

The Defeat of the Amorites on the East Side of the Jordan River

Numbers 21:10-35

Numbers 21:10-35 - *"Now the children of Israel moved on and camped in Oboth. ¹¹ And they journeyed from Oboth and camped at Ije Abarim, in the wilderness that is east of Moab, toward the sunrise. ¹² From there they moved and camped in the Valley of Zered. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the LORD: "Waheb in Suphah, the brooks of the Arnon, ¹⁵ And the slope of the brooks that reaches to the dwelling of Ar, and lies on the border of Moab."*

¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ Then Israel sang this song: "Spring up, O well! All of you sing to it— ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, ²⁰ and from Bamoth, in the valley that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah, that looks down on the wasteland.

²¹ Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, ²² "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." ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ So Israel took all these cities, and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all its villages. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷

Therefore those who speak in proverbs say: "Come to Heshbon, let it be built; let the city of Sihon be repaired. ²⁸ "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. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ "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." ³¹ Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites. ³² Then Moses sent to spy out Jazer; and they took its villages and drove out the Amorites who were there.

³³ 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. ³⁴ 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." ³⁵ So they defeated him, his sons, and all his people, until there was no survivor left him; and they took possession of his land."

Background Notes

The exact location of all nine places in verses 10-20 is hard to pinpoint. However, some of the places in verses 24-30 are identifiable, such as the rivers Arnon and Jabbok, and the towns of Medeba and Heshbon still exist today. We know from Numbers 20 that Israel by-passed the country of Edom because the Edomites refused to let Israel pass through their land. Rather than fight the Edomites, God had Israel turn away and go around Edom, because the Edomites were descendants of Esau, and thus related to Israel. The Lord also told Israel not to fight the Moabites or the Ammonites because they were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. All these nations - Edom, Moab, and Ammon - were to the east of the Jordan River and thus east of the Promised Land.

However, another group of people also lived in the area at that time - the Amorites. Don't confuse Amorites with Ammonites! The Ammonites were descendants of Lot, but the Amorites were Canaanites. The Amorites lived on both sides of the Jordan River, both in the land of Canaan and on the east side of the Jordan River. God gave Israel permission to fight the Amorites. In fact, because the Amorites were Canaanites, they were to be removed and eliminated from the Land.

In Genesis 15:16, God told Abraham that his descendants would be slaves in Egypt for four hundred years, but after that time they would return to the land of Canaan when the iniquity of the Amorites was full. *"But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."* God had been patient and long-suffering with the pagan Amorites, but now the time had come for God to judge the Amorites because of their gross sins of idolatry and immortality. God didn't want His people polluted with the sins of the Amorites.

The first two kings of the Amorites to be eliminated were Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan. These two kingdoms were both on the east side of the Jordan River.

Verse 14 mentions "the Book of the Wars of the Lord." This book is not an inspired book of the Bible that was somehow "lost"! No, this book contained war stories and the victories and songs of Israel, but it's no longer available. Verses 27-30 are a poem, or ballad, or "taunt song" that was used by the Amorites when they conquered Moab, but in this chapter Israel used it to show that they were mightier than the Amorites!

Doctrinal Points

1. Moving forward results in singing.

In verses 17-18 we find the first mention of Israel singing since they crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 15). Did you ever realize that, as far as the biblical record goes, the Israelites didn't sing during their forty years of wilderness travels? But in Numbers 21, Israel was no longer wandering. The wanderings were over, and they were moving forward!

And moving forward results in singing! The Lord provided water for them, and the children of Israel sang. There's a lesson here for us. When we're disobedient and rebellious, and we're wandering in the wilderness of Christian

experience, we can't sing to the Lord from our hearts. It's only as we're moving forward in the Christian life that can we sing with joy.

The water from the well is a picture of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. The Lord Jesus said, *"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."* But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:38-39). When we are walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh, we will be moving forward, and we will naturally want to sing praise to the Lord out of grateful hearts. In fact, Colossians 3:16 indicates that singing is a characteristic of a godly believer: *"...through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts."*

I think there's an extended spiritual picture here. The water from the well, that pictures the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, follows the work of Christ on the cross. We saw a picture of Jesus Christ in His atoning death on the cross earlier in this chapter, when the bronze serpent was lifted up in the wilderness. Now the Israelites were moving forward, and the Lord provided water. The cross must come first, then the strengthening work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and there can there be singing. Are you a **singing Christian**?

Moving forward results in singing!

2. Moving forward results in victory.

In Israel's conquest of Canaan, was Jericho the first fortified city to be conquered? According to the biblical record in Numbers 21, the answer is clear. It was not! Deuteronomy 3 gives us a parallel account of the defeat of the Amorite king Og, following the defeat of Amorite king Sihon, and his fortified city taken. *"So the LORD our God delivered into our hands Og king of Bashan, with all his people, and we attacked him until he had no survivors remaining. And we took all his cities at that time; there was not a city that we did not take from them: sixty cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. All these cities were fortified with high walls, gates, and bars, besides a great many rural towns"* (Deuteronomy 3:3-5). Wow! Sixty cities with high walls were defeated before the Israelites crossed the Jordan and conquered Jericho, another walled city.

Notice Numbers 21:25 - *"So Israel took all these cities, and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all its villages."* When Israel conquered all these cities of the Amorites, they didn't destroy them - they lived in them. The same was true when they crossed the Jordan and conquered the entire Land of Promise. Only three cities were destroyed in the conquest of the Land: Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. The Israelites took over all the rest of the cities of Canaan. God gave them the cities with their vineyards and orchards, just as He had promised, and Israel lived in them.

There's a spiritual lesson for us in all of these victories of Israel. Israel was victorious because they were no longer wandering in the wilderness. Now they were **moving forward**! We, too, will be victorious in Christian living if we move

forward in our walk with the Lord and in our lives as believers. There will be battles with the evil one. There's no doubt about it - there will be battles. But there will be no defeat if we are walking with the Lord!

Moving forward results in victory.

Practical Application

Just dig a little deeper!

The water that God gave to Israel was very easy to obtain. "*The well the leaders sank, dug by the nation's nobles, by the lawgiver, with their staves*" (v18). The leaders were able to dig down with just their staves and get water! That wasn't too difficult, was it?

We've seen that the well water pictures the Holy Spirit at work in the believer's life. What does the Holy Spirit use to accomplish His purposes in a believer's life? Primarily, He uses the Word of God, that's also represented by the water. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God operate together in the believer's life. That's the picture here.

As you hear this, maybe you're saying to yourself, "Well, the Lord doesn't seem to be at work in my life! He seems so far away." Just dig a little deeper! The refreshing water is not far away! As the water was readily available for Israel, so our spiritual water is readily available for us as believers today.

Start digging by getting into the **Word of God**. Then **just dig a little deeper!**