

II. KADESH TO HESHBON (20:1-21:35)

A. DEATH OF MIRIAM v. 1

TEXT

Chapter 20:1. Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 20:1. Then the children of Israel, the entire congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed at Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there.

COMMENTARY

Now the period of wandering has ended. Presumably, all those who had lived under the sentence of death outside of the Promised Land are either dead or will die within this, the fortieth year since leaving Egypt. Moses stresses the fact that it is the entire congregation which assembles at Kadesh. They may have touched in at this spot many times during the years of wandering, but now they are brought together for a clear purpose: the time has arrived to begin the last phase of their journey and to enter Canaan. Their last great decision had been reached here—that they would not follow Joshua and Caleb in claiming the Promised Land immediately after the spies had returned from their mission. A totally different attitude now seems to pervade the crowd with reference to coming into their assigned inheritance. But is far more than a simple brief trip due north, as geography would indicate. They face a long journey, through hostile country; they will be ungrateful, just as their fathers had been, for God's provisions; they will murmur when they are in trouble or in short supply of food or water; they will be brought into conflict with many armies among the countries they visit; they will yield to strong temptations in immorality and suffer the bitter consequences. Yet there is a great

difference: at least a vast majority will rise to the occasion and their influence will dominate the nation. They will recognize the leading hand of the Lord and follow more willingly. They will be granted victory on the battlefield and physical necessities in the camp. It is a major turning point in their tempestuous history.

The very first incident related upon their return to Kadesh is the brief, almost casual, note of the death of Miriam. If this seems curt or indifferent, let the following facts be noted: Miriam had been far from exemplary on occasion; in the entire Bible, the deaths of very few women are noted at all; when the death of anyone is mentioned, it is ordinarily little more than a simple statement of the fact; her death appears to have been from natural causes, since there is no reason to associate the fact with any misconduct, past or present; the thrust of the account demands that we move forward, and undue or excessive details now would interrupt the flow of Moses' account; and, finally, neither of her brothers was ultimately to enter Canaan, and all were excluded by their various offenses. Aaron would expire in the fifth month of the same year, while Moses' death occurred almost at the close of the year. *RCP* adds that while Moses and Aaron died "by the mouth of God," the phrase is not used here (p. 155).

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

339. Identify the Wilderness of Zin, establishing its borders on all sides. Distinguish this wilderness from the Wilderness of Sin.
340. Can you give any reasonable explanation of the fact that so little is said of the wandering period?
341. Why did the Israelites not simply march north from Kadesh into the Promised Land?
342. Mention of Miriam's death seems almost casual. Why is it given so little attention? Discuss your answer.
343. What evidence is there that we have now entered the fortieth year since the Exodus?
344. Compute Miriam's age at the time of her death.

B. SIN OF MOSES AT MERIBAH vv. 2-13

TEXT

Chapter 20:2. And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. 3. And the people chode with Moses and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! 4. And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? 5. And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. 6. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them.

7. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 8. Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. 9. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him. 10. And Moses took Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? 11. And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.

12. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. 13. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and he was sanctified in them.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 20:2. Now there was no water for the congregation;

and they came together against Moses and against Aaron. 3. And the people argued with Moses, saying, "We wish we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! 4. Why have you brought the congregation up into this wilderness? So that we and our cattle should die here? 5. It is no place for seed, or for figs, or for vines, or for pomegranates; and there is no water to drink." 6. Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the congregation to the door of the Tent of Meeting, and they fell upon their faces;

7. and the glory of the Lord appeared to them, and the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 8. "Take the rod and gather the congregation together, you and Aaron your brother, and speak to the rock in front of their eyes; and it shall give forth water. You will bring forth water for them from the rock; in this manner you will give the congregation and their animals a drink." 9. So Moses took the rod from the presence of the Lord as he commanded him. 10. Then Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together in front of the rock and said unto them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water from this rock for you?" 11. And Moses lifted up his hand, and with the rod he struck the rock twice: and water came forth abundantly so that the congregation and their animals drank.

12. And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." 13. These are the waters of Meribah, where the children of Israel contended with the Lord, and he was sanctified by them.

COMMENTARY

Kadesh has not been identified with certainty, and it is thought to designate either a large district of desert land in the wilderness of Zin, or a smaller area about a large natural spring. Nothing was said of a shortage of water when the Israelites first camped here. The present cause may have derived from the season or from an unusually dry period. In saying there was "no

water", Moses may have intended only that whatever supply they had was inadequate to serve the needs of so large a multitude. Since water is essential both to the people and their large herds and flocks, a great quantity would be required regularly. When their requirements are not met, they revert to the manners of their fathers, assembling to protest against Moses and Aaron, (Ex. 17).

Whether the older Israelites had died en masse toward the end of the wandering period or their deaths were spread throughout that time, the surviving ones expressed their preference to join the dead rather than endure the discomforts of being waterless. Certainly the situation would be far from comfortable; but a review of the history of the nation would show that God had never abandoned them in any time of need. This is a time for faithtesting, and they are unprepared. Their charge that they have been brought into an "evil place," (v. 4), reflects only their momentary circumstance. They had not, for the most part, seen any of the bondage in Egypt; and on the other hand, their lives had been spent in the time of wandering. Hardships could not have been new and strange to them.

The evaluation of Kadesh is correct: it is not a place for an agricultural people, and it is far from ideal for their animals. While the Israelites are not at this time agricultural, they, like the Egyptians, may have come to depend largely upon the produce of the land—a fact of which their fathers had loudly complained, (Num. 11:5), when they grew tired of the manna.

Moses and Aaron react properly at first, going before the Lord on their faces to determine His will and His course of action. Without Him they are powerless and at the mercy of the people. But they stand ready to do whatever may be required of them. Their wait was not long when the glory of Jehovah came unto them, and His words have a familiar ring. They are to take the rod (almost certainly that which had been used as a sign before Pharaoh, and at the parting of the waters of the Red Sea), approach "the rock" (otherwise unidentified, but surely a prominent landmark at the camp site), and produce the water so desperately needed.

Initially it appears that Moses will do exactly as the Lord has asked. He gathers the assembly and, after rebuking them by labelling them rebels, addresses himself to the problem. And what was his sin? Some have pointed to the fact that Moses used the plural "we" in reference to the miracle soon to be performed, thus seeming to equate his part in the miracle with the Lord's; or, to say the least, sharing somewhat in it. Others point to the fact that Moses struck the rock twice, whether motivated by anger, righteousness, or impatience; still others remind us that he was told only to speak to the rock, and should not have touched it at all. Any one of these might have been enough, but if we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, God Himself refers to Moses' failure to glorify His name (v. 12), thus singling out the greatest offense.

We should not be surprised that water gushed forth from the rock in spite of Moses' error. God did not intend that the people should suffer, and He sent an abundant supply to care for them and their beasts. His rebuke is properly spoken to Moses and Aaron, and doubtless His verdict was given in private, for their ears alone: they would not be privileged to lead their people in the final triumphant step into the Promised Land. It was a most bitter sentence, but it underscores the grievous nature of the offense. A special weight of responsibility rests upon the shoulders of those entrusted with places of authority and leadership (cf. James 3:1). Since their actions influence many others directly, they must be most careful at all times. The error of Moses was public. Had God ignored it, or had Moses gone unpunished, the people could rightly accuse Him of biased treatment. This God is incapable of doing. His judgments are impersonal, altogether fair and constant.

The name "Meribah" is used of this place, as it had been used in the early days of Israel's exodus (see Ex. 17:7). The similarity between the two locations rests upon their need for water, their bitter complaints, and satisfaction through divine assistance. Otherwise, the narratives are most dissimilar, and cannot be confused. Even in these unusual circumstances, God was "sanctified in them", that is, as PC says, "He revealed there

his holiness and power, and put to silence their evil murmurings against Him. He was sanctified in them all the more abundantly because Moses and Aaron failed to sanctify him in the eyes of the people; but what they failed to do he brought to pass without their agency," (p. 254).

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

345. Since the Israelites must have continually relied upon God's providence in the past for the great quantity of water they needed, why should they suddenly show this strong doubt?
346. Why should the people blame Moses and Aaron for their problem?
347. What type of country surrounds Kadesh?
348. Do you believe God deliberately delayed bringing water to the Israelites? If so, for what purposes?
349. How could the people understand this area to be an "evil place"?
350. Compare the list of the foods they now miss with those given when the nation had first removed from Egypt. Explain the differences.
351. Some have suggested that Moses used Aaron's budded rod in the incident here. Why is this unlikely?
352. What explanations have been given for Moses' sin at "the rock"? Which do you accept, and why?
353. Explain why God sent water forth from the rock in spite of this fact.
354. Does it seem fair to you that Moses should be prohibited from leading the people into the Promised Land on the basis of this single act of error? Defend your answer.
355. What similarities can you find between the two incidents involving "Meribah"?
356. What do you learn of God's justice from the incident?

C. PASSAGE REFUSED THROUGH EDOM vv. 14-21

TEXT

Chapter 20:14. And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us: 15. How our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers: 16. And when we cried unto the Lord, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border. 17. Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders. 18. And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword. 19. And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without doing any thing else, go through on my feet. 20. And he said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand. 21. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 20:14. Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, "Thus says your brother Israel, 'You know all the difficulty which has come upon us: 15. how our fathers went down into Egypt, and we lived in Egypt a long time. Egypt treated us badly, as well as our fathers. 16. When we cried to the Lord, He heard our voice, sent an angel, and brought us out of Egypt; and, lo, we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your territory. 17. Let us pass through your country, I pray you. We will not pass through the fields nor through the vineyards, nor will we drink of the water of your wells. We will go by the King's Highway; we will not turn to the

right or to the left until we have passed through your country.' ” 18. But Edom replied to him, “You shall not pass through me lest I come out with the sword against you.” 19. And the children of Israel said to him, “We will go by the highway. And if I or my cattle drink any of your water, I will pay for it. I will do no damage; just let me pass through on foot only.” 20. But he said, “You shall not pass through.” And Edom came out against him with many people and a strong force. 21. In this way Edom refused to allow Israel passage through his border; so Israel turned him away.

COMMENTARY

When the Israelites refused to enter the land of Canaan the first time they came to the region of Kadesh, they were turned away from Kadesh by the warring Amalekites and Canaanites (14:45). This may be the reason they now choose not to enter Canaan from the south—the direct route—choosing instead the long march around the south of the Dead Sea and an approach from east of the Jordan. Because Moses does not consult the Lord in the decision, it is safe to assume that he had already been informed that the march would follow such a route.

Even without the detour required around the borders of Edom, going from Kadesh to Jericho via the southern route involved prolonging the trip extensively, through much more formidable territory. But it was a wiser choice than a confrontation with their previous enemies. Such a route required the permission of the king of Edom, through whose territory the large troupe must pass. The Edomites knew of the general circumstances (v. 14), since news of their origin and travels must certainly have spread throughout all adjacent lands. When Moses recites the history briefly, it is a polite prelude to a fair proposal. He asks permission for his people to pass through Edom without imposing hardship of any kind upon the residents. The population of Edom was never large, and the country had little tillable land. The Israelites might have consumed their resources in a relatively short time. Reassurance that the people would take nothing from field, vineyard, or

even the wells should have allayed any fears. It was a strong promise, and perhaps the Edomite king thought enforcement of the pledge, however sincerely given, was impossible.

Not wishing to incur the wrath of the king, nor to engage his forces in battle, Moses is compelled to agree to a detour. Even the pledge to stay on the trade route, and to reimburse the Edomites for any items consumed, even for any water, is fruitless. The adamant stand of the king might well account in part for later feelings of antipathy between the two peoples. The march turns again, and an additional 200 miles is imposed upon them.

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

357. What reasons possibly explain why the Israelites did not move directly north from Kadesh into the land of Canaan?
358. Consult a good map, and estimate the additional distance the tribes were required to travel when they were refused permission to pass through Edom.
359. How might the Edomites have heard the story of the history of Israel's servitude and delivery from Egypt?
360. Why was the proposed trip through Edom a potentially disastrous event for the Edomites? What safeguards did Moses offer?
361. Of what was the king of Edom actually afraid?
362. Trace the genealogical lines of the Israelites and the Edomites to find their relationship.

D. DEATH OF AARON vv. 22-29

TEXT

Chapter 20:22. And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh, and came unto mount Hor. 23. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, 24. Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land

which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. 25. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto mount Hor: 26. And strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. 27. And Moses did as the Lord commanded: and they went up into mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. 28. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount: and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. 29. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 20:22. And they traveled from Kadesh, and the children of Israel, the entire congregation, came to Mount Hor. 23. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor, near the border of the land of Edom, 24. "Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: he shall not enter into the land I have given the children of Israel, because you rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. 25. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son and bring them up to Mount Hor. 26. Strip Aaron of his garments, and put them on Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and he shall die there." 27. And Moses did as the Lord commanded; and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. 28. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. And Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. 29. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the children of Israel mourned for thirty days.

COMMENTARY

About one day's journey northeast of Kadesh is a tall, easily recognizable peak often thought to be this Mount Hor. Positive identification has not been made, although Jebel Harun is near

Petra, well inside the borders of Edom, The essential portion of the country lies north of this point, and it is through this area the Israelites were not permitted to march. Here God chooses to call Aaron to the peak of the "mountain on top of a mountain," to be the scene of his death. The second of the famous children of Amram and Jochebed is soon to die in the fortieth year of the wandering.

The death of Aaron, like that of Moses, comes before the Israelites enter the land of Promise; and it is for the same reason: the disobedience at Meribah. They have shared the crime, and they share the punishment. Although the death of Moses is delayed, it still deprived him of what must have been the strongest yearning of his life—entrance into the new Land. Aaron's life was plagued by some rather glaring sins, such as the construction of the golden calf (Ex. 32:1ff.); his self-exaltation and sedition against Moses, along with Miriam's harsh criticisms (12:1-11); and this last, the presumptuous wrong at Meribah. Any of these might have excluded him from Canaan, but God quite apparently considers the final offense to be the worst.

God gave special instructions to be carried out in conjunction with Aaron's death and his successor. The death would come on top of Hor, and the priestly robes, stripped from his body, should be placed upon Eleazar his third son, as God's next man chosen for the office of the high priest. The first sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, were victims of their own disobedience, and died in offering strange fire before the Lord (Lev. 10:1-2). Besides Eleazar, there was a younger son, Ithamar. Together they had served with Aaron after the death of their brothers (3:4); but only one could occupy the high priesthood, and Eleazar is chosen.

Among all the beautiful Hebrew expressions, none is more expressive than the phrase, given at death, "he was gathered unto his people." Far more than merely euphemistic, the thought had been used of the patriarchs (Gen. 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33, and elsewhere), and suggests a continuity of fellowship beyond the grave, and more than an elementary concept of the pleasantness of reunion with those we have known and loved in

this life. It is one of the clearest assertions of this doctrine in the Old Testament.

God's instructions were carefully followed. With the people watching, the two men carry out their roles.

Mourning was always a symbolic rite among the Hebrews, and might last for an extended period of time—not usually less than a week if the deceased were of any prominence. The entire nation mourned for Aaron for thirty days, indicating that he was a man of no little respect.

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

363. Identify Mount Hor. Distinguish this from the other mountain of the same name.
364. Why was Aaron not permitted to enter the land of Canaan?
365. Which of his sins was responsible for this exclusion? Why?
366. Why was Aaron's firstborn son not selected to succeed his father to the high priesthood?
367. Detail the instructions God gave to be carried out at the death of Aaron.
368. Show the symbolism and the deeper meanings of the term, to be "gathered unto one's people".
369. How long had the Israelites mourned for these people: Jacob? Joseph? Miriam? Aaron?
370. What actions were involved in this mourning?

E. VICTORY AT HORMAH 21:1-3

TEXT

Chapter 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. 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. 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.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 21:1. When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who dwelt in the Negev, heard that Israel came by the way of Atharim, he fought against Israel and took some of them prisoners. 2. And Israel made a vow to the Lord and said, "If you will indeed deliver these people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities." 3. And the Lord listened 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.

COMMENTARY

The Israelites had come approximately sixty miles from the region of the Canaanites since leaving Kadesh. The raid of Arad's king was quite apparently caused by false information, since Israel had headed away from this area. Perhaps they thought this was a guise, and that Israel would return to attack them. The term translated "by the way of the spies" is probably incorrect. Most of the more recent translations use the term "Atharim", which must be a local place name. The Canaanites held the territory of what would later be the southern portion of the land of Judah, to the wilderness of Zin. The Israelites had passed through this section en route to Mount Hor. The offensive action of the Canaanites is aimed at taking the lead away from the Israelites by beating them to the attack. Their adventure is at least temporarily successful when they gain prisoners from their foray.

The vow of the Israelites is simple. If Jehovah will grant them victory, they will pronounce a kind of anathema upon the cities of the Canaanites. It was a means of designating them for total destruction, with no booty to be divided among the conquerors. The purpose, as *PC* affirms, would be to remove them "from the sphere of private hatred, revenge, and cupidity,

and place (them) upon a higher level" (p. 270). The pledge is passed to the location, "Hormah", or, the "place of the ban." It is not altogether clear whether the term was intended for a single location, or for all the Canaanite cities in the general area of the attack. Carrying out the pledge necessarily must be deferred, since the Israelites have not intended to enter Canaan from the south. Fulfillment of the vow is mentioned in Joshua 12:14, although nothing unusual is said to have occurred at the time.

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

371. Why should the Canaanites go so far from their territory to attack Israel, when the Israelites were not immediately threatening them?
372. What territory is included in 'Arad'?
373. Give the terms of Israel's vow unto the Lord.
374. Give the meaning of 'Hormah', and tell why it fits the occasion.
375. In what way was the promise to destroy Arad any different from the instructions of God regarding other pagan cities?
376. When was the destruction of Hormah carried out?

F. INCIDENT OF THE BRASS SERPENT vv. 4-9

TEXT

Chapter 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. 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 loathed this light bread. 6. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people. and much people of Israel died.

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. 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. 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.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 21:4. From Mount Hor they traveled by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the heart of the people was very much disturbed because of the route. 5. 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 bread, nor is there any water; and we detest this miserable bread." 6. Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people; and they bit the people, and many of the people of Israel died.

7. And 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 the serpents away from us." And Moses prayed for the people. 8. Then the Lord said unto Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." 9. So Moses made a brass serpent and put it upon a pole. And it happened that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked at the brass serpent, he lived.

COMMENTARY

The journey of the Israelites now takes them through the long, narrow geological fault, known as the Arabah, which extends through the entire Jordan valley, and for a total of approximately 3,000 miles. Its northern extremity reaches north of Syria; its southern terminus is found deep within the African continent. Of variable width and depth, it includes the

country of Edom. However, the western portion of the valley was all but desolate and uninhabited, and it is through this side the Israelites march. Their course will take them all the way to the northeastern tip of the Red Sea, which is the Gulf of Aqabah at this point. It is rugged country all the way.

The trials of travel, as well as the great length added to their trip because of the stubbornness of the Edomites, doubtless incites this latest complaint of the people, and they take up the common refrain so often sung in the past: how much they had rather give up the present circumstance to return to their former state in Egypt. Their special criticism is turned upon the manna and a lack of water. Nowhere is it suggested that the people were actually without at least their barest necessities. The manna fell daily, and water had always been provided as needed.

Of the sending of the serpents, the Midrash has said, quoting the supposed words of the Lord: "Let the serpent, who was punished for speaking slander (Genesis 3), come and exact punishment from those who speak slander. Let the serpent, to whom all foods taste alike, come and exact punishment from these ungrateful people for whom one food (manna) could have a variety of tastes," *RCP*, p. 161.

PC enters an unusual thought in reference to the serpents' identity, claiming that, rather than being poisonous vipers, the term "burning" or "fiery" refers to an unusual coloration—a brilliant and metallic lustre. The modifying word *saraph* seems to indicate such brilliance in two other uses (Ezekiel 1:7 and Isaiah 6:2); but, in reference to the serpents, such a position seems illogical. The snake bites cause death among the Israelites, and the bronze image is erected to prevent such death, which would hardly be sensible if the bite were harmless. When *PC* points out that certain "very deadly snakes in Australia . . . are known as "copper snakes", the point is irrelevant, since they are on the wrong continent. No such serpents have been positively identified in the Arabah.

With the camp in an uproar at this latest turn of events, the

people once more turn to Moses; but this time it is in air of desperation and concern. They confess, "We have sinned," and identify their sin as critical talk about the Lord. They ask for Moses' direct intercession in their behalf. It is the first time they have asked for such a favor; on all other occasions of Moses' intervention, it was his own unsolicited action. Their hope is clear; that the serpents may be removed.

It is doubtful that either Moses or the people quite expected the answer which the Lord gave. They would have been shocked at the erection of the image of a serpent for two reasons: God Himself had instructed them to make no graven image of any creature in the Decalogue; and, there would seem to be no connection whatever between a brass image and the relief they sought. Clearly, however, the remedy God suggests is a test, however elementary, of their faith. He who had prohibited image-making for the sake of idolatrous practices has ordered this action for quite another purpose, to show His great power even over the simple creatures of the dust. An unusual kind of faith would be required of the people of Israel if they were to be healed. They must look upon the bronze standard in the center of the camp. The command cannot be rationalized. It is purely a test of obedient faith, such as is common in the Word of God. Man responds to a command of God, not because he understands fully the relationship between carrying out the command and receiving the pardoning favor of God, but because he believes God means exactly what He says; He will punish the disobedient and show His favor unto the obedient. To look upon the serpent is enough. Anyone believing this will be cured of the poisonous bite.

How could anyone of that day, Moses included, have known the glorious symbolism which our Lord would make of this circumstance? Although an application of the lifted serpent in the wilderness to the redeeming cross of Calvary would hardly have occurred to the Christian without Jesus' own words (John 3:14), His application is clear. Those whose shallow faith would not permit so much as a glimpse at the lifted serpent would suffer the consequences of their doubts, whereas those who

believed Moses' instructions and, in faith were to look at the standard erected by God's words would be cured. It is the exact relationship of Jesus Christ to the world. There is no salvation to that one who will not turn to the Son of God in obedient faith to seek His cleansing power. So the most detested of all creatures became a sign of the innocent Lamb of God, despised of the world, but offering Himself in behalf even of those who hated Him.

Later history shows that this brazen serpent had been kept by the people, and became an object of worship. In Hezekiah's day the practice of offering incense before the standard was ended when the good king ordered it to be broken in pieces (II Kings 18:4). Typically, the people had turned a glorious historical symbol into an object of disgraceful paganistic practice.

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

377. Describe the Arabah.
378. List the factors which contributed to the complaints of the people.
379. Why would such complaints be unjustified?
380. What is the meaning of the term "fiery serpents"?
381. Discuss the possibility that Moses was referring to a specially colored snake, rather than to a venomous type.
382. If Moses is referring to the color of the serpents, explain how the people died from their bite.
383. What was the primary motive of the people in appealing to Moses to intercede for them unto the Lord?
384. What is unusual about the fact of having a serpent serve as a means of saving the people from death?
385. What relationship is there between looking at a snake's image and being cured of a poisonous bite?
386. Show how Jesus used the figure of the brazen serpent in His teaching.
387. What was the ultimate end of the brazen serpent?

G. BYPASSING MOAB vv. 10-20

TEXT

Chapter 21:10. And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in Oboth. 11. And they journeyed from Oboth, and pitched at Ije-abarim, in the wilderness which is before Moab, toward the sunrising. 12. And from thence they removed, and pitched in the valley of Zared. 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. 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, 15. And at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab. 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.

17. Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it: 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: 19. And from Mattanah to Nahaliel: and from Nahaliel to Bamoth: 20. And from Bamoth in the valley, that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah, which looketh toward Jeshimon.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 21:10. And the children of Israel moved forward and camped in Oboth. 11. And they moved forward from Oboth, and camped at Iyeabarim, in the wilderness which is opposite Moab, toward the sunrise. 12. From that place they left and camped in the wady of Zered. 13. From that place they left and camped on the other side of the Arnon, which is in the wilderness extending from the boundary 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,
 And the wadies of the Arnon,
 15. And the slope of the valleys
 Which extends to the dwelling of Ar,
 And lies at the boundary of Moab.

16. And from there they continued to Beer: that is the well of which the Lord spoke to Moses, "Gather the people together and I will give them water.

17. Then Israel sang this song,
 Spring up, O well; sing to it:
 18. The well which the princes dug,
 Which the nobles excavated,
 With the scepter and with their staves.

And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah, 19. and from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth, 20. and from Bamoth to the valley which is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah, which overlooks the desert.

COMMENTARY

Two stations, later mentioned (33:41-43), are omitted at this point; but there is no significance to the omission other than to make the account somewhat more brief. The stations, Zalmonah and Phunon, are not identified, and nothing of consequence occurred at either place. Oboth itself has not been located positively, although it is tentatively set by George Adam Smith on a high plateau in eastern Edom. By the time this point had been reached, Israel had completed its long, and to them unnecessary, journey around the circumference of Edom. Israel had been severely warned not to make war upon the descendants of Esau (Deut. 2:4-6), and to repay them for any provisions procured from the residents of the land. Traveling on the eastern edge of Edom was much less difficult than the former marches had been, since the mountains are almost a continuous plateau. The Edomites, by now convinced that the Israelites have no military intentions, are content to let the huge parade go by unharmed. Ije-abarim, like Oboth, has not been

certainly identified. It means, literally, "the ruins on the other side," (of the Jordan, that is). In 33:44, Ije-abarim is located on the border of Moab. Since the march took the tribes well to the east, it is likely that this encampment was near the edge of the Arabian Desert. Later the general name "Abarim" was applied to the region east of the Jordan, comparable to the area designated as "Perea" in the New Testament (such usage is to be found in Jeremiah 22:20). At the time of Moses, the name applied to the range of mountains opposite Jericho.

The so-called "valley of Zered" is commonly thought to be mistakenly used here for the Wady Kerek, which would have been crossed earlier. The next camp, established on the other side of the Arnon, must have been well to the east since the valley of the Arnon is very precipitous as the river approaches the Dead Sea, at which point it would have been impassable to the company of Israel. The Arnon itself usually formed the border between Moab and the land of the Amorites; although it was not always so, this must have been the case at the time of Moses. In the context, the phrase "on the other side of the Arnon" seems to indicate the south side of the river in the land of Moab. From such a site it would be logical to establish the point from which the territory of the Amorites could be entered. An embassy was sent to Sihon from the spot.

Concerning the fragmentary song and historical extract introduced at this point, nothing more is known. The book, *Book of the Wars of Jehovah*, has not been found. Apparently it was composed by anonymous national poets who commemorated various incidents and victories mentioned by Moses. *PC* asserts that such a poem demonstrates the genuineness of the fragment, as well as the original, since such a fragmentary, isolated and archaic bit obviates forgery (see p. 280). In its original form, the book may have been a compilation of odes celebrating the glorious acts of the Lord. The portion in v. 14 has neither subject nor verb, indicating its familiarity at the time it was incorporated into the text.

The positive, victorious tone of the poem leaves no doubt about the great hand of God in the affairs of His chosen people.

It anticipates the victory over Sihon, and signals the fact that the people will no longer need to depend upon some miraculous act to provide their water: they have but to dig wells. One cannot miss the marvelous contrast in attitude, shifting from very recent bitter complaint to joyous, triumphant praise. Beer Elim, mentioned in Isaiah 15:8, seems to be the spot of the encampment when the great victory song was composed and sung. It is located in the extreme northeastern sector of Moab, at the edge of the desert. The next move, to Mattanah, brings them into a less barren area. Nahaliel, "the brook of God," may designate a small tributary of the Arnon, on the route Israel followed north from that river. Bamoth, "heights", seems to indicate a site where Baal was worshiped; the full name, in this case, would be Bamoth-Baal, as in 22:41 and Joshua 13:7. The name, then, might have designated its mountainous elevation; or it could be understood to a "high place" which served as a central point for Baalism.

The text presents a problem here in the original: "And from Bamoth . . . the valley which in the field . . . Moab . . . the top . . . Pisgah." *PC* suggests a full reading: "And from the heights to the valley that is in the field of Moab, viz., the top of Pisgah," (p. 281). The field would appear to be an area north of the Arnon which is barren plateau. However, since Bamoth is a common name found elsewhere in Moab, as well as in areas where Baalism was strong, the identification is uncertain.

Passing then through the valley, which is unnamed but probably was little less than a glen rather than a wady, the troupe came to "the top of Pisgah." Pisgah is applied to a series of peaks along the plateau of northwestern Moab, overlooking the Dead Sea, and offering a commanding view of the land of Canaan. The same term also apparently includes the single peak of Mt. Nebo, and the two peaks have often been considered identical. It is said to overlook the Jeshimon, or "valley". The Jeshimon is usually associated with the area where David took refuge from Saul, the eastern section of the hills of Judea. Here it is applied to the area opposite, just east of the Dead Sea. Since the word is often used as a common noun as well as a

proper noun, there is no real confusion of terms. The people's camp will be established here until after the eastern lands have fallen to God's people, and they prepare to cross Jordan after the death of Moses.

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

388. What reasons can you give that so many of the places mentioned here, and in similar passages regarding the travels of the Israelites, are difficult or impossible to identify today?
389. Examine a topographical map of the region of Edom and its environs. Why would it have been more simpler to cross the northern portion of the Arabah? Why would the Edomites not be afraid to have the Israelites cross the southern point of the country? For what reasons would the Israelites travel along the extreme eastern edge of Edom as they headed north?
390. Show how the term "Abarim" is commonly used.
391. Why is the reference to crossing the Zered probably a mistaken notation?
392. For what primary reasons would the Israelites avoid crossing the Arnon in the vicinity of the Red Sea?
393. What do you know of the *Book of the Wars of Jehovah*? When and by whom was it probably written? What is its essential purpose? How does its piecemeal nature indicate its authenticity?
394. What great change in life style is indicated in the portion of the poem recorded?
395. Explain the problem in the original text at v. 20. What is the probable meaning?
396. Explain the confusion regarding the name "Pisgah".
397. What region is usually designated by the "Jeshimon"? What more is meant here?
398. How long did the Israelites maintain their encampment here?

H. VICTORY OVER SIHON AND OG vv. 21-35

TEXT

Chapter 21:21. And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, 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. 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. 24. And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon to Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon was strong. 25. And Israel took all these cities; and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon. 27. Wherefore they that speak in proverbs say, Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared: 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. 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. 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.

31. Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites. 32. And Moses sent to spy out Jaazer, and they took the villages thereof, and drove out the Amorites that were there.

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. 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. 35. So they smote him, and his sons, and all his

people, until there was none left alive; and they possessed his land.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 21:21. And Israel sent messengers to Sihon, King of the Amorites, saying, 22. "Let me pass through your land; we will not turn aside into the fields or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well; we will go along by the King's Highway, until we have passed your borders." 23. But Sihon would not permit Israel to pass through his territory. He gathered all his men together and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and he came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. 24. And Israel slew him with the edge of the sword and took possession of his land from Arnon to Jabbok, as far as the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon was strong. 25. And Israel took all these cities, and Israel settled in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all its villages. 26. Now Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had taken all his land out of his hand, as far as the Arnon. 27. Therefore those who speak in similes say,

"Come to Heshbon; let it be built;
Let the city of Sihon be established.

28. "For a fire went out of Heshbon,
A flame from the city of Sihon:
It consumed Ar of Moab,
And the lords of the high places of Arnon.

29. "Woe unto you, Moab!
You are undone, O people of Chemosh!
He made his sons fugitives,
And his daughters captives
To Sihon, king of the Amorites.

30. "So their posterity vanished from Heshbon,
As far as Dibon, and we laid waste
Until the fire spread to Medeba."

31. In this manner Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites.

32. And Moses sent to spy out Jazer; and they took its villages and drove out the Amorites who were there.

33. Then they turned and went 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. 34. And the Lord said to Moses, "Do not be afraid of him; I have delivered him into your hand, and all his people, and his land. You shall do to him as you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon." 35. So they slew him, his sons, and all his people until there was not a single survivor; and they took possession of his land.

COMMENTARY

Having passed through the territory controlled by the Edomites and the Moabites, the people of Israel now turn their attention to the next northern neighbors, the Amorites. Unlike the other two nations, the Amorites were not Hebrews, but Canaanites (see Gen. 10:16). The same request made before to Edom and Moab, is addressed to Sihon, and with the same results. It is rejected. To emphasize his refusal, Sihon organized his people into an army and attacked Israel. The encounter occurred at Jahaz, a site as yet unidentified, but probably was found well to the east of Israel's camp.

With the conquest of Sihon, the Israelites gained control over a large land, reaching northward to the Jabbok. This river is found about twenty-five miles north of the Dead Sea, and forty-five miles north of the Arnon. North of the Jabbok lived the Ammonites; they may well have prevented the expansion of the Amorites' territory. The primary city of the Amorites, Heshbon, had been the capital since Sihon had earlier defeated Moab. It is located about midway between the Arnon and the Jabbok, and eighteen miles east of point where the Jordan flows into the Dead Sea. The immediate area is a plateau of about 3000 feet elevation. Heshbon and her "daughters", the small surrounding villages, are listed in Josh. 13:17.

Victory at Heshbon gave rise to the quoted proverbs. These would have been sung by their composers, who may have been

professional balladeers. With a succession of favorable events to celebrate, their works are joyous to the Israelites and taunting to their enemies.

The first portion is sometimes thought to have been a work of satirical nature, composed by an Israelite who now challenges the Amorites to recapture their recently-lost capital of Heshbon as they had previously taken it from Moab. The second portion, v. 29, attacks the worshipers of Chemosh, who was Moab's chief god. Certain coins found at Areopolis show Chemosh a god of war armed and flanked by fiery torches. Singing of his defeat in this manner comprised an especially ironic thought. Not only was Chemosh a war god, his direct worship involved human sacrifice via the flame. In the song, Chemosh is powerless to resist Sihon who, in turn, has been soundly defeated by Israel. The third section of the poem details the consequences of Sihon's defeat. The text is obscure in the *KJV*; the *RSV* seems justified in following the *LXX*. Heshbon has been utterly destroyed, together with some of the chief cities nearby, Dibon and Medeba.

Jazer was taken next, along with its surrounding villages, which ended the resistance of the Amorites. All of the residents of the city were expelled, and it became an important city in the land of Gad under Joab.

The land of Bashan, lying well to the north of Jazer, is a broad, fertile territory lying to the east of the Sea of Galilee, and extending from Mt. Hermon to a point south and east of the Yarmuk. Edrei, the capital, lay in this corner of the land. The people were Amorites (see Josh. 2:10), but had a separate existence from those governed by Sihon. They lived in heavily fortified cities which had been considered invincible by direct assault. Apparently Og's forces left the capital for some reason and were beaten in the field. Perhaps, as *PC* offers, they were victims of their own overconfidence. Speaking as He often did, God told Moses "I have delivered him into thy hand . . . ;" He speaks of the *fait accompli* before the battle is engaged. Israel will take army, people and land, and they shall know the same end as did Sihon. And so it happened.

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

399. Trace the origin of the Amorites.
400. Why should Sihon, ruler of a rather small nation, attack such a large group as the Israelites?
401. Describe the country in which the Amorites lived.
402. Show the irony in the first simile-ballad, as it relates to the Amorites, and to Moab.
403. How does the second ballad reflect upon the god Chemosh?
404. What was the ultimate fate of Jazer?
405. Show what territory was included in the land of Bashan at this time.
406. What possible explanation might there be for Og's abandoning his fortified cities in order to attack Israel in the field?