

## Numbers 20-21

### INTRODUCTION

As we come to Numbers 20, the years of wandering through the wilderness are now at an end.

### IX. THE WILDERNESS SOJOURN Chs. 20-25

#### A. *Moses Blows It* 20:1-13

**<sup>1</sup>Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, & the people stayed in Kadesh; & Miriam died there & was buried there.**

Where are they? This is Kadesh Barnea.

This is the *same place* they were 38 years before, when just a little over a year after the Exodus from Egypt, they *refused* to go up & take possession of the Promised Land.

Now, here they are back at Kadesh, after having wandered *literally* in circles for nearly 40 years.

That's what happens to a person when they balk at following the Lord's guidance & refuse to deal with those doubts & fears that stifle their spiritual progress; they end up wandering in a kind of spiritual wilderness until that which would hinder them from moving forward dies off & falls away.

Don't forget that for the 38 years they spent in the wilderness, they were being led by the pillar of smoke & fire.

God had wanted them enter Canaan but when they refused, then He led them through the Sinai peninsula – in circles! ***God led them in circles!***

And every circuit they took on the merry go round of Sinai saw more & more of the elder generation die off.

Oh that we might learn from this! If we balk at following God, & dig in our spiritual heels & say, "No!" to His plan for us, then God will honor our choice. He will not leave us nor forsake us, but He will engineer our course in life so that which keeps us from yielding to Him falls away.

If it seems like you're just going round in circles & not really making any progress in life – it may be that you've balked at following the Spirit as God wanted to bring you into some new place of maturity.

Fears & doubts rose up like a brick wall & instead of pushing through, you backed off.

God has been at work in you to bring you to the place where that which hindered you before is laid aside.

& just as Israel found itself ***back at Kadesh***, so God will bring you back to the very same place of challenge.

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The 38 years Israel spent in the wilderness are covered in only 5 chapters; 15-19. & 3 of those 5 chapters deal with religious rules. So really, only 2 chapters are given to the 38 years of the wilderness wandering.

Why? Because nothing was happening in terms of spiritual things!

Oh sure, there was all kinds of news from an earthly perspective.

***The Israeli Times*** was chock full every day of articles about this & that in the camp.

But from the divine, the spiritual angle – *nothing* was happening.  
They were just killing time as time was killing off that which was keeping  
them from entering in to all God had for them.

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We read when they arrived back at Kadesh, Moses' elder sister Miriam died & was  
buried there. The elder generation is expiring.

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**2 Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered  
together against Moses & Aaron.**

If the people were walking in faith in God, when there was no water, what would  
they have done?

Prayed, & expected God to provide, as He so faithfully every day for the last  
40 years.

**3 And the people contended with Moses & spoke, saying: "If only we  
had died when our brethren died before the LORD! 4 Why have you  
brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we &  
our animals should die here? 5 And why have you made us come up  
out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or  
figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink."**

Though this is a new generation – they repeat virtually the same complaint as their  
parents in their day.

The harshness of their bondage in Egypt is forgotten & they look back to those  
days with almost a fondness.

One of the things that's a bit distressing in listening to some people's testimonies,  
is how they *glamorize their past*.

They talk about the parties & drinking, the drugs & sex, the theft & debauchery  
that marked their lives before they came to Christ, & there's a jovial kind of  
celebration of how bad they used to be instead of a deep sense of shame  
over it.

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Here they are – lamenting a simple lack of water & making all kinds of wild &  
false accusations against Moses & Aaron, blowing things horribly out of  
proportion, while at the same time painting their past as slaves as a relaxing  
Summer vacation.

**6 So Moses & Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the  
door of the tabernacle of meeting, & they fell on their faces. & the  
glory of the LORD appeared to them.**

Moses & Aaron do the right thing – they go to God with the problem, which is  
exactly what the people ought to have done.

Look – yes, they needed water. That's a given. Water is an essential & they had  
every right to be concerned with its provision.

But rather than complaining, they ought to have recognized that God would  
provide in His way & time & simply gone to Him to ask.

Rather than hurling silly accusations at Moses & Aaron, they ought to have  
said, "Mo – listen, don't know if you're aware of this, but there's no water.

Shall we gather & pray about this? What's the plan Mo?"

Folks, let's learn from this in our personal lives, our family, & our church.

It is so easy, as soon as some need presents itself, to start complaining &

making all kinds of wild accusations.

What we ought to do is realize that when a legitimate NEED arises, it's God's way of preparing the stage for the manifestation of His blessing!

Our response ought to be to pray in simple yet confident faith.

What M&A did in seeking the Lord is *exactly* what *all* of the people ought to have done.

**<sup>7</sup>Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>8</sup>“Take the rod;**

What rod? The rod of Aaron's that had budded.

You see, M&A's leadership is being challenged yet again.

Since it's been decades since the events of ch. 17 when God made it crystal clear to the nation who He had ordained to lead the nation, the people need to be reminded.

Aaron's rod with its branches, twigs, flowers & almonds would remind the people that God had placed His seal of approval on M&A as the leaders of the nation.

The rod was to act as nothing but a *memorial* – a sign pointing to their authority & call.

**<sup>7</sup>Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>8</sup>“Take the rod; you & your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes,**

There at Kadesh where they were camped was a large rock.

**Speak to the rock before their eyes, & it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, & give drink to the congregation & their animals.”**

M&A were to simply *speak* to the rock & the water would flow – enough to water every soul & beast in the camp.

The average 150 pound person should drink 3 qts. of water a day.

That's 2¼ million gallons of water! 45,000 – 50 gal. drums.

If a truck can carry 30 such drums, it would take 1,500 truck to carry the water.

If you put those trucks on the FWY & give each one 30 ft., the line would stretch for 8 miles. We're talkin' *a lot of water*.

**<sup>9</sup>So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. <sup>10</sup>And Moses & Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; & he said to them,**

Wait a minute, what had God told Moses to speak to? The rock.

But here he is speaking to *the people*.

**“Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?”**

We've never seen Moses speak this way before.

When being accused & criticized by the people, he's always taken it to the Lord & then returned with the simple directions God had given him.

But now his frustration & anger is showing through.

And we can probably understand it.

I mean, this is the *new* generation; they're back at the same place the whole thing started nearly 40 years before, & they're saying the same silly things

their parents had said.

Moses is probably thinking – “Oh great! Here we go again.”

He’s had it & his anger comes out in his words – “[Hear now, you rebels!](#)”

Then he says something that doesn’t appear at all characteristic of Moses, “[Must we bring water for you out of this rock?](#)”

This is just wrong on so many levels.

First of all–Moses is taking a very uncharacteristic place for himself here by making himself a *partner* with God in the miracle.

Second–It was precisely his duty as the leader of the nation to provide for them. So what’s he getting all bent about?

Anger is a dangerous thing because it can drive us to say & do things that we ought not say & do.

While we may *sympathize* with Moses’ anger here & understand why he would be so hot with the people – we must also see that when anger becomes the motivating force behind our words & actions, we’ve erred.

In Ephesians 4 we read, “Be angry, but do not sin.”

Anger itself, as an emotion, is not wrong – but it can move us to wrong.

When we find ourselves angry, we need to ask “Why?”

If we’re angry simply because we didn’t get our way- which is the cause of most anger, then we ought to simply repent for being selfish.

But if our anger is righteous, even then we must make sure we do not lose self-control but that the anger fuels a righteous response.

We see this in Jesus in John 2 where He cleared the temple. [Elaborate]

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*Moses was ticked* & it came out in his words of hostility at the nation.

“[Hear now, you rebels!](#)”

It also confused his own sense of self-importance because anger has this trait – it makes us feel righteous & justified in *why* we’re angry.

“[Must we bring water for you out of this rock?](#)”

But the real tragedy is what Moses anger caused him, not to say, but to **DO** . . .

**11 Then Moses lifted his hand & struck the rock twice with his rod; & water came out abundantly, & the congregation & their animals drank.**

God had never told Moses to strike the rock. The instructions were quite clear; he was to speak to the rock & it would flow.

Moses struck the rock – with what? Aaron’s budding rod!

What happened to the branches, blossoms & fruit on it? Broken, torn, stripped off.

A precious memorial to God’s miraculous power & M&A’s calling was shredded. & in that shredding – their calling was ended.

**12 Then the LORD spoke to Moses & Aaron, “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”**

I have to admit that this seems like an awfully harsh judgment God is meting out on Moses here.

I mean, he’s been so faithful for 40 years in the face of incredibly trying circumstances – & now, he won’t be allowed to complete the mission of

taking the nation into the Promised Land.

And all because, as God says in v. 12 - “[Because you did not believe Me.](#)”

Wow – the rest of Israel has been doing a lot worse things than that, & now they are going to get to enter in. Is this fair?

Yes, it is fair – ***totally fair***; because God’s judgments are always the epitome of perfection & He sees all kinds of things we do not in our judgment.

Moses’ error at the rock in Kadesh is a really serious one for this reason: He knew what God had told him to do, & he did ***something else***.

If there was anyone who ought to have known he should obey God, it was Moses!

To whom much is given, much is required. [Luke 12:48]

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Another reason M&A faced such severe judgment was because as God said in v. 12, they had not “hallowed” or ***rightly represented*** God before the people.

God was not angry with the people. Their need for water was real & though it wasn’t presented in the right way, God wasn’t angry with them, at least not in the way M&A made evident to the people.

Moses’ words were harsh condemnations of the people – “You rebels!”

“Rebels” doesn’t really carry the flavor of these words across accurately.

Let’s say our church goes through a period of intense discord where we have some families who are going at it with silly disputes.

And the elders & staff try to deal with it & get no where.

So in frustration, I get up one Sunday & say to the whole congregation,

“Listen up you pack of no good, lousy, worthless morons.”

I’d clearly be abusing my authority & badly, ***badly*** misrepresenting God.

If that’s the kind of leader I was, then I would surely never be able to take that same congregation to the heights of spiritual blessing in Christ.

M&A were charged with the solemn task of representing God to the nation; Moses politically – Aaron, religiously.

But they misrepresented God in a most grievous manner. For this, they forfeited their ability to lead.

From this we learn that there are ***certain sins*** that a leader can commit which remove him/her from ministry ***as a leader***.

They may be able to serve in some ***other*** capacity, but not in the same role they held before.

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You see, God had intended to use the whole rock at Kadesh incident as a means of putting in play another picture of the Coming Messiah.

Friends, don’t forget that the whole reason God singled out Abraham, then Isaac, Jacob & the 12 tribes of Israel, was to prepare a nation through whom the ***Savior of the World*** would come.

The history of Israel was a tapestry God was weaving depicting the Coming King.

So when they arrived again at Kadesh & cried out for water, God planned to use it as the way to install yet another picture of Jesus.

So he told Moses what part he was to play, what thread in the tapestry he was to insert.

He was to ***speak*** to the rock – & water would flow in abundance.

Moses had already struck the rock at the command of God way back in Exodus 17 when the people arrived at Mt. Sinai.

When he struck the rock, the water flowed.

But now at Kadesh—once the rock had been struck – all that was needed was to *speak*, & the water would flow once more.

As Paul makes clear in 1 Cor. 10, God intended the rock to be a picture of Christ.

He was smitten at the cross for our sins.

When He was struck, the blood flowed, & this provided the cleansing we need.

The spear went into His side & the blood & water flowed – by which we are made the children of God.

But now that Christ *has been* smitten – His death atones for our sins *once for all*, as it says in Hebrews 7:27.

Now, all we need to do is *speak* to the Rock of our salvation & the abundance of the Spirit is ours.

This pretty much puts the nail in the coffin of the practice of the Mass which thinks that at each Mass, Jesus is crucified again, & that it is only this fresh offering that makes His death effective for us today.

The word of God is quite clear – Jesus was offered once, & His one offering forever atones for our sin.

In John 7, Jesus stood in the temple of Jerusalem & cried out to the crowds that had gathered from all over the world to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles -

**37 . . .If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me & drink. <sup>38</sup>He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”**

Then John added . . .

**39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.**

Jesus was referring here to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Tonight, it may be that you’ve come to the *smitten rock*, to the *Saving Christ*; you believe Jesus died for your sins.

But have you *spoken to the Rock*, to the *Baptizing Christ*, & asked Him to fully satisfy you with His living water, & to cause to come forth from you a river of life that will deluge those around you with love, peace, & joy?

Tonight, as we sit here, ask yourself this question – “Do rivers of living water flow out of my heart?”

That is what Jesus promised to those who would simply ask of Him.

He said, “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me & drink.*”

Tonight when we finish, if you want to be filled with the Spirit, we’ll be having prayer up here.

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God intended the events here at the rock at Kadesh to be a picture of all this – but Moses threw a wrench in the works by angrily striking the rock.

**13 This was the water of Meribah, [Contention] because the children of Israel contended with the LORD, & He was hallowed among them.**

How was God hallowed if M&A had *failed* to hallow Him in their



misrepresentation?

God's *judgment* of M&A turned it around so that the people realized they had not been speaking on behalf of God – not at all.

The contrast revealed to them just how good, faithful, & gracious God is, while at the same time being so holy & righteous that M&A would have to be disciplined for their error.

### **B. Edom Closed 20:14-21**

**14** Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. **“Thus says your brother Israel:**

Moses referred to Israel as Edom's *brother* because the Edomites were the relatives of Israel.

The father of the 12 tribes of Israel was Jacob. His twin brother was Esau, AKA Edom.

**‘You know all the hardship that has befallen us, <sup>15</sup>how our fathers went down to Egypt, & we dwelt in Egypt a long time,**

It's been about 450 years since they went to Egypt.

**& the Egyptians afflicted us & our fathers. <sup>16</sup>When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice & sent the Angel & brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border.**

**<sup>17</sup>Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory.”**

Passing right through the territory of Edom was one of the main highways of the ancient world – “The King's Highway” - El Camino Real.

Moses asked for permission to take the nation along this route. Such a path would speed their journey by many days.

Plus, it was the route the pillar of cloud made clear they were to take.

Why Moses asked for permission is a bit of a mystery.

Maybe he was just being cautious after the events of the previous verses.

It seems that if the Lord was leading them, they ought to have simply followed.

But Moses sent a message to the king of Edom asking permission to pass.

**<sup>18</sup>Then Edom said to him, “You shall not pass through my *land*, lest I come out against you with the sword.” <sup>19</sup>So the children of Israel said to him, “We will go by the Highway, & if I or my livestock drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, *nothing more.*”**

The first request is denied. So they applied again with solemn promises that they will stay on the highway pay for any damage done or supplies taken.

**<sup>20</sup>Then he said, “You shall not pass through.” So Edom came out against them with many men & with a strong hand. <sup>21</sup>Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him.**

This time, not only did the king of Edom deny the request, he sent out his army to

let them know they weren't welcome.  
Israel then turned away at Kadesh & made a move to the northwest, skirting the edge of Edom. [Map]

### **C. Aaron Dies 20:22-29**

**22** Now the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh & came to Mount Hor. **23** And the LORD spoke to Moses & Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying:

**24** "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. **25** Take Aaron & Eleazar his son, & bring them up to Mount Hor; **26** and strip Aaron of his garments & put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered to his people & die there." **27** So Moses did just as the LORD commanded, & they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation.

**28** Moses stripped Aaron of his garments & put them on Eleazar his son; & Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. **29** Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.

Moses is about 120 at this point. Aaron was his elder brother, so he's an old guy & it's time for him to retire.

God tells them the end is at hand & that another one must step in to take his place.

When God designs that a work continue, He will raise up a new leader to fill the shoes of the one who's departing.

### **D. Canaanites Defeated 21:1-3**

**1** The king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South, heard that Israel was coming on the road to Atharim. Then he fought against Israel & took some of them prisoners.

Israel was following a lesser route north & arrived in the region of Arad.

This area was the home of a petty Canaanite king who decided to take on the Israelites. This will be the new generation's first encounter with battle.

**2** So Israel made a vow to the LORD, & said, "If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities." **3** And the LORD listened to the voice of Israel & delivered up the Canaanites, & they utterly destroyed them & their cities. So the name of that place was called Hormah.

Which means "Utter Destruction."

While it seems a strange way of thinking to us, Israel saw the utter destruction of such cities as a way to dedicate it completely to God.

We will see this time & again in the conquest of Canaan – God calls for the total eradication of a city, including all its goods, as a kind of offering.

Everything was to be burned – not so much as a shoelace kept of the spoils. When Israel says here that they will utterly destroy the cities of Arad, they're



saying that they were not fighting for the sake of personal gain but to reclaim their fellow Jews who've been taken captive & they will "dedicate" the spoils to God by burning them completely.

In fact, when we get into Joshua, we'll see how the phrase "dedicate to the Lord" often refers to such destruction of cities & their spoils.

### **E. Complaining - Part 3 21:4-9**

**4**Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; & the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. **5**And the people spoke against God & against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For *there is* no food & no water, & our soul loathes this worthless bread." **6**So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, & they bit the people; & many of the people of Israel died.

**7**Therefore the people came to Moses, & said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD & against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. **8**Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, & set it on a pole; & it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." **9**So Moses made a bronze serpent, & put it on a pole; & so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

Since we covered this in depth Sunday, will leave for you to get the tape or CD if you weren't here.

### **F. From Mt. Hor to Moab 21:10-20**

**10**Now the children of Israel moved on & camped in Oboth. **11**And they journeyed from Oboth & camped at Ije Abarim, in the wilderness which *is* east of Moab, toward the sunrise. **12**From there they moved & camped in the Valley of Zered. **13**From there they moved & camped on the other side of the Arnon, which *is* in the wilderness that extends from the border of the Amorites; for the Arnon *is* the border of Moab, between Moab & the Amorites. **14**Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the LORD: "Waheb in Suphah, The brooks of the Arnon, **15**And the slope of the brooks That reaches to the dwelling of Ar, & lies on the border of Moab."

**16**From there *they went* to Beer, which *is* the well where the LORD said to Moses, "Gather the people together, & I will give them water."

**17**Then Israel sang this song: "Spring up, O well! All of you sing to it —**18**The well the leaders sank, Dug by the nation's nobles, By the lawgiver, with their staves."

So here we get a little list of their journeys & where they camped. [Map]

When they arrived at Beer, it seems the people knew how to respond to the lack of water by simply waiting on the Lord.

He told them to sink a well, which when they did, produced an abundant

supply, not of Beer, bit of sweet water.

Notice – the people aren't complaining now – *they're singing!*  
The new generation is learning to live & walk by faith.

**And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah, <sup>19</sup>from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, <sup>20</sup>and from Bamoth, in the valley that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah which looks down on the wasteland.**

#### **G. Amorites Defeated 21:21-32**

**<sup>21</sup>Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, <sup>22</sup>“Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into fields or vineyards; we will not drink water from wells. We will go by the King’s Highway until we have passed through your territory.”**

Both the Ammonites & Moabites were distant relatives of Israel.

They were descendants of Lot's by the incestuous coupling with his two daughters after the destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah.

They gave birth to 2 boys, Moab & Ben-Ammi. These then gave rise to the Moabites & Ammonites who settled in neighboring regions.

As he had with Edom, Moses sent a message to Sihon, the king of the Ammonites requesting permission to pass through his land.

Sihon not only said “No” he came out & attacked Israel.

**<sup>23</sup>But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together & went out against Israel in the wilderness, & he came to Jahaz & fought against Israel. <sup>24</sup>Then Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, & took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as the people of Ammon; for the border of the people of Ammon was fortified. <sup>25</sup>So Israel took all these cities, & Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon & in all its villages. <sup>26</sup>For Heshbon was the city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, & had taken all his land from his hand as far as the Arnon.**

**<sup>27</sup>Therefore those who speak in proverbs say: “Come to Heshbon, let it be built; Let the city of Sihon be repaired. <sup>28</sup>“For fire went out from Heshbon, A flame from the city of Sihon; It consumed Ar of Moab, The lords of the heights of the Arnon. <sup>29</sup>Woe to you, Moab! You have perished, O people of Chemosh!**

That was the idol worshipped by the Moabites & Ammonites.

**He has given his sons as fugitives, & his daughters into captivity, To Sihon king of the Amorites. <sup>30</sup>“But we have shot at them; Heshbon has perished as far as Dibon. Then we laid waste as far as Nophah, Which reaches to Medeba.”**

**<sup>31</sup>Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites. <sup>32</sup>Then Moses sent to spy out Jazer; & they took its villages & drove out the Amorites who were there.**

The ancient name of “Ammon” lives on in the name of the capital of this region – Amman, Jordan.

**H. Ammonites Defeated 21:33-35**

**33** And they turned & went up by the way to Bashan. So Og king of Bashan went out against them, he & all his people, to battle at Edrei.

**34** Then the LORD said to Moses, “Do not fear him, for I have delivered him into your hand, with all his people & his land; & you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon.”

**35** So they defeated him, his sons, & all his people, until there was no survivor left him; & they took possession of his land.

By no survivor being left to him, it probably didn't mean not a single living soul of Bashan but that not a single person was left of the royal family.

This was a very common practice in the ancient world – kill the entire royal family so that there'll be no one to rally the survivors of the nation in a hope of replacing the conquerors with their own ruler.

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Israel now has 3 major battles & many lesser military excursions under her belt. She's defeated the southern Canaanites, the Ammonites, & the Bashanites. Each foe was progressively tougher. The nation is now ready to enter Canaan.

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