

## **LESSON 25: NUMBERS 21**

### **JUNE 20, 2012**

#### **OVERVIEW**

- . Victory over Arad – Numbers 21: 1-3
- . The Bronze Snake – Numbers 21: 4-9
- . Journey to Moab – Numbers 21: 10-20
- . Victory over Sihon – Numbers 21: 21-31
- . Victory over Og – Numbers 21: 32-35

#### **VICTORY OVER ARAD – NUMBERS 21: 1-3**

- . The first of the Israelites victories over the Canaanites at Arad
  - . Unlike the Edomites, who were distant brothers, the citizens of Arad were Canaanites and not related
    - . The Israelites believed it was God's will that they conquer these people  
Numbers 21: 3
    - . The Canaanites also provoked the battle
- . Location of battle
  - . Biblical Arad is identified with Tell Arad, twenty miles south of Hebron in the eastern Negev
  - . Israelites refer to the place as Hormah – Numbers 21:4
    - . Significance is that this is the same place where many Israelites were defeated thirty-eight years earlier when they tried to enter on their own  
Numbers 14:45
    - . Serves as a reminder that when we trust and obey God, the places of our former defeats, can become the place of our greatest victories

#### **THE BRONZE SNAKE – NUMBERS 21: 4-9**

- . Complaints of the people – Numbers 21:4-5
  - . So close to the Promised Land, yet so far away – Numbers 21:4
    - . From Mt. Hor and the area around Arad, they travel south to the Red Sea
    - . The seed of frustration must have sprouted in the realization that they were embarking on a long journey
  - . Worst outburst against the miserable food to date – Numbers 21:5
    - . This food, manna, was a gift from God
    - . Rebellion against the food, was slapping the hand that was feeding you – something God found to be very offensive

- . Judgment by venomous snakes – Numbers 21:6-7
  - . These “burning fiery serpents” appear in mass and begin to poison and kill the Israelites
  - . Their venom not only causes agonizing death, but the awareness of their stealthy presence can drive people crazy
- . The Bronze Snake – Numbers 21:8-9
  - . The people turn to Moses, acknowledge their sin and ask for Moses to pray to the Lord for salvation
  - . The Lord instructs Moses – Numbers 21: 8-9
    - . Make a bronze snake and put it on a pole
    - . Have the people look at it after they’ve been bitten
    - . The act will save them from the snake’s bite
  - . It was not the bronze snake that saved them, rather they were saved through their faith in the promise of God
    - . In and of itself this solution is patently absurd
    - . There is no therapeutic value in the bronze snake
    - . Also, this act, would have been contrary to anything Moses or anyone else would have done on their own
    - . Think for a moment of the emotional odds that Moses and the people had to overcome to put their full faith and trust in God
      - . They were asked to do something totally contrary to common Sense
      - . Yet, this story affirms that healing in this case comes only from an act of faith, not human intervention
- . How Jesus uses this story – John 3:14-15
  - . Jesus foreshadows his death and resurrection
  - . Jesus draws a parallel between Moses lifting the snake up and the Son of Man being lifted up
    - . People had to have faith that this improbable method of salvation, laid out to them in the form of a bronze snake would work
    - . In the same way, Jesus is telling Nicodemus that people will need to have that same level of faith in Him and who He says He is
      - . As improbable as it may seem, our own salvation rests in our ability to have faith in something that defies human logic
  - . The point of the illustration is that salvation is made possible by the grace of God alone and it is received by faith alone
    - . “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” I Corinthians 1:18
  - . There is no human remedy for sin
    - . God’s remedy in this story is His way of saying to the Israelites, “Nothing you do, short of what I’m telling you to do, will save you”
    - . They were to cease from any human remedy and turn to divine remedy

- . This is also what Jesus is telling Nicodemus
  - . Salvation can not come by any amount of self-reformation
  - . It is useless to fight sin by our natural human efforts
- . Salvation is received through faith alone
  - . The first building block in faith is knowledge, or content
    - . “The object of faith is Christ – faith rests upon knowledge, not upon pious ignorance” – John Calvin
  - . The second building block is the assent to belief
    - . One can possess the knowledge, but still be personally lost if they have not given personal assent to it
    - . “It now remains to pour into the heart itself what the mind has absorbed” – John Calvin
  - . The third building block is trust
    - . Jesus is telling Nicodemus that just like the Israelites had to trust God’s remedy of the Bronze Snake, mankind will need to trust God’s ultimate remedy in the Risen Christ – John 3: 14-15

### **JOURNEY TO MOAB – NUMBERS 21: 10-20**

- . Israelites turn north to the Arnon stream which flows westward into the middle of the Dead Sea
  - . The stream marks the border between Moab (to the south) and Ammon (to the north)
- . Included in this section is text from a volume called the *Book of the Wars of the Lord* Numbers 21:14-15, 17-18
  - . The placement of these verses seem strange and out of context
  - . One possible explanation is that it highlights a shift in attitude from grim to Hopeful

### **VICTORY OVER SIHON – NUMBERS 21: 21-31**

- . Land north of the Arnon stream was Amorite country
  - . Sihon was the king of the Amorites
  - . The Amorites were not related to the Israelites
- . Israelites request passage through the Amorite territory
  - . After being rejected, the Israelites attack and defeat the Amorites
- . This becomes the first of the conquered territories that will ultimately become part of the nation of Israel
  - . This will become the future home of the Reubenites and the Gadites, who will choose not to cross over in to the Promised Land

### **VICTORY OVER OG – NUMBERS 21: 32-35**

- . Last area to be captured was the land of Og, east of the Sea of Galilee
  - . With this land they now have conquered the whole of transjordan, from the land of Moab in the south to Mt. Herman in the north
- . This land, east of Galilee, would become home of the tribe of Manasseh
- . The people of Israel end chapter 21 on a victory march feeling that the Lord is with them

**NEXT LESSON IS WEDNESDAY JULY 18, 2012: NUMBERS 22 - 25**