**March 1, 2022**

BIBLE STUDY

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**“LOOK UP AND LIVE”**

**Numbers 21:1-35**

***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."***

The next challenge on the journey was from the Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, the desert region in the south of what is now called Israel. 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. Instead of letting the Israelites pass, he attacked them and captured some prisoners. It appears, this was not an all-out battle. He, probably, caught some spies out looking over the land, and captured them. Israel, understandably piqued, pledged to completely destroy their attacker’s cities if God gave them victory over this people. Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, to utterly destroy their cities: The word translated “utterly destroy” (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. This vow to the Lord must be kept since they made it to the LORD. So God made Israel victorious, and they named the place Hormah, “Destruction,” to commemorate it. 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. 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.

***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."***

Moses saw that he could not deliver the people to the edge of the promised land by going straight up from the south after what had happened with Arad and with Edom. So he set out on a longer route, skirting around Edom to the east. But this arduous journey (unsurprisingly) frustrated the Israelites, who resorted to their favorite complaint against God and Moses: Why have you led us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? 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. Now, the Lord had mercifully preserved them in the wilderness for forty years. To assume the worst of him at this point was scandalous. So, since they were determined to complain about dying, God gave them something to actually complain about. He sent poisonous snakes among the people, and they bit them so that many Israelites died. 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."***

***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."***

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. When the people confessed their sin, Moses interceded for them. 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."***

***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 him to make a snake image and mount it on a pole so that anyone who had been bitten could look at it and recover. Moses obeyed, and thus anyone who looked at the bronze snake in faith that God would heal them as promised recovered. 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. Only those who believed God and looked on the bronze serpent lived. This looking upon it, was like transferring their sins to the serpent on the pole. We live when we look to Jesus for life. Medical doctors today have as their emblem of healing, a serpent wrapped around a pole. We see from the following statement of Jesus, Himself, what the raising of the serpent symbolized. 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 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:"***

***John 3:15 "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. Later the bronze snake played a large role in Israel’s religious life, even until the days of Hezekiah during which Israel fell back into the ancient pagan way of thinking and worshiped the bronze snake as the bearer of life.

***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 Ije- abarim, 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."***

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. The sunrising is in the east. Ije-abarim is a place of ruins or heaps. This was east of Moab, near Jericho. Valley, in the verse above, could have been translated brook. Perhaps, they stopped in this place, because of the water. This is all near the Dead Sea, or the Salten Sea. Moab was founded by the descendents of Lot and his younger 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,"***

***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."***

***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:"***

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. Apparently, this was a collection of war songs dealing with Israel’s struggle for the possession of Canaan.

***2 Chronicles 12:15 “Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies? And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually.”***

***2 Chronicles 27:7 “Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars, and his ways, lo, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.”***

These verses include a listing of places along the Israelites’ journey. Beer means “well”; it was there where God told Moses to dig a well. Given the constant lack of water along the way, the people must have found it a joyous moment to have an ongoing water source at their disposal. It seemed, there were many brooks which ran through this marshy area at the foot of the mountains. 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. It had indeed been a long time since the people of God had sung a song of praise. 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:"***

***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."***

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. This is describing their journey. It is interesting to note that "Nahaliel" means valley of God. 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. Then Israel came to the Pisgah highlands that overlook the wasteland. The name “Pisgah” would later have great importance as the place where God would take Moses to view the promised land before his death.

***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."***

Before long, two more formidable enemies stood in Israel’s way, beginning with King Sihon of the Amorites. As Moses had done with the Edomites (20:14-21), Israel asked for permission to travel through Sihon’s land rather than just setting out across it, vowing not to take anything from his fields or vineyards or drinking any well water. But, just like Edom’s king, Sihon refused and gathered his whole army and fought against Israel. This was a foolish move. 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. The message is the same as the one sent to Edom. They want to pass through, with no problem to the Amorites. 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."***

***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."***

When attacked, Israel didn’t turn away and go quietly. Israel struck Sihon and took possession of his land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River. We see this generation was ready to fight. They had never seen war before, but God was with them, and they won the battle. 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. 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. 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 21:27 "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."***

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 (Judges 11:26). 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. "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, Milcam, 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. Regardless of how powerful these people, like Heshbon, had been in the past, they are now defeated by God's army.

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

***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."***

The Amorites are destroyed, and Israel took over their land. This was the last of the Amorite villages that Israel defeated. It’s included because what Sihon had taken from Moab, Israel wrenched away from Sihon. (Talk about poetic justice.) 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. 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. Not only was Og defeatd, but they were wiped out as a people. The Israelites were under orders from God. He saw that they were victorious in this battle. The other king Israel had to confront was King Og of Bashan, who also came out against [Israel] with his whole army. Og was another Amorite king who presented no threat to Israel because the Lord had already given him and his land into Israel’s hands. Og’s defeat was a foregone conclusion before he even put on his armor. After the battle, Israel also took possession of his land. This was another conquest that was both historically and symbolically significant to Israel. Deuteronomy 3:11 mentions Og as being one of the “giants” with his bed being 13 ½ feet long and six feet wide.

**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 do medical doctors today have as their emblem of healing?

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. \_\_\_ is a well-known \_\_\_\_\_\_ king