

**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.**

**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.**

**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.**

It seems Arad, a king in the southern part of Canaan, received a report from his spies that the Israelites were headed his way. He went out and fought against Israel and took some of them prisoners. This time the Israelites responded by seeking the LORD's help. They promised to utterly destroy the cities ruled by this king if He would give them the victory. The LORD heard their vow and gave them the victory. The people honored their vow and utterly destroyed the Canaanites and their cities. They called the place Hormah, one meaning of which is to "destroy...utterly (slay)"; however, it also includes "to devote to religious uses...consecrate."

"utterly destroy" – Guzik offers some further insight: "It is strange idea to our way of thinking, but Israel at this time would show that property was completely given to God by destroying it - thus making it unusable to anyone else. It was an expensive and whole-hearted way to give things to the LORD. This was Israel's way of saying, 'we're not fighting this battle for our own profit, but for the glory of God.'"

Some of the other translations are worded more in line with the NIV: "*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.*"

JFB offers the following explanation: "The *Septuagint* and others consider the *Hebrew* word 'spies' a proper name, and render it: 'Came by the way of Atharim towards Arad.'"

**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.**

**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.***

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

In the next several verses we are basically given the route the people followed after leaving mount Hor. They journeyed by way of the Red sea around the land of Edom. As previously noted, the people were discouraged since the Edomites would not let them go through their land, forcing them to take a much longer route. Once again they complained and accused God and Moses of taking them

out of Egypt only to let them die in the desert—a place with no bread or water. They complained that they were tired of eating “this light bread,” in reference to the manna.

After so many proofs of His provision for them, the LORD had no patience with them this time. He immediately sent poisonous fiery serpents among the people, and many of them died.

**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.**

To the people’s credit, they realized that they had incurred God’s judgment. They knew that they had sinned by falsely accusing the LORD and Moses. They asked Moses to pray to the LORD to take away the serpents—and Moses did so.

Thought: How often are we more ready to complain to the LORD about our circumstances rather than turning to Him in prayer seeking His will and provision?

**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.**

**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 LORD told Moses to make a fiery serpent and put it upon a pole so that it could be easily seen. Those who were bitten by a serpent and looked at the pole for healing would live. So Moses made a serpent of brass and put it on the pole, and those who looked at the serpent after being bitten did not die.

This is a very interesting section for many reasons. To associate looking at a serpent for healing is in stark contrast to the primary association we have of the serpent with Satan as the one that deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. In my studies I have learned that brass is associated with sin and judgment in the scripture. By placing the serpent on a pole and lifting it up as a focus of one’s faith in the LORD for deliverance we begin to get a clearer application. Christ was lifted up on the cross to become our sin, and only by looking to Him in faith for deliverance can one be saved. We know this application is true because of the words of John.

*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.”*

Wesley added some further insight: “The serpent signified Christ, who was in the likeness of sinful flesh, though without sin, as this brazen serpent had the outward shape, but not the inward poison, of the other serpents....” I will add

that though Christ was without sin, He was made our sin (in the sight of God) and suffered the judgment of our sin

*Isaiah 53:10–11 “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.”*

*Hebrews 2:9 “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that **he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.**”*

*2 Corinthians 5:20–21 “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For **he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.**”*

An interesting side note: This bronze snake was still around until King Hezekiah finally destroyed it several hundred years later because it had become an idol.

*2 Kings 18:4 “He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.”*

**Numbers 21:10 ¶ And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in Oboth. Numbers 21:11 And they journeyed from Oboth, and pitched at Ijeabarim, in the wilderness which is before Moab, toward the sunrising. Numbers 21:12 From thence they removed, and pitched in the valley of Zared. 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. 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, 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.**

Eventually, the Israelites moved on and Moses identifies the following campsites: Oboth, Ijeabarim (near Moab), the valley of Zared, and Arnon (the border between Moab and the Amorites).

In verse 14 there is a reference to “the book of the wars of the LORD,” reminding us that there were other records of the history of Israel that were not included in scripture because they were not inspired by God. This book included the miracle that God performed at the Red Sea when He parted the waters. Moses couples that with what the LORD did in the brooks of Arnon that led to the dwelling of Ar, a Moabite city. I assume this is referencing the victory of the Israelites over Sihon as detailed below.

**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.

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

**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:

**Numbers 21:19** And from Mattanah to Nahaliel: and from Nahaliel to Bamoth:

**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.

Continuing on their journey, the people then camped at Beer, noted as a place where the LORD once again provided water to supply the needs of the people. It actually seems that the people were of a good spirit at this time since it is noted that they sang a song as the leaders of the people dug the well according to the LORD's direction through Moses.

From Beer they continued on to Mattanah, to Nahaliel, to Bamoth (in the valley in the country of Moab), to the top of Pisgah (that overlooked Jeshimon). It was from Mount Pisgah that Moses would be given a special view of the land of promise.

*Deuteronomy 34:1 "And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan...."*

**Numbers 21:21** ¶ And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying,

**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.

**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.

**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.

Once again the people sought permission of a foreign king to pass through his lands—Sihon, king of the Amorites. Once again they promised not to take anything from their fields or vineyards or drink from any of their wells. They assured the king that they would stay on the king's highway until they were all the way through his land.

Once again the Israelites were denied this privilege. In fact, Sihon gathered his people and went out to war against Israel at Jahaz. The LORD gave Israel the victory, and they took possession of the land from Arnon unto Jabbok, the border of the Ammonites.

Point is made that the Ammonites maintained a strong border.

Personal note: If only America defended her borders as vigorously as did these nations.

**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.**

**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.**

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

**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.**

**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.**

**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.**

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

Moses records that the Israelites took possession of the cities and villages of the Amorites, including Heshbon, the city of Sihon, king of the Amorites. It is also noted that Sihon had taken the land from the king of Moab all the way to the border of Arnon. Sihon's victory over Moab even inspired a song exalting the strength of the Amorites and demeaning Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, and ending with a note of triumph for the victory of Israel.

The NIV describes the land area that was conquered as "extending from the Arnon River at the midpoint of the Dead Sea to the Jabbok River, which flows into the Jordan River some twenty-four miles north of the Dead Sea."

With this victory over the Amorites, I am reminded of God's words to Abraham that pointed to this time.

*Genesis 15:13–16 "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."*

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

**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.**

**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.**

**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.**

Moses next proceeded to send spies to Jaazer before taking possession of the Amorite villages there. They then turned toward the kingdom of Bashan and were met by its king, Og, and his troops at Edrei. The LORD told Moses that they were not to fear these people because He was going to give them the victory. In fact, their victory would be as complete as what they had experienced over Sihon and the Amorites at Heshbon.

The chapter closes with a record of the victory, emphasizing that they killed Og, his sons and all his people. They left no one alive. They then took possession of these lands as well.

JFB notes that the land conquered in this battle included, “a hilly region east of the Jordan lying between the mountains of Hermon on the north and those of Gilead on the south.”

A verse in Deuteronomy provides insight as to why the LORD gave a special word to Moses not to be afraid; Og was a giant.

*Deuteronomy 3:11 “For only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of giants; behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron; is it not in Rabbath of the children of Ammon? nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it, after the cubit of a man.”*

There is also application to us today. Og was an enemy giant that provoked fear. Today we face other types of giants that cause us to fear—horrible diseases like cancer and ebola, terrorism, financial insecurity, etc. The Christian has no more need to fear such “giants” than did the Israelites. God will give us the victory if we keep our hearts fixed on Him. He will either bring us through in victory this side of heaven or in His presence in heaven.