

Bamidbar Chapter 21 - Transcript

Shiur Overview

Summary: Bamidbar Chapter 21 — Fragmentary Wars, Songs, and the Journey to the Threshold of Eretz Yisrael

Contextual Framing: The Third Act of Bamidbar

This chapter belongs to the third major section of the book's chronology:

- First section:** The first year — establishment of the Mishkan and the camp
- Second section:** Beginning of desert travel, with its complaints and stories
- Third section:** The end of desert travel — wars, complaints, and challenges at the threshold of Eretz Yisrael

Miriam and Aharon have already died; Moshe has been told he too will die in the desert due to Mei Meriva. This is clearly the turning point to the new generation, though several stories and conquests remain.

A key observation about this section: **many of these narratives are fragmentary**. Unlike the detailed accounts of Yetzias Mitzrayim or the Mishkan's construction — where even seemingly superfluous details are included — these final wars and stories are told with most of the narrative missing. The chapter even explicitly references books or sources that apparently contained fuller versions of these narratives, but those sources are not available to us. We are working with fragments.

Pesukim 1–3: The War with the Canaanite King of Arad

The Canaanite king of Arad, located in the Negev (southern Israel), hears that Israel has come by way of Atarim (some road or place) and attacks, capturing some captives. This echoes the very similar episode at the end of Parshas Shelach, where the Canaanite dwelling in the Negev fought and defeated the *ma'apilim* who tried to ascend after the sin of the spies. This may be a version of that same story or a separate but parallel event.

In response, Israel makes a **neder** — a vow. The concept of a neder in crisis is well-established: when in distress, one promises Hashem something in exchange for deliverance. Here the collective vow is: "If You deliver this people into our hand, *v'hecharamti es areihem*" — we will place their cities under *cherem* (consecrated destruction), meaning the spoils go to Hashem/the Mishkan/the kohanim rather than being kept personally. This connects to the earlier halachos of cherem: כל חרם בישראל לך יהיה.

a notable verse — וישמע ה' בקול ישראל — Hashem listens because usually *we* listen to the voice of Hashem, but here Hashem listens to the voice of the people. Israel wins and imposes the cherem, and the place is named **Chorma** (from cherem). Intriguingly, Chorma is the same name given to the place where the Canaanites defeated the ma'apilim. There may be multiple places called Chorma, all named for the same concept. The Melech Arad or Melech Chorma appears again later in Sefer Yehoshua during the conquest. Midrashim

attempt to fill in the background, but the report as given is .very fragmentary

Pesukim 4–9: The Complaint, the Serpents, and the Copper Snake

The Complaint

Traveling back from Hor HaHar (where Aharon died) and **והקצר**, forced to go around Edom (which refused them passage) the people's spirit grows short. They are — **נפש העם בדרך** — exhausted, impatient, facing an ever-lengthening journey with repeated obstacles. They complain against God and Moshe with the familiar refrain: "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in the desert?" They acknowledge having *some* food our souls are fed" — **ונפשנו קצה בלחם הקלקל** (the mahn) but say ".up with this worthless/spoiled bread

The Punishment

Hashem sends **nechashim seraphim** — venomous/burning snakes. *Saraf* here means a snake whose bite burns, i.e., a poisonous snake. Many die. This connects to Devarim's description of the desert as a place of *nachash saraf v'akrav* — the very dangers of the desert are turned against them in response to their complaint that the desert is terrible.

The Resolution — A New Model

The people confess (**chatanu**) and ask Moshe to pray. Moshe prays, but prayer alone is not the solution. Hashem instructs Moshe to make a *saraf* (snake image) and place it on a **nes** (pole/flagpole). Anyone bitten who looks at it will live (*vachai* — meaning recover/become healthy).

Moshe makes a **nechash nechoshet** — a copper snake. Hashem didn't specify copper; Moshe chose it, creating the **לשון נופל על** what Chazal call) *alliterative* **nechash nechoshet** He places it on the pole, and anyone bitten who looks at **לשון**. it is healed

This solution is **structurally parallel** to the aftermath of Korach's rebellion, when a plague struck and Moshe had Aharon bring ketores as a kind of technical/segulah-type remedy. In both cases, the resolution isn't simply teshuvah or prayer but involves a specific, almost technical intervention. The famous Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah reinterprets this in moral terms (when Israel looked upward and submitted their hearts to Heaven, they were healed), but the narrative itself presents something mysterious and not fully explained — again, part of the fragmentary nature of these reports. Why Hashem gave this particular solution remains unexplained.

Pesukim 10–20: Travel Reports and Songs

The Travel Itinerary

A series of travel stops is reported — fragments of what appears in full form at the end of Parshat Masei. The purpose is to move Bnei Yisrael from Hor HaHar through various stations toward their final destination: **Aravot Moav**, where the crucial final events of Bamidbar and all of Sefer Devarim take place.

The stops: **Ovot** → **Iyei HaAvarim** (in the desert facing Moav, from its east) → **Nachal Zered** → **Ever Arnon** (in the desert emerging from the border of Emori). The Arnon is a famous river in Transjordan that served as the border between Moav and Emori (one of the seven Canaanite nations).

Sefer Milchamot Hashem (Pesukim 14–15)

At Arnon, a fragment of poetry is quoted from a source called **Sefer Milchamot Hashem** — apparently a book or oral epic poem about the wars and conquests on the way to Eretz — "את והב בסופה ואת הנחלים ארנון" — Yisrael. The quoted fragment contains place names: Vahev b'Sufa, the rivers of Arnon, the delta (*eshed*) of these rivers flowing toward **Ar** (a famous .city of Moav), tending toward the border of Moav

Shirat HaBe'er — The Song of the Well (Pesukim 16–18)

A **Be'er** (well) is found. This is notable because the earlier episodes of water from the rock (both in Shemot and the previous chapter) never called the result a *Be'er*. The most literal reading: they found a well in that area. Hashem told Moshe to gather the people and He would give them water — possibly meaning the rock became a well, or Moshe dug/discovered a natural well, recalling the well-digging narratives of Sefer Bereishit where finding water in arid regions was a major event.

"אז ישיר ישראל את השירה הזאת" (אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל). The phrase "את השירה הזאת" implies a song that was .known and repeated later, not just sung once

Rise, well, answer to her" — "עלי באר ענו לה": The song the princes — "באר הפרה שרים" .singing to or about the well "במחקה"; "נדיבי עם" .another term for princes/nobles — dug it .can mean lawgiver but also one who digs or makes a ditch — with their sticks/staffs. There is wordplay: the — "במשנתם" *shevet* (staff of a *nasi*/leader) doubles as the grubbing .stick that digs earth to find water

Further Travels (Pesukim 18b–20)

Written poetically but also describing more stops: **Midbar** → **Mattanah** → **Nachaliel** → **Bamot** → the final stop: **the valley in Sedeh Moav**, at **Rosh HaPisgah**, from which one can see **pnei haYeshimon** (the plains/wilderness) — possibly a proper noun or simply meaning "the plains."

Three Wars with Neighboring Nations

The chapter (together with the previous one) reports three wars or attempted wars Moshe led with nations surrounding Israel:

1. Edom (Previously Covered in Chapter 20)

They sent messengers, were refused passage, and retreated.

2. Sichon King of the Emori (Pesukim 21–30)

Messengers were sent to **Sichon** with the same request as to Edom: passage without touching fields, vineyards, or water, traveling only on the king's highway. Sichon refused **and** came out to fight at a place called **Yahatz**. Unlike with Edom, **Israel did not retreat**. They struck him by the sword and conquered his land **from the Arnon to the Yabok** — two rivers marking the limits of Sichon's territory. Beyond the Yabok lay **Bnei Ammon**, whose border was strongly defended and could not be taken.

Israel settled in **Cheshbon** and all its "daughter cities" (surrounding dependent towns — not suburbs but satellite

cities, with Cheshbon as the head city).

Historical note in the text: Cheshbon was Sichon's city but originally belonged to the **King of Moav**. Sichon had previously conquered it from Moav all the way to the Arnon.

The Moshlim Poem (Pesukim 27–30)

from the *moshlim* — "על כן יאמרו המושלים" — A poem is quoted (poets/proverb-sayers, a category that will include Bilaam in the next chapters — ancient poets or prophets who composed poems about the nations around Israel). This poem celebrates **Sichon's conquest of Moav**: "Come to Cheshbon, let the city of Sichon be built up; a fire went out from Cheshbon, a flame from the city of Sichon, it consumed Ar of Moav, the high places of Arnon." The poem uses the characteristic **אבדת עם** : "אוי לך מואב, אבדת עם כמוש" — Woe to you Moav, you are lost, people of Kemosh" (Kemosh being the god of Moav, so *am Kemosh* = another name for Moav). Kemosh's sons became fugitives, daughters captives, all given to Sichon. Various place names — Niram, Cheshbon, Divon, Noshach, Nofach, Medva — mark the cities Sichon took from Moav, which Israel then conquered from .Sichon

3. Yazer (Pasuk 32)

A brief separate report: Moshe sent **meraglim** (spies) to **Yazer**, conquered it and its daughter cities, and dispossessed the Emori living there. Yazer was part of Emori territory, possibly belonging to Sichon, but receives its own war report.

4. Og King of Bashan (Pesukim 33–35)

Israel turned and went up through **Bashan** — higher and more northward, in what is now Jordan, Syria, and the Golan. **Og King of Bashan** came out to fight them. Unlike the Sichon episode, there is no record of Israel requesting passage — Og either attacked unprovoked or Israel was planning to pass through regardless. The reason for this war's outbreak is left unclear.

Moshe was apparently frightened, because Hashem explicitly reassures him: "**Don't be afraid, because I have given him, his people, and his land into your hands — do to him what you did to Sichon, King of Cheshbon.**" The reassurance functions as a reminder of the precedent: you already proved powerful enough to conquer Sichon, and you can do the same to Og. They struck him down, destroyed him, his children, and his entire nation until nothing remained, and they took his land.

Arrival at Arvos Moav (Chapter 22, Pasuk 1)

The chapter effectively ends with the Og narrative, but the next verse provides the crucial geographic conclusion. From Bashan, Bnei Yisrael travel to **Arvos Moav**, located on the other side of the Jordan opposite Jericho — Transjordan, the East Bank. This is their final encampment, and the rest of the narrative — including the Bilaam story and all of Sefer Devarim — will play out from this location.

Closing Observation on Chapters 20–21

These last two chapters constitute condensed, fragmentary reports covering the second half of the people's desert journey. The narrative style throughout has been compressed and selective, offering brief episodes rather than comprehensive accounts — referencing outside sources like Sefer Milchamot

Hashem, quoting fragments of poems, and leaving much unexplained. This deliberate fragmentation brings the people from the wilderness to the threshold of the Promised Land,

with the new generation poised to enter what the previous generation could not.

Full Transcript

Bamidbar Chapter 21: Fragmentary Narratives at the Threshold

Introduction: The Third Section of Bamidbar

As I've mentioned, or I might have not mentioned, so I'll give this preface to this chapter and many of the chapters or the stories in this part of the book. As we've said, this is sort of the third part of the narrative, the third part of the chronology if we say the first part is the first year, the establishment of the Mishkan and the camp around it. Second part would be the beginning of the travel through the Midbar and the complaints and stories that have to do with it. And the third part is the end of the travel through the Midbar and the wars and also complaints and tests and challenges that happened with that.

As we saw yesterday, we already had the deaths of two of the three main leaders of the people during this first generation, all the way from Mitzrayim, which are Miriam and Aharon. So we're left only with Moshe, so to speak. And of course, Moshe's death was already talked about in the previous chapter, Moshe is going to die in the desert, not going to take him into Eretz Israel because of the sin of Mei Meriva. So we're very clearly at the turning point of the new generation. But we still have some parts to go through, some stories and even some conquests and some successes of Moshe at the threshold of the land of Canaan and the land of Israel. So we hear certain successes and certain not fully successes.

The Fragmentary Nature of These Narratives

And as we'll see, I think one of the best way to look at all these stories is that many of them are fragmentary. We have very little information. Of course, like, for example, the beginning of the story, the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, the parashat Shemot is at length the story of Moshe overcoming the challenges of Mitzrayim and all the 10 Makkot and all of that, the whole story of the establishment of the Mishkan and the camps around it were told to us in great length. There's no detail missing or even many details that we say are, we think are superfluous, they're extra, there's a huge amount of detail.

But when it comes to this, in particular, this part of the story, the last few wars that Moshe fought, the last few stories that happened, there's something very, very fragmentary in the way that they're told and the way that they're recounted to us. We're missing sort of most of the narrative. There's even explicit references in this chapter and possibly in some other chapters to some books or some sources which apparently have more of these narratives and more full, but we don't have those books or we don't have those writings or those songs or those sources. So we're kind of missing the main context, the main part of the narrative of the story. We have only like little parts, but this is what we're going to read.

The War with the King of Arad (Pesukim 1-3)

The Initial Attack

So the first thing is we hear another war with the Canaanites, the king of Arad. Arad is somewhere to the south of Israel. Of course, the Negev are somewhere there. Not clear when this

happened. This is something we saw something very similar already in the end of Parshat Shelach, when the Meraglim ,[the Canaanite dwelling in the Negev] **הַכְּנַעֲנִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּנֶגֶב** went and and Arad is in the Negev, and they fought with the people of Israel that went up to the land after the Meraglim, after they decided that they will go. And this might be some repeat or some version of that same story or just another thing that happened again

In any case, he hears that the Canaanite who lives in Negev, the king of Arad, this is the exact Canaanite that we discussed, hears that Israel came there to Atarim, so some way over there called Atarim. This is some way or some place where they went and he comes to fight with them and he captures some captives. So apparently he was successful, at least in his initial battle, he captured some captives from Israel. So there's a problem.

Israel's Neder (Vow)

And therefore, in response to this crisis, what they do is something that we see very many times, not so much in the Chumash, but many times in Tehillim and Tanakh, where one of the things someone does in a crisis is he makes a neder, he makes a promise. Of course, we've read in the stories of the Avot many times the concept of a neder, as I've told you then already, the main concept of a neder is when someone is in a crisis, someone is in a situation that is hard, he promises Hashem that if we'll get better, if we'll get out of this, he will bring a korban, he will do something for Hashem.

So Israel, in general, the collective makes a neder and they say, if you will give this people in my hands, this is a kind of korban we'll see in Sefer Yehoshua, something similar to the concept of a cherem. In other words, I will not take it for myself, I will **כָּל חֵרֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל**, give it to you, I will give it like we learned earlier **לְךָ יִהְיֶה** [Israel shall be yours Mikdash, and so on. That's saying that's going to be the fulfillment of their pledge of their neder too

Victory and the Name Chormah

vayishma Hashem — and] **וַיִּשְׁמַע ה'** ,And Hashem listens because Israel is a very nice request. We ,[Hashem listened have a lot of times we listen to the voice of Hashem, but **וַיִּתֵּן אֶת הַכְּנַעֲנִי** Hashem listens to the voice of the people and He gives in ,[vayiten et haKena'ani — and He gave the Canaanite] **הַכְּנַעֲנִי** other words, it's implied, they win the battle and they make a cherem for the Canaanite, for their cities, and that's why this place is called Chormah

The interesting thing is, of course, that Chormah was the exact name of the place where the Canaanite fought the battle and won against the Ma'apilim, the name of the place is mentioned in other places also, so there's some complication with this word Chormah, there might be more than one place called Chormah, named after the same idea of like Chormah being the place where a cherem was made. It's giving this name a reason, that it was called Chormah, because this place was called cherem, because it was a neder that the people made.

So that's one very fragmentary report, it's not clear what this war is about, I mean obviously later they're going to go into Eretz HaKena'an and Sefer Yehoshua and conquer also this Canaanite, it's explicitly mentioned if I remember, Melech Arad or Melech Chormah. So there's something interesting about this story, there's Midrashim that tried to deal with what's going on here and fill in some of the background and tell us what's happening, but that's what the report that we have here.

The Complaint, the Serpents, and the Copper Snake (Pesukim 4-9)

A New Model of Response

Now we have one more story of a problem, of a complaint, and a very interesting response. So we've discussed several models of the complaints and the response that the Hashem has or Moshe has to the complaints. What we have here is a new kind of model, or maybe the most similar to what happened after Parshat Korach when there was a Maggeifah, and Moshe had a, we could call something like a segulah, some kind of technique to solve the problem, and here also we're going to have a solution. Hashem is upset and therefore causes a problem and Moshe doesn't just do teshuvah or doesn't just beg Hashem to relent, he has a certain solution, a technical solution to the problem and of course everyone knows the Mishnah that discusses what kind of solution this might be to reinterpret it in the moral terms, but that's what happened.

The People's Complaint

So what happens is, they go back from Hor HaHar, so remember they were in Hor HaHar, that's where Aharon died, and they have to go back to go around Edom because Edom vatiktzar nefesh] **ותקצר נפש העם** [ha'am — and the soul of the people became short words, they become tired, they become maybe thirsty and hungry, but they become tired from the way, they don't have any more patience to go through, the way is getting longer and longer here, they've faced many obstacles and setbacks

And therefore they speak about Elokim and Hashem and Moshe, their leaders, so they're complaining against them and they have their regular complaint that they always have, why did they bring us out of Mitzrayim, we're going to die in the desert, there's no bread, there's no food, yes we have some here, they admit that they have some food, apparently the mahn, but similar to what they complained about the mahn in venafshenu] **ונפשנו קצה בלחם הקלוקל** Parashat Beha'alotcha katzah ballechem hakelokeil — our souls are fed up with this with this not good bread, with this spoiled, [worthless bread bread or not good bread

The Punishment: Venomous Serpents

nechashim] **נחשים שרפים** And Hashem in response sends so strong snakes, Serafim, [serafim — venomous serpents many times, over here means a snake, it's a snake that burns, something like a poisonous snake, something like venomous snakes, and they bite the people and many die from these snakes. Of course, we're going to see in Sefer Devarim, this is one of the very clear attributes of the desert, that there's that's the kind, [nachash saraf] **נחש שרף**, venomous snakes in it of animal that you find in the desert, but obviously this was in response to their complaints that the desert is a bad place, so they got from the dangers of the desert

Confession and Prayer

Now the people come to Moshe and they admit their sin, they they say Vidui, we, [chatanu — we have sinned] **והטאנו** say spoke about Hashem, so this is not b'einei Moshe or b'einei Hashem, he didn't hear, the people come to Moshe and say, and sort of apologize to him, they say we've spoken against you, against Hashem, please pray to Hashem and He takes away the snakes and Moshe prays, but that prayer is not enough

The Solution: The Copper Serpent

Hashem tells Moshe, take one serpent, in other words one snake, one sort of snake, put it on a stick, kind of a flag stick, flagpole, everyone who was bitten will see it and become back meaning will be healthy, chai [vechai — and live] **ויהי**, healthy can mean live, but chai can mean also become healthy. So nechash nechoshet — a copper] **נחש נחשת**, that's what he does Hashem didn't tell him to make it out of copper, [serpent Hashem told him to make a snake, obviously means like an image of it, but made it out of copper, it's a nice alliteration, nechash nechoshet, and he puts it on a stick, a nes, a flagpole, something that you hang something, here not a flag, like a statue or some image, and if any snake bites someone they look at it and they become healed

And this is like I said something mysterious, what does this mean, what does this happen, why did Hashem give him this solution, something mysterious, and also as we can add all kinds of background to understand it, but this is part of the fragmentary nature of these reports, there's something unclear here, something not very fully explained what's going on.

Travel Report: Moving Toward the Destination

Now we have a short report, as I've given this title to it, it's a report of firstly a travel report, so some fragments of something which we have the full version of in the end of Parashat Masei, in the end of this book, with all their stops, all their traveling in the desert, and it seems like this point of this is to get them from where they were, from Hor HaHar, they went to Atarim, all these places, all the way to the end, the end goal of this chapter so to speak, or this part really of the book.

The Mystery of the Copper Serpent (Continued)

The copper serpent — **nachash nechoshet** — placed on a **nes** (a flagpole or stick, something you hang something on) — not a flag but a statue or image. If any snake bites someone, they look at it and they become healed. This is, as I said, something mysterious. What does this mean? What does this happen? Why did Hashem give him this solution? Something mysterious. And also, as I said, we can add all kinds of background to understand it, but this is part of the fragmentary nature of these reports. There's something unclear here, something not very fully explained what's going on.

HaMasa'ot v'HaShirot — The Travel Reports and Songs

Now we have a short report, as I've given this title: *HaMasa'ot v'HaShirot* [The Travels and the Songs]. It's a report of, firstly, a travel report — so some fragments of something which we have the full version of in the end of Parashat Masei and in the end of this book, with all their stops, all their traveling the desert. And it seems like the point of this is to get them from where they were — from Hor HaHar they went to Hasodim, all these places — all the way to the end. The end goal of this chapter, so to speak, of this part, really of the book, is they will arrive at a place called **Aravot Moav** [the plains of

Moav]. That's the last stop. That's where the whole important last part of the story happens. Also Sefer Devarim — all is happening in Aravot Moav.

The Journey to Aravot Moav

So they go first to a place called **Ovot**. From Ovot they went to a place called **Iyei HaAvarim**, which is in the desert on the face of Moav from the east of Moav. And then they go to a place called **Nachal Zered**. Then come to a place called **Ever Arnon**, which is in the desert going out of the border of the Emori. Because Arnon is a river, a famous river in what's called Transjordan — the other side of the Jordan — where Moav is. And that river was the border of Moav, between the Moav and the Emori. Emori is one of the seven nations of Canaan. So they went there, and apparently there's something going on with these borders, right? Some of the people they have a good relationship with, some of them they don't.

Sefer Milchamot Hashem — The Book of the Wars of Hashem

And over here there is a poem, or a fragment of a poem, quoted. It'll be in **Sefer Milchamot Hashem** [the Book of the Wars of Hashem]. So now we get to this place called Arnon. There's a fragment of a poem said, and then the poem is given a location. It said, "the Sefer from the Milchamot Hashem." So apparently there was a book or a poem, maybe an oral poem, called *Sefer Milchamot Hashem*, and the *Sefer Milchamot Hashem* has some epic poetry about the wars, the conquests, and the challenges that people had on their way.

And it says like this — I think most literal translation — this is: these are names of places, the rivers Arnon. So these are apparently places, or maybe names for the same place, like the delta of the rivers which go to Arnon. All the *eshed* [delta] — they tend towards Ar. So Ar is famously one of the cities of Moav. Finish on the *givul* [border], even goes to the border of Moav.

Shirat HaBe'er — The Song of the Well

And there, there was also the **be'er** [well]. So here's the first time we have this account of a well. Of course, one of the big problems of the desert is that there's no water, and we had the stories twice, right? Over here last chapter and in Parshat Moshe, hitting a rock and making it into — sort of making it into a bar — but it's not called a *be'er*. Here's the first time where there's a *be'er*. And of course, the most literal meaning would be something like: over there in that area they found some kind of well.

Asher amar Hashem l'Moshe — Where] "אשר אמר ה' למשה" Gather the people, now I'll give them" :[Hashem said to Moshe water." This might mean the water, the well in the sense of became a well, but it was really what — the rock that Moshe made into a well? Or it just a well that Moshe somehow dug or discovered there? Remember, the stories of the digging of the wells in Sefer Bereishit — it's a big deal when you find a well in the desert or in places that are close to the desert where it's hard to find. So that's part of the story

"אז ישיר ישראל" And it quotes another song, and there's all this Az yashir Yisrael et hashira hazot — Then] "את השירה הזאת" — [et hashira hazot] "את השירה הזאת" So .[Israel sang this song this is when they first sang this song, but of course we still sing it. It's a song that's repeated or sang later, and the same way *there's — was a song about the *be'er

Ali be'er, enu lah — Rise, well,] "עלי באר ענו לה" :The song goes So they're sort of singing to this well, or .[and answer to her about this well, or about this great accomplishment that they Be'er chafruha] "באר חפרוה שרים" :found a well. And they said .[Nedivei am] "נדיבי עם" .[sarim — The well the princes dug it which is another word for princes, have dug it. The lawgivers, can [b'mechokek] "במחקה" — or the people who are digging mean can mean someone who digs or makes a ditch or a kind "במשנתם" — of digging in the earth or in something .[b'mishenotam — with their sticks]

So there's some play on words with sticks. Of course we discussed where you have a *shevet* [staff], and I see someone who has a stick. But this stick can be also said as like the stick that sort of like a tool that digs in the earth and makes a well and finds water. So that's the important thing: how they find water.

The Final Stages of Travel

And now we go back to — this also seems to be written poetically, but it's also a description of more travels, more stops. They go from **Midbar** to **Mattanah** to **Nachaliel** to **Bamot** to the final stop, which is the valley in the fields of Moav, with the head of this mountain — **Rosh HaPisgah** — which from which you can see the entire valley and the entire — the plains over there. "**Pnei HaYeshimon**" [the face of the Yeshimon] — it might be also a proper name, or also just means the plains. And that's, as I said, that's the last place where they're going to. That's this poem is describing this, like, last few chapters, the last few stops where they get to there.

The Wars with Neighboring Nations

But we still have some — one, two — one, two more important short reports of wars in this chapter, and we have to talk about them quickly. So similarly to — so we're reading here about three — this in the previous chapter — three important wars that Moshe led, wars or attempted wars that Moshe led with three different nations around Israel.

First War: Edom (Review)

The first was Edom, which they've sent a message and didn't let them go through, so they passed by him.

Second War: Sichon King of the Emori

Then there was another one. The same thing: they sent messengers, and they sent — they sent messengers to **Sichon**, the king of Emori. So we've heard of Moav and Emori, right? Emori is the one on the other side of the Arnon. And they ask him the same thing: we're going to go, we're not going to drink your water, we're not going to go into your fields, into your vineyards, we'll go on the king's highway.

And Sichon did not allow them pass by. Unlike Edom, which didn't let them pass by and came — of course — across to them, came towards them with his army, and the people — the Bnei Yisrael — passed, sort of lost or retreated. For Sichon, they did not retreat. So Sichon, it comes to them, the place called **Yahatz**. He fights with them there, and they fight him back. They kill him by the sword, and they take his land. They conquer his land from the Arnon until the **Yabok** — these are two rivers or the two limits of Sichon's land. Emori, all with — **Bnei Ammon** is on the other side, apparently, or maybe where the Yabok is, there's the limit, the boundary, the border of Ammon. And that's strongly defended; they couldn't take that. But they took all of the land of Sichon, which is from Arnon to Yabok.

So they took all these cities and they sat in all these cities. Known as **Cheshbon** and all the daughter cities of Cheshbon — like the cities around it. Not cities and like suburbs — not suburbs in those days, was not suburbs — but they're like other cities. Cheshbon was sort of the head city, and the other cities called their daughters. They were all taken by the people.

Historical Background: Sichon's Conquest of Moav

And this doesn't give some of the historical note: Cheshbon was this city of Sichon, although it was originally his land. Originally it belonged to the king of Moav, because this whole area is called Aravot Moav, the area of Moav, the plains of Moav. But Sichon has fought a war with the first king of Moav and took in his land, all the way to Arnon.

The Moshlim Poem About Sichon's Victory

Al ken] "על כן יאמרו המושלים" :And it quotes another poem or the people [yomru hamoshlim — Therefore the poets say say proverbs. Have had a poem, and also this poem is very geographical, full of names of a series of places. And apparently this poem was about Sichon's conquest of Moav. So the Torah is quoting some kind of Sichon poem, some kind of poem that Sichon was singing about. Or the *moshlim* — we'll see next, in the next week, in the next chapter — is about Bilaam, who was one of the *moshlim*, one of the ancient poets or prophets that would say poems about the nations around them, around Israel

So similarly, one of these poems was about Sichon's great Bo'u Cheshbon] "בואו השבון" :conquests of Moav. And as it says Cheshbon will be built up. A fire came. [— Come to Cheshbon out of Cheshbon, a fire — and there's these doublings of as and as, as is common in biblical poetry — a flame from the city of "בעלי במות", Sichon. It ate the land, the city of Moav called **Ar** which [ba'alei bamot Arnon — the high places of Arnon] **ארנון** is again the river that's in Moav. And ate also the great, the high places of Arnon

Oy lecha Moav — "אוי לך מואב" :And this poem goes on to say Avadta am] "אבדת עם כמוש" .You've lost. [Woe to you, Moav Kemosh was the. [Kemosh — You are lost, people of Kemosh name of the god of Moav, their god. Their people, or *am Kemosh*, is another way of saying Moav, is lost. His children are fugitives, his daughters are captives. They're all given to the king Sichon, king of Emori

they're either a — [Vaniram] "וניירם" .And they were also lost place called Vaniram, or it's a word for their kingship — was lost from Cheshbon until **Divon**, or from Nashmal to **Nofach**, which is next to **Medva**. But these are all places and cities that

Sichon took from Moav, and Israel now — Israel conquered from Sichon and therefore sat in all these places

Third War: Yazer

So that's one more war that we discussed. Now there's even one more, very short report of a very short war: a place called **Yazer**. Doesn't say who lived there — part of Emori, but maybe it also belongs to Sichon, but has a separate report of the war. So Moshe sent spies to Yazer and conquered it, and they say all the daughter cities of Yazer, and conquered it from the Emori who lived there.

Fourth War: Og King of Bashan

One more report, which is the next king. They've turned around, they went through **Bashan**. Bashan is somewhat higher, more north, so to speak, and also in the what is now Jordan, Syria, Golan, places like that. And **Og**, the king of Bashan, comes and fights with them. It doesn't say that they asked to go through him. Apparently he just unprovoked — or they were planning to go through him anyways. It's not clear why.

The War with Og, King of Bashan

This war with Og started, and here apparently Moshe was scared, because we have a report of Hashem telling Moshe, don't be afraid because I've given you, I've given him and his people and his land in your hands, and do to him what you did to Sichon, the king of Cheshbon.

So in other words, Hashem is reminding Moshe: look, you're powerful, you're able to conquer Sichon, you'll be able to conquer Og in the same way. And that's what they do — they hit him, they destroyed him, his children, his nation, until there was nothing left from him, and they took his land.

Arrival at Arvos Moav — The Final Encampment

And that is really — the chapter finishes here. But I think we should do, like I said here, one more pasuk. From there they go to **Arvos Moav** [the plains of Moav], which is on the other side of the Yarden [Jordan River] opposite Jericho. In other words, from the perspective of the land of Israel, it's on the other side — what we call Trans-Jordan, or the East Bank, the East Bank of the River Jordan. That's their last stop, and there we're going to have the rest of the story is going to play out there.

Concluding Observations on Chapters 20–21

So all of these last two chapters were really condensed and fragmentary reports of the second half, so to speak, of the journey of the people in the desert, and that's the end of chapter 21.