

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**DHW BIBLE CLASS**

**LESSON 12**

**THE BOOK OF NUMBERS**

**CHAPTER 21**

**INTRODUCTION**

The children of Israel were now making their final approach to the Promised Land, Canaan. The forty years of wandering in the wilderness had gone. A new generation of people had emerged and we would see a new spirit too. The LORD keeps His covenant promises. He would remove any hindrance that stood in the way of His plan and purpose for His people.

We know that the Old Testament is God's picture book to teach us many precious truths of His wonderful grace. In this chapter, God reveals His holiness and His grace upon His people who were slow to learn of Him. But we should learn well and quick.

We face the problems of life from day to day. Sometimes we overcome them; sometimes they overwhelm us. But the important thing is that we keep on and not faint. At times we may "mount on wings like eagles," but to "walk and faint not," is what is required. We find these lessons taught in this chapter.

**OUTLINE**

**A. The Israelites Defeated A Cananite Attack Against Them (21:1-3).**

1. King Arad of the Canaanites launched an attack against Israel and captured some Israelites (21:1).
2. Israel appealed to the LORD for victory against the Canaanite on the promise to destroy the Canaanite cities (21:2).
3. The LORD heard Israel's appeal and Israel defeated the Canaanites at Hormah (21:3).

**B. Israelites Must Look Upon the Bronze Snake to Live (21:4-9).**

1. The children of Israel journeyed from Mount Hor and compassed the land of Edom (21:4).
2. The children of Israel were dissatisfied with manna and rebelled against God and Moses (21:5).
3. The LORD sent fiery serpents that bit the people and killed many (21:6).
4. The people confessed their sin and asked Moses to intercede on their behalf (21:7a).
5. Moses prayed (21:7b).
6. The LORD instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it up on a pole (21:8).
7. The children of Israel who looked upon the bronze serpent would not die (21:9).

### C. The Children of Israel Journeyed to Moab (21:10-20).

1. The children of Israel journeyed to Beer where the LORD gave the people water (21:10-16).
2. The children of Israel sang a song of praise unto the LORD (21:17-18).
3. The children of Israel journeyed on and came to Moab (21:19-20).

### D. Israel Defeated Sihon, the King of the Amorites (21:21-31).

1. Israel requested from king Sihon for a safe passage through his land (21:21-22).
2. King Sihon refused the request and attacked Israel (21:23).
3. Israel defeated the Amorites (21:24-32).
  - a) Israel possessed the land of the Amorites from Arnon to Jabbok (21:24).
  - b) Israel took all their cities in Heshbon (21:25-30)
  - c) The Israelites dwelt in the land of Amorites (21:32).

### E. The Israelites Defeated Og, King of Bashan (21:33-22:1).

1. The Israelites moved on to the land of Bashan (21:33a).
2. The King Og of Bashan attacked Israel (21:33b).
3. The LORD assured Moses victory over king Og (21:34).
4. Israel defeated king and possessed the land (21:35).
5. Israel moved on into the plains of Moab (22:1)

## COMMENTARY

### VICTORY AT HORMAH

Do you remember Hormah? About forty years ago, the children of Israel attempted to enter Canaan, but they were defeated by the Amalekites and the Canaanites at Hormah (Numbers 14:45).<sup>1</sup> The word “Hormah” means “destruction”. The Israelites had come full circle and they were now once again at the doorstep to the Promised Land.

King Arad of the Canaanites was told that the children of Israel were making their way up to Canaan. He launched a surprise attack on Israel. In this initial encounter, Israel suffered a setback in which some of them were taken prisoners. They then turned to the LORD and vowed that if the LORD gave them the victory over the Canaanites, they would “utterly destroy” their cities (2). This phrase “utterly destroy” means “devoted”. They used this word to promise the LORD that they would give the people and the cities completely to the LORD.<sup>2</sup>

We see a new spirit emerging in this generation. Instead of mourning and crying over their defeat, they were determined to return and fight. They acknowledged the LORD and turned to Him for help. They promised that if the LORD gave

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 14:45 Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, *even* unto Hormah.

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 27:28 Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the LORD of all that he hath, *both* of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing *is* most holy unto the LORD.

them the victory they would devote all the people, the cities, and all the spoils to God.

The LORD heard their cry. The LORD was pleased. They had shown their faith in Him. The LORD delivered the Canaanites into the hands of the Israelites, and they “utterly destroyed” them and their cities. This victory meant a lot to the children of Israel. This was their first victory. It would have boosted their morale and lifted up their spirit. There would be more battles to be fought ahead. This battle gave them military experience to prepare and build them for the many eventualities in the future.

### **BY-PASSING EDOM**

The Edomites refused a safe passage for the Israelites across their land. It was a shorter route to Canaan. It was an unkind gesture on the part of the Edomites, who were the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob, and they were first-cousins to the Israelites. The children of Israel were not deterred. This time they were determined to enter the land the LORD had promised them. They bypassed Edom, taking the longer and harder way to Canaan.

Not long later after travelling on this rather difficult route, they became very discouraged. Life is a war; winning one *battle* is not enough. In order to win the *war* one must win every necessary battle. Winning the battle at Hormah, although good, was just not enough. The children of Israel must overcome the harshness and hardships that faced them in their journey to Canaan. They succumbed to the harshness and hardships of the way

and began to murmur against God and Moses. The same old complaint that they had learnt from their fathers. The complaint: Why have you brought us here from Egypt to let us die in the wilderness? They thought of the goodies in Egypt. They despised and disliked the heavenly bread, *manna*, which the LORD gave them each day to sustain them. And thus far they had been provided for and lived! Their behaviour was unwarranted. They were tempting the LORD. They were slow in learning that it was a very terrible thing to rebel against God. They had seen how their predecessors, who had rebelled against the LORD’S anointed, had been judged.

The LORD’S judgement was quick. The LORD sent “fiery serpents” among the people. The bite of these serpents was fatal. Many people died from the bites (6). The word “fiery” is not a description of the appearance the serpents. It means “burning.” It therefore refers to the “burning” effect, the inflammation and pain caused by the venom of the snake bite.

The people came to Moses and confessed their sin that they had spoken against the LORD and him. They begged Moses to pray to the LORD and intercede on their behalf. This is a significant change in this new generation of Israelites. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of their repentance. This was the last time they murmured and complained against the LORD and Moses before they entered into the Promised Land. In the past, Moses was the one who interceded on their behalf on his own volition. Now the people themselves

came and begged Moses to pray to the LORD. Moses prayed for the people.

The LORD heard and instructed Moses to make a “fiery” (bronze) serpent and set it upon a pole. The word “fiery” is used here to describe the metal serpent—it is shining red. The LORD told Moses that every one who was bitten by the serpent, when he looked upon the brazen serpent would be healed. Moses did as God commanded him. The children of Israel, who were bitten by the snakes, were healed when they looked upon the brazen serpent.

The looking upon the brazen serpent held up by a pole and the people were healed was neither magic nor superstition. It was a direct command from God. It was the look of faith upon the brazen serpent and God healed them. It was supernatural and miraculous. There was nothing magical or superstitious about it. Although in ancient times people were superstitious and they believed that the images of animals had magical powers to save them from disease and demonic influence. The Egyptians used the image of a serpent to ward off snake bites. Wenham’s comment on this is notable, “Animals are killed, so that sinful men who deserve to die may live. Blood, which pollutes when it is spilled, can be used to sanctify and purify men and articles. The ashes of a dead heifer cleanse those who suffer from the impurity caused by death. In all these rituals, there is an inversion: normally polluting substances or actions may in a ritual context have the opposite effect and serve to purify. In the case of the copper serpent, similar principles

operate. Those inflamed and dying through the bite of living snakes were restored to life by a dead reddish-coloured snake. It may be that copper was chosen not only because its hue matched the inflammation caused by the bites, but because red is the colour that symbolises atonement and purification” (*Numbers*, 158). In the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ made a reference to this brazen serpent as a prophetic picture of Himself. (*John 3:14*) “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*”

The act of raising the serpent was a type of Christ being raised on the cross. The comparison must be limited only to the ACTION itself. The serpent does not represent Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ who is sinless, was made sin for us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). The people who were bitten by the snakes *must believe* that by looking upon the brazen serpent they might be healed. It was the look of faith and it is still *the look of faith* in Christ Jesus that can heal a person from sin and live forever.

### AT BEER

After the snake biting episode, the children of Israel marched on. They were making progress. They were moving day by day nearer to their Promised Land. Surely the Pillar of Cloud and Fire was leading them, moving when it moved and settling when it settled at a place.

The children Israel came to the northern most part of Moab and pitched their tent after having crossed the river Arnon. Arnon formed a natural division between the Moabites and the Amorites and further north the Ammonites. The Amorites must not be confused with the Ammonites. The Ammonites were the descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. They were therefore relations of Israel. The Amorites were synonymous with the Canaanites. The northern border of the Amorite territory was the river Jabbok, which made a natural division between the Amorites and the Ammonites, and the people of Bashan.

The *Book of the Wars of the LORD* is mentioned only here (13). Verses 14 & 15 are a citation from the book. The title of the book suggests that it contained songs celebrating the LORD'S victories against His enemies (Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 411). The quotation cited here gives the geography of the area, which Israel was passing through. But the most interesting and significant aspect of their journey at this point is the fact that at Beer (meaning, "wells"); the LORD called Moses to gather the people together and He would provide them water! That says a lot about the LORD. This time round, the LORD knew of the needs of His people. They had travelled quite a distance along very difficult terrain. They must be tired and thirsty. The LORD led them to Beer and there He gave them water to quench their thirst and refresh them. The children of Israel rejoiced and sang a song.

The princes dug the wells and there was water.

Our Lord Jesus Christ knows our every need. He has taught that we should not worry about our temporal needs. The birds do not have to sow or reap and keep their food in barns, and yet **our** Father in Heaven feeds them. Are we not better than they? Look at the lilies. God makes them more beautiful than the splendour and glory of Solomon. Yet these very lilies blossom today and tomorrow they are not. Shall not God also clothe us? **Our** heavenly Father knows that we have need of all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, that is, to do the will of God, and all our material needs will be met (Matthew 6:25-33).

Having had their fill, they moved on and came to the top of Pisgah. This is the mountain on which Moses was later to view the land and then died there.<sup>3</sup> Moses sent messengers to king Sihon of the Amorites (21). Look at the map to locate the Amorite country. Moses sent the same message to the king as the one he sent to the Edomites. They just wanted to pass through the king's highway. But king Sihon not only refused their request, he gathered his army and attacked Israel. Israel had no choice but to counter attack and defend themselves. Israel won a resounding victory over king Sihon and the

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<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 3:27 Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold *it* with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan.

Amorites. They pursued them right up to their chief city, Heshbon, which was just south of the border of the Ammonites. And Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites (31).

Another victory! Things were happening. The Israelites were moving on and their claim of the Promised Land was not far away. This second victory would surely build their confidence and morale. The LORD wanted His people to possess the land east of Jordan. It was part of God's plan and purpose and of His covenant promise. So He permitted king Sihon to attack Israel and gave victory to Israel. The Amorites had boasted of an earlier triumph over the Moabites (vv.27-30). The LORD always protects and delivers His people. But the people of God must always acknowledge Him, fear Him and serve Him.

Now when the Israelites moved northwards into the land of Bashan, king Og of Bashan attacked Israel without warning. They fought the battle at Edrei. The LORD quickly assured Moses that they should not fear for He *had* (prophetic past tense = mission already accomplished) already delivered king Og and his soldiers into his hand. The land too would they occupy like the land of the Amorites. So Israel fought and won completely, and they possessed the land (35).

It was the LORD'S plan that the east bank of Jordan (today occupied by the Jordanians) should belong to Israel. Later we will learn that two and half tribes of Israel, namely, Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, settled on this side of Jordan, while the rest crossed Jordan and occupied the west bank.

Now the entire east region of the Jordan River was in the hands of the Israelites.

## SUMMARY

This is an inspiring chapter, except for the instant when the Israelites, tired and tested by the long and difficult journey, rebelled and tempted God. We can learn from this instance that the physical has some influence over the spiritual—that is, when we are physically exhausted and drained, there is every possibility that we will also falter in our spiritual life. So it is important to maintain our physical health and strength. Another thing that we learn is that a failure is not final. Go to God for help.

In the cure for the serpents' bite, the people need only to look in faith at the brazen serpent, and they would be cured from the fatal venomous bite. Similarly, today, people are bitten by sin. Sin has destroyed and devastated our lives and led us to eternal damnation. The only way to be cured of this terrible and fatal disease is to look in faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was hung on the cross to shed His precious blood and died for anyone who will look to him and receive Him in faith!

God keeps His promises. A new generation of Israelites had emerged. They were those under twenty years of age some forty years ago, and their children and grand children. God had promised them that they would enter the Promised Land. The LORD proved true to His promises. Israel was attacked, not once but three times. And all the

three times they won convincingly. The land on the east bank of Jordan was now conquered by the Israelites. The next phase was the entering of the land. God had kept His promise to them. Not only did He keep His promise, He provided them the food and water they needed to survive and be strong. How good is the LORD our God! AMEN.

**2. What do we learn about the LORD our God in verses 1-3?**

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**DAILY READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**MONDAY: Numbers 21:1-3; Acts 14:21-22; Ephesians 6:11-13.<sup>4</sup>**

**1. What can we learn from the Israelites when we fail?**

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 14:21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and *to* Iconium, and Antioch, 22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

**TUESDAY: Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14-16; Philippians 2:7; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 2 Kings 18:4.<sup>5</sup>**

**3. What can we learn in this passage (vv.4-9) when we sin each time against God?**

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<sup>5</sup> John 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Philippians 2:7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

2 Corinthians 5:21 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.

4. What must the people do to be cured of their snake bites? Did they have to do anything to deserve to be cured? What cured them?

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**WEDNESDAY: Numbers 21:10-20; Isaiah 40:31; 65:24; Matthew 6:25-33.<sup>6</sup>**

5. What did the LORD reveal about His character in this passage?

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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.

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.

Isaiah 65:24 And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

Matthew 6:25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? 26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? 27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? 28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith? 31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you..



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**6. How did the Israelites respond to what the LORD did for them? What lesson can be learned?**

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**THURSDAY: Numbers 21:21-32; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.<sup>7</sup>**

**7. What was Moses trying to do when he petitioned king Sihon for a safe passage through his land?**

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 4 (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; 6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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**8. What was it that the Israelites did not expect from king Sihon? How had it benefit them?**

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**FRIDAY: Numbers 21:33-35; Leviticus 26:6-9; Psalm 91:7.<sup>8</sup>**

**9. What evidence is there to show that the Israelites had gained more confidence?**

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<sup>8</sup> Leviticus 26:6 And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make *you* afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. 7 And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. 8 And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. 9 For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you.

Psalm 91:7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; *but* it shall not come nigh thee.

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**10. How does this chapter teach us about perseverance and encouragement in life?**

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