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The Book of the Wars of the LORD 21: 10-20

The book of the wars of the LORD DIG: What was the Book of the Wars of the LORD? Why would it be important that the Israelites remember this trip? How would the song of the well in this passage help them do that? What recurring themes do you see here? What pictures of our Lord Yeshua Messiah have we seen in the story of Number so far?

REFLECT: The Israelites were grateful for the well God provided. Why were they so grateful for water? What are you especially grateful for today? Which event in your spiritual pilgrimage during this past year was the most significant? Why is it important that you remember that event? What will you do to ensure you do? What are you looking forward to doing?

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This section offers a summary of the military engagements of **Isra'el's** march to the Transjordan, given in a fuller account later in the book (**to see link click Gf – From Mount Hor to the Plains of Mo'ab**). Since the battle with **the Amorites** clearly took place prior to **Isra'el's** arrival at the Jordan valley, then chronologically **21:21-32** precedes **21:10-20**. A few battles are cited from a poetic work, **the Book of the Wars of the LORD** and a second poem, **the Song of the Well**, is inserted into the narrative when **Be'er** was reached.[424]

The Edomites: At last **the people** were on the march toward **their** destination of the Transjordan, the area located east of **the Jordan River** and opposite the eastern boundary of **Canaan** opposite **Jericho**. The Transjordan would be the staging area and entry point for **the wilderness generation** as **they** prepared to advance into the Promised Land.[425] **The Israelites** crossed to the highlands east of **the Arabah** and then turned north again. The path did lead **them** through **Edomite** territory, but **they** kept to **the King's Highway** and passed through unchallenged. It may well be that **the Edomites** could not control **the Desert**

Highway at that time. But **the Israelites** obeyed the command of **ADONAI** and avoided any confrontation with **them** as they passed through (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Aq – Moshe Remembered the Events in Seir**).

The Moabites (21:10-13): After passing through the craggy heights of **Edom**, **Isra'el** entered the land of **the Moabites**. The list of camping places shows an interest in arriving at **the eastern border** of **Mo'ab** as quickly as possible and zeroing in on **the Amorite land**. **Ha'Shem** also commanded **the Israelites** not to attack **the Moabites** (see **Deuteronomy Ar – Moshe Remembered the Events in Mo'av**). **The people of Isra'el traveled on and camped at Oboth. From Oboth they traveled and camped at 'Iye Abarim, in the desert bordering Mo'ab to the east. From there they traveled and camped in Zered Valley, having** moved from the west of **Edom to the east** of **Edom. The Israelites** were then in **Moabite** territory. **From there they traveled and camped on the other side of the Arnon, in the wilderness; this river comes out of the border of the Amorites; for the Arnon is the border between Mo'ab and the Amorites.**



The book of the wars of the LORD (21:14-15): At this point in the description of the journey, the Torah cites a proof-text from another collection entitled **The Book of the Wars of the LORD.** The passage cited is a short poetic unit which simply describes the local geography, confirming that **the valleys of Aron** did indeed border **Mo'ab**.[426] Then we are introduced to a strange **book** called **the Book of the Wars of the LORD**. This **book** is no longer in existence, but a fragment of the book contained truth that **God** wanted to preserve was recorded by **Moses**. Not all ancient books that the biblical writers mention are necessarily inspired. But some would contain truth that **YHVH** wished to preserve. **This is why it** says: **Waheb**

(possibly a **Moabite** fortress) **in Sufah** (Hebrew: *storm*)**, the valleys of Arnon, and the slope of the valleys extending as far as the settlement of 'Ar, which lie next to the border of Mo'ab."** With a slight modifying in the vowel patterns (because the vowels were added much later), a literal translation might be: *The LORD came like a storm, He took Waheb, and marched through the valleys of the Arnon, extending as far as the settlement of 'Ar, which lies next to the border of Mo'ab.*[427] This poem pictures **the LORD** as **the Divine Warrior** sweeping through the territory of **Mo'ab** ready for the great battles in the Transjordan that anticipated the conquest of Canaan.[428]

According to Ibn Ezra, this description of Isra'el's position accords with Balak's location of Isra'el's encampment, saying: They have settled next to me (Numbers 22:5). Thus, this book supplied another confirmation that Isra'el avoided the territory of Mo'ab. It seems that the Book of the Wars of the LORD was a separate book which, together with the Book of Jashar (Joshua 10:13 and **Second Samuel 1:18), were anthologies of early songs describing the saga of Israelite battles at the beginning of her national existence. But only a couple of small fragments in verses 17 and 18a survived.**[429]

Jewish traditional explanations aside, it seems most likely that **the Book of the Wars of the LORD** was some type of chronicle of the military engagements that the children of **Isra'el** faced as **they** came up from **the wilderness**. The conservative view would suppose that it must have been written by **Moses** or one of **the Wilderness Generation**. In any case, it probably tells, with some detail, the story of the various battles that **the Israelites** faced in **the wilderness** and as they entered **the Promised Land**. The most significant battles were with **Sihon** (see **Dk – The Defeat of Sihon of Heshbon**) and **Og** (see **Dl – The Defeat of Og of Basham**). The book of **Numbers** treats these two major engagements sparingly, even though **they** figured significantly in the story. **They** are important military campaigns, long celebrated and long remembered. **They** are revisited in **Deuteronomy** numerous times. **They** are mentioned in **Joshua**. The story of the battle with **Sihon** is recounted in **Judges**. **The Psalms** refer back to the glory of those victories. One would imagine such celebrated victories would occupy a lot of text. But they do not. Perhaps the reason for the scarcity of detail regarding the battles with **the Amorites** is that another collection, **The Book of the Wars of the LORD** contained a full chronicle of those battles. The chronicle may have also contained detailed geographical information which **Numbers 21** seems to draw

upon. The movements of **Isra'el** are reported with a heightened sense of place and territorial relationship in these last chapters of **Numbers**. Unfortunately, we possess only five lines of the original work. The rest has been lost to time. But it is not unlikely that **the song of the well** in **Numbers 21:17-18** and the poem relating the defeat of **Sihon's city** of **Heshbon** in **Numbers 21:27-30** are also extracts from the same source.[430]

The song of the well (21:16-18a): From the valleys of Arnon they went on to Be'er [which means **well]; that is the well about which ADONAI said to Moshe, "Assemble the people, and I will give them water."** This is the first time in **the Torah** where **the water** is provided for the people prior to **their** complaining over the absence of **water**. Perhaps the incident with the serpents had made an impression upon **Isra'el**. **They** refrained from complaining, and as a result, **God** took the initiative **Himself** and met **their** needs. **Then,** as a result of getting **water** from **the well**, **Isra'el sang this song, "Spring up, oh well! Sing to the well sunk by the tribal leaders, dug by the people's leaders with the scepter, with their staffs!" The Midrash Rabbah views the well as the same rock that had followed them in the wilderness for the last forty years (Numbers Rabbah 19:25).** But the plain reading of the text seems to suggest that this **well** was a new source of **water**. There are similarities though. Just as **Moses** struck the rock with **his staff** to bring forth **the water**, this **well** is said to be **dug** with **the staff** of **the trial** leaders.Just as **Moses** was to speak to the rock, **the leaders** of **the people** are portrayed speaking to **the well** and **singing** to **it**.

The miracle of **the well** on the edge of **Moab's** territory reminds us of **the water** dispute between **Abraham** and **Lot**. **Abraham's** herdsmen and **Lot's** herdsmen quarreled over the **water** rights (see the commentary on **Genesis Dx – Abram Lived in the Land of Canaan, While Lot Lived in Sodom**). As a result, **they** parted company. Now the descendants of **Abraham** travel through the land of the descendants of **Lot (Mo'ab), ADONAI** miraculously brings forth **a well** for them.[431]

On to the territory of King Sihon (21:18b-20): From the wilderness they went to Mattanah, from Mattanah to Nahali'el, from Nahali'el to Bamoth, and from Bamoth to the valley by the plain of Mo'ab at the start of the Pisgah Mountain **range, where it overlooks the wilderness, north of the Dead Sea on both sides of the Jordan.** Poised on the mountaintop of Nebo, at the prominent peak of **the Pisgah** mountains, **Moses** would later be granted a glimpse of the Promised Land (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Gj – The**

Death of Moses). For now, **the Israelites** celebrated with great joy the gift from **God**.[432] Finally, **they** had come to the territory of **King Sihon** of **the Amorites** in Transjordan.

This is a good place to pause and note the pictures of our **Lord Yeshua Messiah** that are found in the story in **Numbers** so far. We've seen **Him** in **the manna** as **the bread of life** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Fr – Jesus the Bread of Life**), and now in the well **He's** the giver of **living water** (see **The Life of Christ Gp – On the Last and Greatest Day of the Feast**). In the Bible, **water** for drinking is a picture of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, while **water** for washing is a type of **the Word of God**. In the context of the role of **the husband** in marriage, **Ephesians 5:26-27** is reminiscent of the **Jewish** wedding ceremony. **He** is **to make his wife holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word.** But before **Yeshua** could send **the Spirit**, **He** had to die on the cross **(John 7:39),** which leads us to **the uplifted snake** (see **Di – The Healing Snake**). **The manna** emphasizes **His** incarnation, **the snake His** crucifixion, and **the water His** ascension and the outpouring of **the Ruach**.[433]

*Dear Heavenly Father, Praise **You** for being so loving and also so very powerful, **the Almighty Sovereign** ruler of the world! How fantastic that there never will be a battle or an enemy too powerful for **You**! Even when **the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war (Revelation 19:16)** against **You**, **You** so easily take **them** completely out! **Then the beast was captured, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs before him by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, as well as those who had worshiped his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the One riding on the horse. And all the birds gorged themselves with their flesh (Revelation 19:20-21).***

*It is not horses, tanks, size of the army nor wisdom that win a war; but it is **You** our **Almighty Heavenly Father** who is always victorious **(Psalms 20:7).** How wonderful to know that **You never sleep, nor slumber (Psalms 121:3-4). You** always have the solution and are always there to help me with any battle or problem, no matter how big or how small – Your will be done! **For God Himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you," (Hebrews 13:5c). I will say of ADONAI, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.***

For He will rescue you from the hunter's trap and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge. His faithfulness is body armor and shield (Psalms 91:2-4).
I love, worship and glorify ***You*** *for* ***Your*** *Mighty Power! In* ***Messiah Yeshua's*** *holy* ***Name*** *and power of* ***His*** *resurrection. Amen*