

Military Victories; Fiery Serpents Because of Complaining

Numbers 21

Group ¹	C	V	Description
Arad Conquered	21	1-3	Arad, a Canaanite king, is defeated
The Bronze Serpent		4-5	People complain again about “miserable food” and lack of water
		6-9	God sends fiery serpents who bite people and they die from it, Moses makes a serpent out of bronze to use to save the people
		10-15	The camp moves close to Moab
		16	A well in Beer (Heb, a well)
		17-20	The people celebrate, singing, “Spring Up O Well”
Two Victories		21-30	Sihon, the Amorite, refuses to let the Israelites pass through the his land
		31-32	Israel captures some Amorite cities
		33-35	Og of Bashan is defeated by the Israelites

Reflections

God grants the people victories in battles but they can still find reasons to complain, usually about food and water. This time, God sends fiery serpents among the people and when they bite the people, they die. Moses intercedes for the people and God instructs Moses to make a bronze serpent set up on a standard and to instruct the people to look at the serpent whenever they are bitten and they would live. If they didn’t, they would die.

This chapter also includes some of the movements of the camp as they move closer to the place where they will enter the promised land. It also includes the difficulties and victories the Israelites will have while they make this migration.

The sad thing is that the bronze serpent became an object of idol worship and God eventually had to have it taken from the people to stop this form of idolatry. This happened during the reign of Hezekiah in Judah.

2 Kings 18:1-6 NASB Now it came about in the third year of Hoshea, the son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah became king. **2** He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem; and his mother’s name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. **3** He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. **4** He removed the high places and broke down the *sacred* pillars and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan. **5** He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor *among those* who were before him. **6** For he clung to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses.

¹ (NASB) “Group” column from the headings in the NASB text.

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The name Nehushtan means “a piece of brass”² and it would appear that when Hezekiah breaks it he was calling it a mere piece of brass, nothing worthy of worship instead of God, which it had become.

Of course, we know that this bronze serpent is a type or symbol that is used to represent Christ on the cross. Jesus Himself even mentions this.

John 3:14-15 NASB "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

Everyone who looks to Jesus for salvation will be saved.

There and Then: Here and Now

Answer the questions below as you reflect on your own life and this part of our study³: my LOG vs others SPECK. Here are some possible responses I've identified from the text that might apply to anyone.

S - Are there *sins* for me to avoid or confess?

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P - Are there *promises* from God for me to claim?

•

E - Are there *examples* for me to follow or avoid?

•

C - Are there *commands* for me to obey?

•

K - How has this passage increased my *knowledge* about God / Jesus / Holy Spirit?

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Key Words: Old Testament, Torah/Pentateuch, Numbers, Military Victory, Complaining, Bronze Serpent, Arad, Sihon, Og, Jesus, Salvation



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² (Orr “Nehushtan”)

³ *Navigator Bible Study Handbook* (The Navigators), with additions & Matthew 7:1-5.