here, is speaking of the brass it is made of.

They were to wrap it around a pole and lift it up for all to see.

The “brass” means judgement.

This symbolizes the Lord Jesus being raised up on the cross.

Jesus had the sin of the entire world upon His body, when He was on the cross.

Sin was judged and died on the cross.

This looking upon it, was like transferring their sins to the serpent on the pole.

We live when we look to Jesus for life.

It is interesting to me, that doctors today have as their emblem of healing, a serpent wrapped around a pole.

Numbers 21:9 “And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.”

The snake was a symbol of all that repelled the people of Israel.

As such, the “serpent of brass” atop a pole was a dramatic, horrific symbol.

Yet only those who would look at it would live.

The snake on the pole has the effect of Christ on the cross, visually horrible, but the only means of salvation (John 3:14-15).

Moses kept the bronze figure as a reminder of the people’s sin and God’s provision.

Eventually, however, Hezekiah, destroyed the serpent because the people had turned it into an idol (2 Kings 18:1-4).

“The serpent of brass”:

One had to fix his gaze upon this snake, a definite act of the will, if he wanted to be healed and live.

See the topological use of the incident in (John 3:14-15).

We see from the following statement of Jesus Himself, what the raising of the serpent symbolized.

John 3:14-15 “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:” “That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

The serpent that bites every one of us is sin.

We must look to Jesus for forgiveness for that sin.

When we look to Jesus, He takes our sins away.

Jesus is life.

To look to Him brings life.

Verses 10-20

Israel circled around both Edom and Moab and encamped on the north side of the Arnon River in the territory of the Amorites.

“The book of the wars of the LORD”:

Apparently, this was a collection of war songs dealing with Israel’s struggle for the possession of Canaan (compare 1 Sam. 18:17; 25:28).

It had indeed been a long time since the people of God had sung a song of praise (Exodus chapter 15).

Numbers 21:10 “And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in Oboth.”

From Zalmonah, and came to Punon.

Which, according to the above writer, was twenty miles from it.

Though here indeed, some think, the brazen serpent was set up.

Here being, as before observed, brass mines to furnish with that metal.

“And pitched in Oboth”:

Which was twenty four miles from Punon, as says the same writer.

The word signifies bottles.

Perhaps here the Israelites got water and filled their bottles.

Or, as others think, they filled them with the wine of Moab, and called the name of the place from thence.

It is perhaps the same with the Eboda of Ptolemy, which he places in Arabia Petraea.

And of which Pliny also makes mention.

When the plague of the serpents was gone, The LORD led them to Oboth.

This tells us that the Israelites went around the southern end of the mountains of Edom.

Numbers 21:11 “And they journeyed from Oboth, and pitched at Ije-abarim, in the wilderness which [is] before Moab, toward the sunrising.”

How long they stayed there is not certain.

“And pitched at Ije-abarim”:

Which, according to Bunting, was sixteen miles from Oboth.

Jarchi says it was the way that passengers pass by Mount Nebo to the land of Canaan.

And which divides between the land of Moab and the land of the Amorites.

“In the wilderness which is before Moab”:

Called the wilderness of Moab (Deut. 2:8).

“Toward the sunrising”:

The east side of the land of Moab (Judges 11:18).

The sunrising is in the east.

Ije-abarim is a place of ruins or heaps.

This was east of Moab, near Jericho.

Numbers 21:12 “From thence they removed, and pitched in the valley of Zared.”

Or the brook Zered (as in Deut. 13:14), that is near it.

This seems to be the same station with Dibon-gad (Num. 33:45).

And which, according to the above writer, was sixteen miles from Ije-abarim.

Valley in the verse above, could have been translated brook.

Perhaps, they stopped in this place, because of the water.

Numbers 21:13 “From thence they removed, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, which [is] in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites: for Arnon [is] the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites.”

A river on the borders of Moab.

“Which is in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites”:

According to Jarchi, they went round the land of Moab, all to the south and east, and came not into the border of Moab, as Jephthah said (Judges 11:18).

But before they came hither they had a station at Almon-diblathaim (Num. 33:46).

“For Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites”:

A river which divided these two countries, and bounded them.

And Moses is the more particular in this account, to show that the Israelites took nothing from the Moabites.

But what the Amorites had taken from them, they being charged not to distress the Moabites and Ammonites (Deut. 2:9).

See Jephthah’s defense (Judges 11:15).

This is all near the Dead Sea, or the Salt Sea.

Moab was founded by the descendants of Lot and his oldest daughter.

They were wild heathen people.

The Amorites were a tribe descended from Canaan.

They too, were heathen people.

These are people not living for God.

Numbers 21:14 “Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon,”

“The book of the wars of the LORD”:

This was apparently a book of victory songs that was current at the time of Moses, possibly written by Moses or a contemporary.

The work is cited here as evidence that the Arnon River was the northern boundary of Moab.

This book of the wars of the LORD is not speaking of the Bible, but of another book of that period.

Someone was so moved by the miraculous victories of the LORD, that he wrote a book about it.

Numbers 21:15 “And at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab.”

All that part of the country which lay upon the stream, as far as the city of Ar.

The metropolis of Moab, called Ar of Moab (Isa. 15:1).

“And lieth upon the border of Moab”:

As that city did.

So far goes the quotation out of the aforesaid book, as a proof of what was taken by the Amorites from the Moabites.

And were not in their possession when Israel were upon their borders.

And therefore, in taking them from the Amorites, did no wrong to Moab.

It seemed, there were many brooks which ran through this marshy area at the foot of the mountains.

Numbers 21:16 “And from thence [they went] to Beer: that [is] the well whereof the LORD spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water.”

“Beer”:

Literally “well”.

Here God provided water for Israel.

In response, Israel praised the LORD with a song which might have also come from “the Book of the Wars of the LORD” (verses 17-18).

This is where the LORD has them to dig their own well.

This is changing them over, from depending on God miraculously bringing water, without any effort upon their part.

They now, will dig the well themselves.

The water is still a miracle, but they are learning to be more dependent upon their own labors.

Numbers 21:17 “Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it:”

Being affected with the free favor and good will of God towards them.

“Spring up, O well”:

For the springing up of which they prayed in faith.

Believing in the promise of God, that it would spring up.

And so encouraged one another not only to believe it, but even to sing on account of it before it actually did.

“Sing ye unto it”:

Or on account of it praise the LORD for it.

Or “answer to it”, it being their manner to sing their songs by responses, or alternately.

This song is an act of faith.

They believe the water will come into the well.

Numbers 21:18 “The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by [the direction of] the lawgiver, with their staves. And from the wilderness [they went] to Mattanah:”

The princes and heads of the several tribes.

“The nobles of the people digged it”:

The seventy elders, according to the Targum of Jonathan.

“By the direction of the lawgiver”:

Either the LORD Himself, the lawgiver of His people, who pointed out the spot, and directed the princes where to dig.

That is, he did this by Moses.

And who, as Jarchi thinks, is the lawgiver, and not amiss.

The Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem render the word by Scribes, in the plural number, and interpret them of Moses and Aaron.

And this the princes and nobles “dug with their staves”.

Either their walking sticks, or their rods, the ensigns of their authority.

With these they smote the ground, or stuck them in a soft and sandy place, upon which the waters bubbled up and flowed out.

Mr. Ainsworth thinks that this well signified Christ, the fountain of gardens, and well of living waters.

And the waters of it the Spirit and His graces, which are a well of living water springing up unto everlasting life.

The means of which are the labors of the governors of the church, the ministers of Christ. By preaching the word, and opening the Scriptures.

And such grace is worthy of a song, and to be had with joy out of the wells of salvation (Isa. 12:3)

“And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah”:

From the wilderness near Arnon, which came out of the coasts of the Amorites (Num. 21:13).

To a place which signifies a gift.

The Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem render it, “and from the wilderness it was given to them for a gift.”

That is, the well.

And so the people of God, that are called out of the wilderness of this world, and come up from it, are called to partake of the gifts and blessings of grace, which are freely given unto them of God.

It appears, Moses told them where to dig, and the leaders of each tribe dug the well.

Some of these wells are still producing water today.

Mattanah was their next stop.

Numbers 21:19 “And from Mattanah to Nahaliel: and from Nahaliel to Bamoth:”

All the Targums interpret this, and the following verse, not of the journeying of the children of Israel, but of the motion of the well.

That, from the place from where it was given them, descended with them into the valleys, and from there to the high places.

As these words signify.

And indeed those places are not mentioned in the journeys of the children of Israel (Num. 33:1).

And were not stations where they pitched, but places they passed through before they came to Abarim, and the wilderness of Kedemoth.

This is describing their journey.

It is interesting to note that “Nahaliel” means valley of God.

Numbers 21:20 “And from Bamoth [in] the valley that [is] in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah, which looketh toward Jeshimon.”

Or rather “to the valley”, as the Targum of Onkelos.

Since Bamoth signifies high places.

Though, according to the Jerusalem Talmud, Bamoth, Baal, which seems to be the same place, was in a plain.

“That is in the country of Moab”:

The valley belonged to Moab, into which Israel came.

To the top of Pisgah.

Not that the valley reached to the top, nor did the children of Israel go to the top of it, only Moses.

But rather to the bottom, which indeed is meant.

For it intends the beginning of it, where Pisgah, which was a high mountain near the plains of Moab, began.

And which was properly the foot of it.

“Which looketh towards Jeshimon”:

That is, Pisgah, as Jarchi rightly interprets it.

Which looked over a place called Jeshimon.

And which signifies a wilderness, and is no other indeed than the wilderness of Kedemoth (see Deuteronomy 2:26).

For from thence the following messengers were sent.

There have been many songs written about mount Pisgah.

From this vantage point, was the very first sight of the valley of the Jordan River and of the hills of Palestine.

Verses 21-32

As with Edom (21:14-19), Israel requested passage through the land of Sihon, a king of the Amorites.

Since there was no requirement from the LORD not to engage the Amorites in warfare as there had been for Edom, when Sihon brought out his army, he was attacked and defeated by Israel.

Israel thus took the land bounded by the Arnon River on the south, the Dead Sea and Jordan River on the west, the Jabbok River on the north, and the land of the Ammonites on the east.

Verses 21-30

The victory over Sihon is mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament (Num. 32:33; Deuteronomy 1:4; 2:24-36; 3:2, 6; 4:46; 29:7; 3:14; Joshua 2:10; 9:10; 12:2; Judges 11:19; Psalms 135:11; 136:19).

It was Israel's first victory over an organized state.

As such, it contained an unmistakable promise for the coming conquest of Canaan.

The door was now open.

Verse 25 is applied some three hundred years later by Jephthah (in Judges 11:26), which, in addition to (1 Kings 6:1), provides a strong argument for the early date of the Exodus.

Verses (27-30), contain the so-called song of Heshbon, justifying Israel's right to the land.

Because Israel had defeated Sihon, the conqueror of Moab, Moab had no right to claim the land back from Israel (compare Judges 11:26).

Numbers 21:21 “And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying,”

Who were one of the nations of the Canaanites, and a principal and powerful one.

And who were devoted to destruction.

And their land designed for the people of Israel (see Gen. 15:16).

At this time Sihon was their king, to whom Moses, in the name of Israel, sent a very peaceable message from the wilderness of Kedemoth.

Which lay near his country (Deut. 2:26).

The Amorites were not relatives of the Israelites.

This is not a message asking for help, because they are related like that to Edom.

The Edomites were related to Israel.

Numbers 21:22 “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.”

Through some part of it, which would have been a shorter way to the river Jordan.

Over which Israel was to pass into the land of Canaan.

The terms proposed, or things to be observed in their passage, which they would bind themselves strictly to, are the same that were made to the king of Edom (see notes on Num. 20:17).

The message is the same as the one sent to Edom.

They want to pass through, with no problem to the Amorites.

Numbers 21:23 “And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel.”

Because he could not trust them, and confide in the promises they made.

And thought it not safe to let such a body of people into any part of his dominions (Judges 11:20).

And chiefly because his heart was hardened by the LORD.

That he might be delivered into the hands of Israel, as was determined (Deut. 2:30).

“But Sihon gathered all his people together”:

All that were able to bear arms out of his cities.

And which made no doubt a very numerous and powerful army.

But then these being defeated, as they were, it became more easy to the Israelites to take their cities.

Where there were none left but women and children.

“And went out against Israel into the wilderness”:

The wilderness of Kedemoth. Not content to reject a peaceable message, he went out in a hostile manner against Israel.

Even out of his own dominions.

So that he was the aggressor and unprovoked.

Which made his ruin appear the more just, and the children of Israel to have a better claim to his country conquered by them.

“And he came to Jahaz”:

A frontier town in the land of Moab (see Isa. 15:4).

And which, according to Bunting, was sixteen miles from Abarim.

“And fought against Israel”:

At the above place, where they had a pitched battle.

We see the same answer as Edom gave, but you might expect this answer from people who did not know them.

Numbers 21:24 “And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon [was] strong.”

Slew him and his army.

Entirely routed them, and got a complete victory over them.

God giving them up into their hands.

Who otherwise were a very strong, powerful, and warlike people (see Amos 2:9).

“And possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok”:

Two rivers, the one to the south, the other to the north of his country.

The one was the boundary of his country between him and the Moabites, the other the boundary of his country between him and the Ammonites, as it follows.

“Even unto the children of Ammon”:

For the border of the children of Ammon was strong.

Which is given as a reason why the Israelites proceeded no further in their conquest.

There was another reason for that, which was the order of the LORD not to distress the Ammonites.

Nor meddle with them; though Jarchi makes this prohibition to be their strength (Deut. 2:19).

But this is given as a reason why Sihon could not extend his conquests further.

As it was so well fortified, either by nature or art, or both.

By the river Jabbok, by mountains and frontier towns, and particularly by Rabbah, as the Targum of Jonathan suggests.

Which was their royal city in later times, and a very strong place (see 2 Sam. 12:26).

We see this generation was ready to fight. They had never seen war before, but God was with them, and they won the battle.

Numbers 21:25 “And Israel took all these cities: and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof.”

Which lay between the rivers Arnon and Jabbok.

Their particular names may be seen in (Num. 32:3).

“And Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites”:

Being given to the Reubenites and Gadites, who inhabited them, as their possession and inheritance (Num. 32:2).

“In Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof”:

Or “daughters thereof”.

Heshbon was the metropolis or mother city, and all the towns and villages adjacent were as daughters to it.

Of which city, more is said in the following verses (see notes on Isa. 15:4).

When God was with them, they could not be defeated.

A better statement would have been; Israel’s God took these cities.

They were able to take the cities, because it was the will of God for them to take them.

He blessed them in battle.

Numbers 21:26 “For Heshbon [was] the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon.”

His royal city, where he kept his palace.

Where he had resided for some time, and perhaps some of his predecessors.

And therefore, being now in his possession when taken by the Israelites, they had a good right and title to keep it and dwell in it.

And indeed, this is here given as a reason of it.

“Who had fought against the former king of Moab”:

Either the king that reigned before Balak, or some king of Moab, that reigned formerly.

Against whom one of the name of Sihon, which might be a common name to the kings of the Amorites, as Pharaoh to the Egyptians, had engaged in war.

“And taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon”:

And had been in the hands of the Amorites some years.

And therefore, the Moabites had no reason to object to the Israelites dwelling in it, and possessing it.

Which they had not taken from them, but from the Amorites in a lawful war.

And for proof of this, reference is had to the bards and poets of those times, who were the persons that transmitted in verse the history of famous actions to posterity.

This is mentioned again in the book of Joshua, which gives more details on the cities they took.

Sihon had defeated Moab earlier, and taken this same land from them.

Numbers 21:27 “Wherefore they that speak in proverbs say, Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared:”

“They that speak in proverbs say”:

These words came from the wise men, probably among the Amorites.

The words of (verses 27-30), describe the Amorites’ defeat of the Moabites north of the Arnon River.

Ironically, as the Amorites had taken the land from the Moabites, the Israelites had taken the land from the Amorites.

The purpose of these words cited by Moses was to substantiate Israel’s right to this land.

According to God’s commandments, the territory belonging to the Moabites was not to be taken by Israel because the Moabites were descendants of Lot (Deut. 2:9).

However, what belonged to the Amorites had been promised to Israel and was theirs for the taking.

Proverbs were a popular thing in this day.

We find that one book of the Bible is Proverbs.

This has a message deeper than the natural eye can see.

It appears, they used Heshbon and Sihon as a sign in these proverbs.

Numbers 21:28 “For there is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon: it hath consumed Ar of Moab, [and] the lords of the high places of Arnon.”

Not before, but after Sihon had subdued it, as Jarchi observes.

And is to be understood of his soldiers going out from thence, and making desolations in the adjacent parts.

Like a strong fire, and the fierce flames of it there is no resisting.

And so the Jerusalem Targum, “for a people mighty, and burning like fire, are gone out of Heshbon” (see Amos 1:4).

A flame from the city of Sihon: which is the same thing in other words, the city of Sihon being Heshbon.

“It hath consumed Ar of Moab”:

The metropolis of the country of Moab.

That is, they were as sure of it, and endeavored to make the people by these their compositions as confident of it.

That this city would fall into the hands of their armies, and be destroyed, as if it was already done.

Otherwise it does not appear that it ever was taken out of the hands of the Moabites, until taken by the Assyrians or Chaldeans.

Of this city (see notes on Isa. 15:1).

“And the lords of the high places of Arnon”:

Who had the government of the high, strong, and fortified places all along the river Arnon.

These it is suggested would be conquered by the Amorites.

All the three Targums interpret it of the priests and worshippers in the temples, and at the altars of the idols in Arnon.

And it may be rendered, “the Baals of the high places of Arnon”, as if the gods of those places should fall into the victors’ hands.

The people around them certainly would have been aware of a fire so great, that it destroyed Ar of Moab and the high places of Arnon.

Numbers 21:29 “Woe to thee, Moab! thou art undone, O people of Chemosh: he hath given his sons that escaped, and his daughters, into captivity unto Sihon king of the Amorites.”

The whole country ruined, or likely to be so.

“O people of Chemosh”:

Which was the name of their idol, who is called the abomination of the Moabites (1 Kings 11:7).

“He hath given his sons that escaped”:

That is, the idol Chemosh had given his sons, the men of the country that worshipped him, who escaped the sword of the Amorites, these.

“And his daughters, into captivity unto Sihon king of the Amorites”:

Who took captive what he slew not, or would do so.

Chemosh their god not being able to preserve them, but obliged to deliver them up.

Thus, the composers of this song insult the god of the Moabites.

As it was usual for conquerors so to do (see Isa. 10:10).

Though some think these are the words of the Israelites, making their observations upon the above song, which ends at verse twenty-eight.

And scoffing at the idol of the Moabites.

“Chemosh”:

Was a false god worshipped by the people of Moab.

These Moabites had placed their faith in this false god, and are now destroyed.

The false gods Molech, Milcom, and Baal came from the same root.

The false goddess Ashteroth was worshipped with Baal.

This false god did not help in time of war against Sihon.

Numbers 21:30 “We have shot at them; Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon, and we have laid them waste even unto Nophah, which [reacheth] unto Medeba.”

Either the Amorites at the Moabites, or else the Israelites at the Amorites.

For, according to Aben Ezra, these are the words of Moses.

Though they, with (Num. 21:29), seem rather to be a continuation of the song of the old Amorite bards.

Describing the ruin of the country of Moab by them.

And this clause may be rendered with the next, “their light, or lamp, is perished from Heshbon”.

Or their yoke, as Jarchi, and so the Vulgate Latin version.

That is, their kingdom, and the glory of it, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan interpret it.

And so Jarchi:

“Even unto Dibon”:

Which was another city in the land of Moab (see Isa. 15:2).

“And we have laid them waste even unto Nophah, which reacheth unto Medeba”:

Nophah perhaps is the same with Nebo, mentioned along with Medeba (Isa. 15:2).

However, they were both places in Moab, and are mentioned to show how far the desolation had or would spread.

And the whole is observed to prove, that this part of the country of Moab, now possessed by the Israelites, was taken from them, not by them.

But by the Amorites, a people Israel now conquered, and so had a right to what they found them in the possession of.

Regardless of how powerful these people, like Heshbon, had been in the past, they are now defeated by God's army.

Verses 31-35

This was another conquest that was both historically and symbolically significant to Israel.

(Deut. 3:11), mentions Og as being one of the "giants with his bed being 13-1/2 feet long and six feet wide.

Numbers 21:31 "Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites."

Not the land of the Moabites.

And by those means before mentioned.

By conquering Sihon their king, they came into the possession of it, and took up their dwelling in it.

This was the beginning of the conquest of the Canaanites, and an earnest and pledge of inheriting their land promised unto them.

The Israelites that dwelt here were the tribes of Reuben and Gad.

The Amorites are destroyed, and Israel took over their land.

Numbers 21:32 "And Moses sent to spy out Jaazer, and they took the villages thereof, and drove out the Amorites that [were] there."

Or Jazer, as it is called in (Isa. 16:9).

Another city that belonged to the Amorites, and which they had taken from the Moabites.

And which came into the hands of the latter again, after the captivity of the ten tribes, as appears from the above places.

According to Jerom, it was fifteen miles distant from Heshbon.

"And they took the villages thereof":

Not the spies, as Jarchi, but the Israelites under Moses.

Who upon the return of the spies, and the report they made, marched towards it, and took it.

And all the towns and villages round about it.

For it seems to have been a principal city.

“And drove out the Amorites that were there”:

That dwelt there, and were in possession of it.

Otherwise they would not have attacked it, had it and its villages been in the hands of the Moabites.

This was the last of the Amorite villages that Israel defeated.

Verses 33-35

The land north of the Jabbok River was under the control of Og, another Amorite king.

Og attacked Israel and suffered a devastating defeat.

Thus, all of the land in the Transjordan from the Arnon River in the south to the heights of Bashan in the north came under Israelite control.

Numbers 21:33 “And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan: and Og the king of Bashan went out against them, he, and all his people, to the battle at Edrei.”

From Jaazer, after they had taken it, and came back a little way.

“And went up by the way of Bashan”:

Which was a nearer way to Canaan, a fine country abounding with oxen and sheep.

Having rich pastures, and very famous for its oaks.

It had its name from the mountain of Bashan in it, and has been since called Batanea.

It was at this time in the hands of the Amorites, and from them it was taken by Israel, as follows.

Who marched this way for that purpose, or at least were so directed by the providence of God for that end.

“And Og king of Bashan went out against them”:

Who was of the race of the giants, and he himself of a gigantic stature.

And was a king of the Amorites, as well as Sihon (Deut. 3:8).

He came out in a hostile manner against Israel, to stop them going any further.

“He, and all his people”:

Out of his many cities, a numerous army no doubt.

“To the battle at Edrei”:

Where it was fought between him and Israel.

Jerom says it was in his city called Adara, a famous city of Arabia.

Twenty four or twenty five miles from Bozra, and six from Ashtaroth Karnaim, the ancient seat of the Rephaim.

Or giants from whom Og sprung (Gen. 14:5).

And was the seat of Og now, from whence he came to Edrei or Adara, to meet and fight Israel there (see Deut. 1:4).

It appears, that some Amorites were in this area also, and the Israelites followed.

Og is a well-known evil king.

He was thought of as an equal in ability to Sihon.

They were not an equal for God, however.

Numbers 21:34 “And the LORD said unto Moses, Fear him not: for I have delivered him into thy hand, and all his people, and his land; and thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon.”

Og being of a gigantic stature, and his forces numerous, might cause some fear in Moses, and in the people.

And therefore, the LORD encouraged them not to be afraid of him and his army.

“For I have delivered him into thy hand, and all his people, and his land”:

That is, he had determined to do it, and now promised it.

And it might be depended on and looked upon as if actually done.

“And thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon”:

Slay him and his people, and take possession of his country.

Even though Og had a reputation for being a fierce fighter, God tells the Israelites not to be afraid of him.

God leads the Israelites, and no army can defeat them as long as they are in the will of God.

God will see that Og is defeated by the Israelites.

Numbers 21:35 “So they smote him, and his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him alive: and they possessed his land.”

They engaged in battle with him.

They slew him and his sons that came with him, and all his armies.

And which consisted, as is probable, of all able to bear arms in all his cities.

Which the more easily came into the hands of the Israelites after this battle, in which such a carnage was made.

“Until there was none left him alive”:

So universal was the slaughter at the battle, and in the cities that fell into their hands.

They utterly destroyed men, women, and children (Deut. 3:3).

“And they possessed his land”:

In which were sixty cities fenced with high walls, gates, and bars, besides a great many unwallled towns.

These were possessed by the half tribe of Manasseh (Deut. 3:4).

Not only was Og defeated, but they were wiped out as a people.

The Israelites were under orders from God.

He saw that they were victorious in this battle.

Numbers Chapter 21 Questions

1. Who took some prisoners of Israel?
2. Where was Arad located?
3. What vow did Israel make to God?
4. Did the LORD do as they asked?
5. What is another word for “Hormah”?
6. Why did the people get discouraged, when they moved?
7. The people spoke against _____, and against _____.
8. What was the “light bread” they were speaking of?
9. This bread symbolized what?
10. What did God send in punishment?
11. Why did they look “fiery”?
12. When the serpents were sent among them, what did the people do?
13. What did God tell Moses to do?
14. “Brass” means _____.
15. What did the serpent on the pole, that Moses built symbolize?
16. Looking on the serpent was as if they were doing what?
17. What does the author find interesting about doctors today?
18. Ije-abarim is a place of _____, or _____.
19. Where is Arnon?
20. What was in the book of the wars of the LORD?

21. Where did God have them to dig their own well?
22. What song did Israel sing at the well?
23. Who digged the well?
24. What does “Nahaliel” mean?
25. What could they see from mount Pisgah?
26. Why was Israel winning the battles?
27. They spoke in _____.
28. What was “Chemosh”?
29. What other false gods came from the same root?
30. ____ was a well known king in this area. What happened to Og?