

Day 168 - SATURDAY: May 27th

Numbers 21

Numbers 21:1-35 NKJV

The king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South, heard that Israel was coming on the road to Atharim. Then he fought against Israel and took some of them prisoners. So Israel made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities." And the LORD listened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites, and they utterly destroyed them and their cities. So the name of that place was called Hormah. Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. Now the children of Israel moved on and camped in Oboth. And they journeyed from Oboth and camped at Ije Abarim, in the wilderness which is east of Moab, toward the sunrise. From there they moved and camped in the

Valley of Zered. From there they moved and camped on the other side of the Arnon, which is in the wilderness that extends from the border of the Amorites; for the Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the LORD: "Waheb in Suphah, The brooks of the Arnon, And the slope of the brooks That reaches to the dwelling of Ar, And lies on the border of Moab." From there they went to Beer, which is the well where the LORD said to Moses, "Gather the people together, and I will give them water." Then Israel sang this song: "Spring up, O well! All of you sing to it— The well the leaders sank, Dug by the nation's nobles, By the lawgiver, with their staves." And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah, from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, and from Bamoth, in the valley that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah which looks down on the wasteland. Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, "Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into fields or vineyards; we will not drink water from wells. We will go by the King's Highway until we have passed through your territory." But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and he came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. Then Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as the people of Ammon; for the border of the people of Ammon was fortified. So Israel took all these cities, and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all its villages. For Heshbon was the city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and had taken all his land from his hand as far as the Arnon. Therefore those who speak in proverbs say: "Come to Heshbon, let it be built; Let the city of Sihon be repaired. "For fire went out from Heshbon, A flame from the city of Sihon; It consumed Ar of Moab, The lords of

the heights of the Arnon. Woe to you, Moab! You have perished, O people of Chemosh! He has given his sons as fugitives, And his daughters into captivity, To Sihon king of the Amorites. "But we have shot at them; Heshbon has perished as far as Dibon. Then we laid waste as far as Nophah, Which reaches to Medeba." Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites. Then Moses sent to spy out Jazer; and they took its villages and drove out the Amorites who were there. 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. 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." So they defeated him, his sons, and all his people, until there was no survivor left him; and they took possession of his land.

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states the following for the introduction to this chapter: "The rest of the trip toward the Promised Land would be hard and difficult. First, the king of the Canaanite city of Arad picks a fight, and carries some Israelites away captive. God empowers the Israelites to "utterly destroy" the Aradites in a place that became known as Hormah, meaning "Utter Destruction." Interestingly, this first military victory against the Canaanites takes place in the same spot that, decades before, the Israelites had been defeated when they vainly tried to enter Canaan after God

told them they would have to wait 40 years (compare Numbers 14:45).” [END]

Verse 3 – Hormah means “devotion” (BDB)

Here is another section from the UCG reading plan: “Yet the victorious spirit does not carry them all the way. Going around Edom proves so difficult that the children of Israel become discouraged—which once again turns to bitter complaining. When their ingratitude leads them to declare that they detest the God-given manna sustaining them, calling it “worthless,” God sends them deadly fiery serpents. In terror and agony, the people quickly repent, asking for Moses' prayers on their behalf.” [END]

Verse 5 – It’s worth remembering that this bread (manna) is a type of Jesus Christ, the true Bread from Heaven (John 6:32, 35). This manna was such an important symbol and such an amazing miracle that God had a golden pot of manna placed inside the ark of the covenant (see Hebrew 9:4). How offensive for Israel to say that they abhorred this “insubstantial/contemptible/worthless” bread.

(שָׂרַף) Verse 6 – The word for “to burn” in Hebrew is “sâraph
Here in this verse, it says the Lord sent “fiery .”(H8313

) (שׂרָפִים) "serpents". The word "fiery" in Hebrew is "sârâph". While these are two different Strong numbers, you can see they are essentially the same word. In this sense, the "fiery" aspect of these serpents was the burning pain that resulted from their venom. While this part of the world is known for having 9 venomous snakes, the most common is the Palestinian Viper (this is the national snake of Israel). It's venom damages the nervous system and destroys tissue (such as skin and blood vessels). It's also known for having an extremely painful ("fiery") bite.

) (שׂרָפִים) "sârâph" "It's worth noting that this word for "fiery" is the same word that is also translated Seraphim in Isaiah 6:2, 6 but in both of those verses, the word serpent is not included.

Not only did the venom burn, but it was also lethal.

Verse 7 – The people correctly acknowledge their sin and turn to God for healing. Moses, God's appointed leader, seeks God's healing and direction for the people. God provides the way in which He would provide the healing.

Verse 8 – At this time, a conquered enemy was often raised on a pole and paraded around as a visual display of one's

dominance over the enemy. The people had no power or ability to stop the snakes. Moses had no ability or power to stop the snakes. Only God could be victorious over these fiery serpents. These snakes were nothing to God and He alone had the power to conquer them. The people were sinners and they had received a lethal punishment. Their sins were about to bring about death, yet by following God's instructions, God would intervene, displaying His power over the enemy and providing the healing they desperately needed.

This is a bit of a bizarre story until we dig a bit deeper. Who did Israel complain about and test? It was the Word (the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ). 1 Corinthians 10:9 tells us "nor let us tempt (test/prove) Christ, as some of them also tempted (to try/test), and were destroyed by serpents;"

This great God Being would later be born as a human, coming in the flesh, and would tell us in 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 whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

All of us were doomed to death, not due to a serpent, but due to our sins, but instead of us paying our deserved penalty and dying, Jesus Christ took our place and paid our

debt/penalty and He was raised up on the cross/pole and crucified so that we would not perish, but have eternal life.

Hebrews 2:14 – 15 states: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

Christ didn't just usher in physical healing for us, but more importantly, spiritual healing that would save us from eternal death.

The Word (Jesus Christ) defeated the physical serpents and brought physical healing. Jesus Christ defeated the serpent of old (compare Rev 12:9, 20:2) and brought spiritual healing to mankind.

Verse 14 – Here is another section from the UCG reading plan: “Verse 14 of Numbers 21 mentions the “Book of the Wars of the Lord.” *The Nelson Study Bible* says this “refers to an early collection of songs and writings known today only from this citation. The fact that Numbers draws upon other early Hebrew writings shows that the ancient Hebrew peoples had other literature in addition to Scripture.” This book is not in existence today.” [END]