

בְּמִדְבָּר *Bemidbar*

Numbers 11-14, 20-24 Podcast Quotes and Notes

Latin Vulgate: Numeri – due to the census in the first 3 chapters. The Jews call this book בְּמִדְבָּר *Bemidar*, “In the Wilderness.”

The Israelites who escaped from Egypt, witnessed the revelation at Mount Sinai, erected the Tabernacle, and were instructed regarding its operation, now prepare themselves militarily and spiritually for their march in the wilderness. They are organized as a war camp centered around the Tabernacle (Numbers 1.1-10.10), but they start complaining, rebelling, and finally foment an apostate spiritual condition which leads to their deaths in the wilderness (Numbers 10.11-25.19).

The first of the three sections of the Book of Numbers take place “in the wilderness of Sinai” (Nun. 1.1, 19; 3.4, 14; 9.1,5; 10.12) over the course of twenty days, from the first day of the second month of the second year (Numbers 1.1) to the twentieth day of the second month of the second year (Num. 10.11), the day the Israelites leave Sinai to meander through the wilderness for thirty-eight years until they reach the Jordan River (Num. 22.1). These twenty days are spent in putting the camp on a war footing to protect it against potential adversaries. First, a census of able-bodied men is taken (chapter 1). Then, the camp is organized for maximum security (chapter 2), while the Levites, who undergo a separate census, are encamped around the Tabernacle and charged with guarding and transporting it (chapters 3-4). This is followed by a bunch of legislation concerned with the purity of the camp (5.1-4) and the priestly responsibility of those that are to care for the Tabernacle (5.5-6.26). The tribal chieftains bring gifts of transport (oxen and carts) to the newly dedicated altar for the use of Levite porters (chapter 7). The Levites are inducted into this service (8.5-22), with the work assigned on the basis of age (8.23-26). A month’s postponement is permitted for those who are ritually impure (9.1-14), and the divine guidance system for the wilderness trek is explained (9.15-23), as well as the various trumpet calls by which the camp can meet emergencies (10.1-10).¹

Nephi’s Response to Challenges in the Wilderness

Bryce started this podcast (recorded 4.1.2022) with emphasizing the point that Nephi personifies how we are to respond while in our “wilderness” trials. He covered the following points:

1. Don’t be like Laman.
2. Laman and Nephi had “7 trials”...
3. 3 Things influenced Nephi’s life, according to 1 Nephi 1.
 - a. His family – 1 Nephi 1.1.
 - b. His afflictions in the course of his days – 1 Nephi 1.1.
 - c. His great knowledge of the “mysteries of God,” what Bryce termed Nephi’s knowing the “marvelous things of God.”
4. Nephi and Laman had the same experiences, but they responded and internalized them differently, based upon their faith in God, their attitude, and their overall understanding of what was happening in their environment.

¹ Jacob Milgrom, [The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers](#), The Jewish Publication Society, 2003, p. 3

5. D&C 136.31-33 – The Saints are told that they “must be tried in all things.” D&C 136.23-33 may be a representation of how Nephi may have approached these trials. Nephi “learned wisdom by humbling himself and calling upon the Lord” and was thus enlightened by the Spirit of God.
6. 1 Nephi 2.16 – Nephi prayed to know God’s will. This verse implies that he did not want to leave Jerusalem, but unlike Laman, he approached God to better understand God’s will.
7. 1 Nephi 17.20 – Nephi’s opponents claim that it would have been better had they died in the wilderness. This is similar to the Israelites treatment of Moses. See Exodus 16.3, “And the children of Israel said unto them, **Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt**, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to **kill this whole assembly with hunger.**”
8. We see glimpses in Numbers. See Numbers 21.14 and 14.28 where the Israelites are reminded of when God was with them, in both Arnon and Heshbon. We do not have the full story, just the reference from the scribe or whoever is retelling this event.

Bryce shared two events that teach this idea:

1. Elizabeth Smart and the “[Yellow Cup](#).”²
2. Francis Webster’s [defense of the Saints in the Willie-Martin Handcart Company](#).³

Numbers 1: Census in the Wilderness

Numbers 2: The Arrangement of the Camp

1. “The children of Israel shall camp, each by his flag with the signs of their father’s house; they shall camp opposite, all around the Tent of Meeting” – Num. 2.2.⁴

² Elizabeth Smart, [My Story, St. Martin's Griffin, 2014](#), p. 130-132.

³ “Was I sorry that I chose to come by handcart? No. Neither then nor any minute of my life since. The price we paid to become acquainted with God was a privilege to pay, and I am thankful that I was privileged to come in the Martin handcart company.’

“The speaker was Francis Webster, and when he sat down there was not a dry eye in the room. We were a subdued and chastened lot. Charles Mabey, who later became governor of Utah, arose and voiced the sentiment of all when he said, ‘I would gladly pay the same price for the same assurance of eternal verities that Brother Webster has.’”

Although Francis Webster’s assertion that none of the company ever apostatized is not quite accurate, **all available records suggest that it is remarkably close**. Like him, **most of those who survived the handcart trek stand as a witness that when adversity is faced with faith**, it strengthens spiritual commitment and draws a person nearer to God rather than weakening commitment and bringing alienation.

Alluding to the story of Francis Webster, President James E. Faust said: “In the heroic effort of the handcart pioneers, we learn a great truth. All must pass through a refiner’s fire, and the insignificant and unimportant in our lives can melt away like dross and make our faith bright, intact, and strong. There seems to be a full measure of anguish, sorrow, and often heartbreak for everyone, including those who earnestly seek to do right and be faithful. Yet this is part of the purging to become acquainted with God.” (“Faith in Every Footstep: The Epic Pioneer Journey,” Ensign, May 1997, 63; see also James E. Faust, “The Refiner’s Fire,” Ensign, May 1979, 53.)

⁴ Numbers 2.2, Richard Friedman translation, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 241.

- a. Note that the Tabernacle is erected inside the camp in Numbers (P), but it is still outside the camp in Numbers 12.4-15 (E). In E the Tabernacle has been moved outside the camp following the golden-calf incident (see Exodus 32-33.11).

Numbers 3: The First Levite Census

Numbers 4: The Second Levite Census

Numbers 5.1- 6.27: Purification of the Camp

Numbers 7.1-8.26: The Final Preparations for the care of the Tabernacle

1. Initiatory gifts – Num. 7.1-89.
 - a. Note the number of livestock offered (Num. 7.88) as a sacrifice to God in this narrative: 24 bulls, 60 rams, 60 goats, 60 lambs. Compare this list of animals to the complaint in Numbers 11.4, when Israel complains that they have no meat to eat. Numbers 7 is from P, while Numbers 11 is from E. This helps explain the contradiction.
2. Lighting the Menorah – Num. 8.1-4.
3. The purification of the Levite work force – Num. 8.5-22.
4. Age limits set upon the Levites – Num. 8.23-26.
 - a. A contradiction within the Priestly narrative exists relating to the age of the Levite priests. Num. 8.24-25 state that the ages allowed for service are 25-50. The problem arises when we read Numbers 4.3, which states the priests may serve from 30-50. The problem is compounded further when a third variant stating that the priests may serve at the age of 20, as cited in the postexilic literature (see 1 Chron. 23.21,27; Ezra 2.36-40; 2 Chron. 31.17). The Septuagint “simply cuts the Gordian knot”: it reads 25 instead of 30 in Numbers 4.3,23,30.⁵

Numbers 9: The Second Passover

1. The second Passover – Num. 9.1-14.
2. The fire-cloud – Num. 9.15-23.

Numbers 10: Trumpets and Movement

1. The trumpets – Num. 10.1-10.
2. The march from Sinai to Transjordan – Num. 10.11-22.1.

The march took about 40 years (Num. 14.33; 33.38), but the bulk of this section is concerned with the opening months (10.11-14.45) and the closing months (20.1-22.1). Israel’s movements are generated solely by the Lord. He leads Israel to the land He has promised (10.29), moves it (9.15-23; 10.11), retards it (12.14-15; 14.26-35; 20.27-28), and causes it to detour (14.25), advises it (13.1-2), nourishes (11.31-32) and gives it victory (21.1-3, 33). In so doing, the Lord renews the wonders of the Exodus: manna (Num. 11.7-9; Exodus 16.14-36), quail (Num. 11.31; Exodus 16.11-13), water from the rock (20.2-13; 21.16; Exodus 17.1-7) and the victories in the Negeb and Transjordan anticipate those in Canaan (13.1-24; 21.1-3; 10.35; Josh. 2.6; 8.10). However, Israel responds with unbelief and rebellion (11.1, 5-6; 14.1-

⁵ Milgrom, p. 65.

10; 17.6-7; 20.1-6; 21.4-5; 25.1), and so do its leaders: the chieftains (13.30-33; 16; 25.14), Miriam and Aaron (12.1), and Moses himself (20.10-12).⁶

Numbers 10.11-12.16: From Sinai to Kadesh

1. The order of the march – Num. 10.11-12.16.
2. Guidance in the wilderness: Hobab – Num. 10.29-32. The identification of Hobab here is difficult.⁷ This can probably be read as “Hobab of the Midianite clan of Reuel.” He is here designated as Moses’ father-in-law (see also Judges 1.16; 4.11), a role assigned to Reuel in Exodus 2.18 and to Jethro in Exodus 18.
3. The ark and the cloud – Num. 10.33-36.
4. The compliant: Who shall give us flesh to eat? (E) – Num. 11.1-3. This is a direct contradiction of Num. 7.88. This is due (according to many Biblical scholars) to the fact that Numbers 11 comes from E, and Numbers 7 from P. These two traditions were stitched together in the narrative of Numbers at some point, and the redactor did not work to correct the apparent contradiction.
5. A description of manna: “as coriander seed, colour as bdellium.”⁸ The people made cakes of the manna, and it tasted like fresh oil – Num. 11.6-9.⁹
6. Moses complains to God – Num. 11.10-15.
 - a. Moses says, “If you would deal thus with me, kill me rather, I beg you, and let me see no more of my wretchedness!” – Num. 11.15.¹⁰

⁶ Milgrom, p. 75-76.

⁷ The issue with Hobab is further complicated by the fact that in Judges 1.16 he is identified as a Kenite. Milgrom states that the problem can be explained if Midian is seen as a confederated of peoples, one of which is the Kenites. Milgrom, p. 78. The name Kenite means “smiths,” and they probably worked in the mountain regions of Sinai or Midian. The Doctrine and Covenants identifies Jethro as one authorized to continue the line of priesthood from Adam and his successors all the way unto Moses (see D&C 84.6-16). Milgrom states that “if Hobab is identical with Jethro, then the Hobabites/Kenites were not only smiths but a clan of priests (Ex. 18.1) who settled among the Judahites at Negeb-Arad (Judges 1.16). There is some evidence that the first Yahweh worship (according to many scholars) came out of Seir, bordering on the Gulf of Elath, the home of the Midianites. The Shasu, a group of Bedouin tribes, were located in this area and an inscription speaks of “the land of Shasu YHW.” The land of Shasu is identified with Seir, and there are Biblical texts that identify Yahweh coming from this region: “The Lord came from Sinai; He shone upon them from Seir...” (Deuteronomy 33.2; Judges 5.4; Isaiah 63.1; Habakkuk 3.3)

⁸ “Bdellium” is the common English translation in the Bible for the Hebrew *bedolach* (בְּדֹלַח), which appears in Genesis 2:12 and Numbers 11:7. I find it fascinating that the Greek translation of Numbers 11.7 reads as follows: τὸ δὲ μαννα ὡσεὶ σπέρμα κυρίου ἐστὶν καὶ τὸ εἶδος αὐτοῦ εἶδος κρυστάλλου – “The manna is like the **seed of the Lord** and the sight of it was as **the appearance of crystal**” (My translation). I see a direct connection between this and D&C 130.9-11 where it speaks of a white stone given to those who are permitted to come into God’s presence, “whereon is a new name written... the new name is the key word” (D&C 130.11). In Genesis, it is given as a product of Havilah, where it is listed along with other precious items gold and onyx. In Numbers, the reference to bdellium is in the context of the manna eaten by the Israelites in the wilderness, which is said to have “the color of bdellium”. These are the only two uses in the Hebrew scripture, and there is no agreement about whether the term *bedolach* actually referred to the resin. The Septuagint interprets it as the name of a **precious stone**, and Rashi describes it as “a precious stone, crystal”. See: Bdellium, [The Jewish Encyclopedia](#), accessed 3.26.22.

⁹ וְהָיָה טַעַם לֶשֶׁת הַשֶּׁמֶן reads in the KJV: “and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil.” *Shamen* שָׁמֶן can be read a few different ways. Milgrom translates this as “It tasted like rich cream.” I like this translation. It brings to mind the idea of the butter and honey that the Messianic figure will eat in Isaiah. It also brings to mind the idea of milk as the Israelites approach the “land of milk and honey.”

¹⁰ Milgrom, p. 86. For a similar death wish, see the statement made by Elijah in 1 Kings 19.4, whose visit to Horeb seems to be in the model of Moses’ experiences with God at Horeb (see also Jeremiah 20.14-34 and Job 3). Richard

7. God speaks of having seventy leaders – Num. 11.16-17. This is connected to the idea of seventy nations (Genesis 10). This number is also associated with the descendants of Jacob (Ex. 1.5; Deut. 10.22), the elders of Israel (Ex. 24.1; Ezek. 8.11), the submissive kings (Judg. 1.7), and those struck by the Lord (1 Sam. 6.19).
8. “I will give them flesh!” – Num. 11.18-23.
 - a. “until it comes out at your nostrils!” – Num. 11.20.
9. The spirit is given to the seventy chosen – Num. 11.24-30.
 - a. Medad and Eldad prophesy – Num. 11.26-27.
 - i. Note that the tabernacle is outside the camp in E. This is because of the offense to God initiated by Aaron in Exodus 32. E keeps the tabernacle outside the camp throughout the narrative, while P has the tabernacle inside the camp throughout. We see this explained again in Numbers 12.4 when God calls Moses, Aaron and Miriam to “go out” to the tabernacle, which is outside the camp.
 - b. Moses says, “Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets!” – Num. 11.29.
10. God sends quail into the camp (a doublet in the Pentateuch¹¹) – Num. 11.31-35. This account is meant to be hyperbolic.¹²
11. The greatness of Moses – Num. 12.1-16.
 - a. Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses, for his “Cushite” wife- Num. 12.1.¹³
 - b. Moses was the most humble man on the earth – Num. 12.2.¹⁴
 - c. Aaron and Miriam “come out” from the camp to the tabernacle, which is outside the camp – Num. 12.4.
 - d. The Lord defends Moses to Aaron and Miriam – Num. 12.5-9.

Friedman makes this observation about Moses’ speech here: “The character development of Moses, the increasing strength in the way he speaks first to Pharaoh and then even to God, and the sympathetic treatment of his suffering are marks of E. J and P are not comparable in this respect. This is also consistent with the idea that E comes from the Mushite priesthood; that is, it is written by someone who traces his descent from Moses. Thus, here Moses makes an extraordinary, plaintive speech to God, perhaps the most audacious way that anyone speaks to God in the Hebrew Bible. See likewise Moses’ last words to Pharaoh (Ex. 11.4-8), his long exchange with God at the burning bush (Ex. 3-4), and his exchange with God on Mount Horeb. (Exodus 32). Richard Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 259.

¹¹ Remember that in the Priestly account of Exodus 16, quail was also sent to the Israelites (see Ex. 16.13). The account in Numbers 11 comes from the Elohist, or E. See: #6 on the list of the doublets in Exodus/Numbers in the article [“Stories told twice in the Bible.”](#)

¹² See: Mike Day, [Over a Billion Quail](#).

¹³ “He married a Cushite woman”: Moses’ wife Zipporah is Midianite (Exod. 2.21). Two explanations are possible: (1) This reference is to Zipporah, “Cushan” being part of Midian (Hab. 3.7); (2) Moses married a second woman in Egypt, a Nubian (= Cush). The latter is more plausible since Nubia was part of the Egyptian empire and dark-skinned women were considered beautiful, as reflected in the Targum’s rendition of Cushite as “beautiful.” *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 308.

¹⁴ Friedman translates this as “And the man Moses was very humble, more than every human who was on the face of the earth.” Sources, p. 261. Milgrom gives a similar translation. This is evidence of editing and the history of the construction the Torah, as Moses certainly would not write such a sentence himself!

- e. Miriam becomes leprous, Moses pleads for her, she is healed after seven days – Num. 12.10-16.¹⁵

Spying out the Land of Canaan: Numbers 13.1-14.45

1. The scouts are chosen – Num. 13.1-20.
2. The expedition – Num. 13.21-24.
3. The report – Num. 13.25-33.
 - a. The land is flowing with “milk and honey.”¹⁶
 - b. “They are stronger than us!... We saw giants!” – Num. 13.31,33.¹⁷
4. The Israelites respond – Num. 14.1-5.
 - a. “Would God we had died in the wilderness!” – Num. 14.2.
 - b. “Let us return to Egypt!” – Num. 14.4.
5. Joshua and Caleb counter with their faith – Num. 14.6-10.
 - a. “The Lord is with us! Fear them not!” – Num. 14.9.
 - b. “Lets stone them!” – Num. 14.10.
6. God responds – Num. 14.11-38.
 - a. The Lord appeared in the tabernacle – Num. 14.11.
 - b. God proposes to smite the Israelites and start over with another nation – Num. 14.12.¹⁸
 - c. Moses counters with “But the Egyptians will hear and make fun of you!” – Num. 14.13-18.
 - d. Moses begs the Lord to pardon the unfaithful – Num. 14.19.
 - e. God forgives them, but states that the unfaithful will not go into the land – Num. 14.20-35.
7. The people’s expedition – Num. 14.39-45.

¹⁵ There seems to be a concession for Miriam here, as the ordinary case for leprosy quarantine lasts for a minimum of 14 days (Lev. 13.5). It may be implied that Miriam was healed at once, if so the 7 day quarantine was not required, but only the 7 day ritual of purification (Lev. 14.1-20). Milgrom, p. 98.

¹⁶ See: [Exodus 1-6 Podcast notes, footnote 9](#).

¹⁷ This brings to mind the story of Genesis 6.4 and the giants there. See: Amar Annus, On the Origin of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions, *Journal for the study of the Pseudepigrapha*, (Vol. 19.4 (2010): 277-320), p. 289. See also: Michael Heiser, [The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible](#), Lexham Press, 2019.

¹⁸ At the death of Joseph Smith, in Nauvoo, Brigham Young stood up and told the Saints that if they would not sustain the Quorum of the Twelve that God would “raise up a people who would!” James E. Faust relates, “Having been a keen observer of the Prophet Joseph Smith and of many of the events of the Restoration, Brigham bore strong witness that the leadership keys had been left with the Twelve after the Prophet was martyred—indeed, that the Lord had “commanded [Joseph Smith] to endow the Twelve with these keys and priesthood” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56], 1:259). In the dark days following the Martyrdom, Brigham reminded the Saints, **“You cannot appoint a prophet; but if you let the Twelve remain and act in their place, the keys of the kingdom are with them and they can manage the affairs of the church and direct all things aright”** (8 August 1844, in HC 7:235). He also told the Saints that if they would not sustain the Twelve, then the Twelve would raise up a people who would! That showed how much confidence he had in the Twelve. He knew they had the keys, the commission, and the responsibility to build on the foundation Joseph had laid.” See: James E. Faust, [Brigham Young: A Bold Prophet, BYU Speeches](#), August 21, 2001.

Miscellaneous Laws: Numbers 15

Encroachment on the Tabernacle: Numbers 16.1-18.32

1. Numbers 16 addresses the problem “who is a priest?”¹⁹
 - a. Corporate punishment of Korah and his house – Num. 16.32-35.
 - b. Only Aaron’s seed can offer incense before the Lord! – Num. 16.40.²⁰

The test of the staffs: Numbers 17

1. Aaron’s authority asserted. This is all from P.

A distinction between the Aaronids and the Levites: Numbers 18

1. Only the house of Aaron shall come near the vessels of the sanctuary – Num. 18.1-4.
2. The Levites are to serve the Aaronids – Num. 18.2, 6.
3. The stranger that comes near the temple is to be put to death – Num. 18.7.
4. The reward for the Levites – Num. 18.20-24.

Purification from Contamination by a Corpse: Numbers 19

1. The “red heifer” – Num. 19.1-13.
2. Purification by sprinkling – Num. 19.14-22.

From Kadesh to the Steppes of Moab: Numbers 20.1-22.1

1. Must we fetch you water out of this rock? – Num. 20.1-10.
2. The Lord reprimands Moses and Aaron – Num. 20.12.

¹⁹ Numbers 16 mixture of J and P, and is a story about Korah (only in P), a Levite, and the names Dathan and Abiram (both from Reuben, come from J). This is a polemic against the sons of Levi (when it mentions Korah, only in P!). Deuteronomy 11.1-7 leaves Korah out of this story and places the blame upon Dothan and Abiram. It is important that there is no mention of Korah anywhere in Deuteronomy. The names of Dathan and Abiram (Num. 16.24) appear in the Masoretic Text **but not in the Greek Septuagint**. Either they were added by the Redactor to weave the stories together or they were added by a later scribe who, not knowing there were originally two separate stories, could not understand why the text referred only to Korah without Dathan and Abiram. The overall point of emphasis is to not challenge Moses’ authority, but the P material is specifically directed at the Levites, stating that they do not have authority. “And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?” (Num. 16.10). The House of Aaron (the Aaronids) wove into the story of the rebellion of Dothan and Abiram the name of Korah to emphasize that the Levites were not authorized priests. This story is typically used in Latter-day Saint discussions to emphasize the importance of following ordained leaders.

Speaking of rebellion and weakness, and working to draw the distinction, Richard G. Scott once taught: The joyful news for anyone who desires to be rid of the consequences of past poor choices is that **the Lord sees weaknesses differently than He does rebellion**. Whereas the Lord warns that unrepented rebellion will bring punishment, when the Lord speaks of weaknesses, it is always with mercy. (See also: Proverbs 28:13; 1 Corinthians 2:3; 15:43; 2 Corinthians 13:4; James 3:17; 2 Nephi 3:13; Jacob 4:7; Alma 34:17; 3 Nephi 22:8; Ether 12:26–28; Doctrine and Covenants 24:11; 35:17; 38:14; 62:1.) Richard G. Scott, [Personal Strength through the Atonement of Jesus Christ](#), October 2013 General Conference.

²⁰ This, once again, emphasizes the Priestly polemic against the Mushite Levite priests. Only the Aaronids, or the House of Aaron, are authorized to perform certain cultic services at the temple. This is something Deuteronomy strongly denies.

3. The encounter with Edom – Num. 20.14-21.
 - a. Edom refuses Israel’s request for passage – Num. 20.21.
4. Aaron dies – Num. 20.22-29. This is the end of P’s narrative, until we get to Num. 25.6 where we read that all the congregation is in mourning. Why are they in mourning? Because Aaron just died!²¹
5. Israel encounters the Canaanites – Num. 21.1-3.
6. The Copper Snake/Nehushtan – Num. 21.4-9.
 - a. “The Lord sent *seraph* serpents against the people. They bit the people and many of the Israelites died.” Num. 21.6.²²
 - b. “Make thee a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole” – Num. 21.8.²³

²¹ After a four-chapter hiatus, P now continues where it left off: “all the congregation of the children of Israel were mourning.” Friedman, *Sources*, p. 288.

²² Migrom translation, p. 173-174. Milgrom writes, “Untranslated. It can be synonymous with nahash “serpent” (Isa. 14.29). The verb saraf means “burn.” Thus the Greek renders “deadly” and the Targum Onkelos “burning,” referring to the serpent’s poisonous bite. I (Mike Day) would add that the text of Numbers 21.6 reads: **וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה בְּעַם אֶת הַנְּחָשִׁים הַשָּׂרָפִים** “And Yahweh sent among/into the people *ha-nachashim ha-seraphim* (the serpents, the fiery ones). The seraphim occur a number of times in the pseudepigrapha and later Jewish literature... The seraphim, cherubim and ophanim are described as “**the sleepless ones who guard the throne of his glory**” ([1 Enoch 71:7](#)). See 2 Samuel 2.6, 2 Kings 19.15, Psalm 80.1, Psalm 99.1, and Isaiah 37.16, Ezekiel 10.1-17. See also: T.N.D. Mettinger, as found in [Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible](#), edited by Karel Van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van der Horst, Eerdmans, 1999, p. 742-743. Kohler, Baumgartner, and Stamm give insight into the seraphim, relating them to **serpents that fly, burn, shine, or glow**. They state, “**It is uncertain whether these creatures are to be understood simply as serpents... or as having human form.**” Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brill Academic, 2001, p. 2746 of the electronic version. See also the extensive commentary on this word and its associated uses in [D&C 37-40 Quotes and Notes](#).

²³ Book of Mormon prophets give commentary regarding this event. Nephi said, “And he did straiten them in the wilderness with his rod; for they hardened their hearts, even as ye have; and the Lord straitened them because of their iniquity. He sent fiery flying serpents among them; and after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished” ([1 Nephi 17.41](#)).

Alma explained the symbolism of serpent; he explains the importance of looking to Christ in faith: “The Son of God... was spoken of by Moses; yea, and behold a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live. But few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now **the reason they would not look is because they did not believe** that it would heal **them**. **O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly**, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief, and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish? If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works” (Alma 33.18-22, emphasis).

One key seems to be that the Israelites did not think it would personally heal them. They saw the miraculous power of the thing Moses was doing, but they did not personally see it as operative in their lives.

The Savior commented on this experience in his dialogue with Nicodemus:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

- c. The snake Moses used is an important image to the authors of the Book of Mormon.²⁴
7. The route through the Transjordan – Num. 21.10-20.
 - a. Another similar list to this summary is contained in Num. 33.1-49. The Book of the Wars of the Lord is a reference to an ancient collection that no longer exists.²⁵
 8. The victory over Sihon – Num. 21.21-32.
 - a. Sihon “would not suffer Israel to pass through his border” – Num. 21.23.
 - b. Israel “smote him with the sword” – Num. 21.24.
 9. The victory over Og, the king of Bashan – Num. 21.32-35.
 - a. Num. 21.33-34 are duplicated in Deuteronomy 3.1-2, except for the change from first to third person. They conform to the Deuteronomic position that all of the Transjordan was taken at one stroke.²⁶

That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3.14-15).

From the *Jewish Study Bible* we read the following commentary regarding the brazen serpent: “The bronze serpent as an apotropaic (evil-averting, from Greek “turn from”) symbol seems to be the etiological account for the bronze serpent, *Nehushtan*, which was worshipped in Jerusalem until the late 8th century when King Hezekiah destroyed it (2 Kings 18-4). Winged serpents associated with the divine are attested in Isaiah (6.6-7; 14.2D-30) and elsewhere in the ancient Near East. **In Egypt, the uraeus, an amulet of an upreared cobra, symbolized kingship and divinity.** It was worn on the pharaoh’s forehead and was believed to protect him with its fiery saliva. A serpent attached to a staff brings to mind the caduceus symbol of the modern medical profession. [The Jewish Study Bible](#), Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 325.

Interestingly enough, the gematria of נחש *nachash* lines up perfectly with the word for Messiah *māšîaḥ* משיח. Both words add up to 358. One author wrote, “Hence, the gematria of *Moshiach* (40+300+10+8) and *nachash* (50+300+8) are equal, 358, since they represent two opposite sides of the same coin. The snake caused us to go into exile and Moshiach will bring us out of exile.” Rabbi Pinchas Winston, [Torah.org](#), accessed 3.26.22.

“How silly,” some must have said. “How can such a thing cure me? I’ll not show my stupidity by paying any attention,” and some would not look... And today many say, “How silly! How could accepting Christ save me?” They will not turn their heads to look nor incline their ears to hear. Boyd K. Packer, *Conference Report*, October 1968, pp. 73-76.

²⁴ Although much of Numbers 21 is from J, the material with the story of the “fiery snakes” and Moses’ construction of the pole with the serpent is from E. Numbers 21.4b-9 are all Elohist, with the remaining text in Numbers 21 coming from J. *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 277-278. This is significant because the Brass Plates seem to reflect a northern Elohist tendency, and thus we have much more material in the Book of Mormon regarding the *Nehushtan*. See Alma 33.19-22: “Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe it would heal them.” See also Alma 37.44-46 where we are told that there “is a type in this thing,” and that we are to look to Christ and give heed to these “words,” not being slothful because of the “easiness of the way.”

²⁵ *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 326.

²⁶ Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 183. Note that in Deuteronomy, “Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of giants; behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron... nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth...” (Deut. 3.11). This puts Og in the discussion relating to the giants as found in the Enoch literature, as well as the Mesopotamian creation myth. Maria Lindquist argues that Og’s bed may “be conceived as a battle trophy signaling the utter defeat of the king at the hands of Israel’s warrior god.” The dimensions of this bed are identical to those of the Babylonian god Marduk, a “symbol of power in the seventh-century” in Mesopotamian politics. See: Lindquist, King Og’s Iron Bed, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* [Vol. 73, No. 3 \(July 2011\)](#), pp. 480.

Laura Quick sees the connection between **Bashan, Og**, the size of **his bed**, the **giants** and the **underworld**:

“Only King Og of Bashan was left of the remaining *Repha'im*...” (Deut. 3.3). Many modern-day commentators understand the term *repha'im* here to mean **spirits of the dead or shades**, who inhabit the underworld. Indeed, ***repha'im* does have this meaning in a number of biblical verses**, for example, see Isaiah 26: YHWH our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but we acknowledge your name alone. The dead do not live; shades (*repha'im*) do not rise—because you have punished and destroyed them, and wiped out all memory of them (Isaiah 26.13-14).

Several scholars argue that Bashan itself, Og’s kingdom, is a reference to the underworld. The name Bashan likely derives from the proto-Semitic root ב.ת.נ. One meaning of this root, found in the Ugaritic term *btn*, is “serpent” or “dragon,” mentioned in several mythological texts. In Deuteronomy 3, evidence for **Bashan as a mythic place** can be found just a few verses after the reference to Og as a remnant of the *repha'im*. When the text describes the land given to the half tribe of Manasseh, we are told that: “...The whole region of Argob: all that portion of Bashan used to be called a land of *Repha'im*” (Deut. 3.13).

If *repha'im* are shades, then Bashan is apparently the land of the dead. Another text which appears to treat Bashan as a supernatural realm is [Psalm 68](#), which **refers to Bashan in mythopoeic terms**:

The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan (הַר־אֱלֹהִים הַר־בָּשָׁן) – lit: “the mountain of Elohim is the mountain of Bashan. (This can be read as Mount Bashan as the mountain of gods, meaning false gods!); an high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills? לָמָּה תִרְצְדוּן הַרִים גְּבוּרִים) lit: “**to what do you *rāṣad* watch with hatred you high mountains?**” = why do you watch with enmity?) this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in (God is taking over Bashan!); yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever. (Bashan and Mount Sinai are rivals! God wishes to inherit/take over Bashan) The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. **Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive**: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, **even the God of our salvation**... He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. But **God shall wound the head of his enemies**, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses. **The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea**: That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same. (Ps. 68.15-23, my [Mike Day] translation included, with emphasis added.)

According to Quick, Og could not only represent many things from the mythic past of Israel’s history, he is also tied to the pre-Israelite tradition of the giants that declared war upon Yahweh and once inhabited Canaan. As read in Deuteronomy:

“It was formerly inhabited by the Emim, a people great and numerous, and as tall as giants. Like giants, they are counted as *Repha'im*; but the Moabites call them Emim” (Deuteronomy 2.10-11).

The description of the bed as found in Deut. 3.11 adds another layer to this tradition. Dr Maria Lindquist of Harvard University connects the size of Og’s bed to the dimensions of the bed of the Babylonian god Marduk, described in Akkadian literature, where its size underscored the deity’s power and might. In light of these arguments, the term *ereš barzel* should be interpreted in line with its simple meaning, “iron bed,” and the text describes the dimensions of his bed, highlighting its—and thus his—enormous size.

The two meanings of רִפְאִים *repha'im* in the Hebrew Bible as “shades” and “giants” may be reconciled (רִפְאִים *repha'im* are translated as “giants” in the KJV of Deut. 2.11). When recalling the mythic past, the *repha'im* are assumed to have been the giant inhabitants of Canaan before the arrival of the Israelites. In their own time, however, the biblical writers understand the *repha'im* as a special class of underworld inhabitants.

Balaam: Numbers 22.2-24.25

1. The Hiring of Balaam – Num. 22.2-21.
 - a. Balaam has historically gotten a bad rap. Numbers 31:16 ([a priestly text](#)) is the only verse in the Old Testament that attributes the apostasy of Baal Peor to Balaam's doing. Part of the reason for his bad reputation comes from later interpreters, and from Biblical verses like [Revelation 2.14](#): "But I have a few things against thee, **because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam**, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."²⁷
2. Balaam and the donkey – Num. 22.22-35.
3. The meeting of Balak and Balaam – Num. 22.36-23.6.
4. Balaam's first oracle – Num. 23.7-10.
 - a. "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?... Who can count the dust²⁸ of Jacob?" – Balaam's oracle is overall positive – Num. 23.8-10.
5. Balaam's reaction and second attempt – Num. 23.11-17.
6. The second oracle – Num. 23.18-24.

In other words, from the perspective of the Deuteronomist, the *repha'im* lived long ago, but are now dead. In the case of Deuteronomy 3, **it is exactly this mythic past which is being recalled**. The description of Og as the last of the *repha'im*, then, has a temporal effect, placing the characters in a distant past. In Deuteronomy 3, Og is the last of the giant inhabitants of Canaan, and not a denizen of the dead. **Deuteronomy 3 recalls the tradition of Og in order to underscore the military power of the Israelite army**. Both the size of his bed as well as the description of Og as the last of the Repha'im serve to heighten this dramatic narrative: Og is part of the mythic past, a mighty foe, one of the giants of old, but Israel defeated him nonetheless. Laura Quick, Og, King of Bashan: Underworld Ruler or Ancient Giant? [Torah.com](#), accessed 3.27.22.

Michael Heiser gives this explanation:

First, the most immediate link back to the Babylonian polemic is Og's bed (Hebrew: שַׁרְפָּת *'eres*). **Its dimensions** (9 × 4 cubits) **are precisely those of the cultic bed in the ziggurat called Etemenanki**—which is the ziggurat most archaeologists identify as the Tower of Babel referred to in the Bible. Ziggurats functioned as temples and divine abodes. The unusually large bed at Etemenanki was housed in "the house of the bed" (*bit erši*). It was the place where the god Marduk and his divine wife, Zarpanitu, met annually for ritual procreating, the purpose of which was divine blessing upon the land. Scholars have been struck by the precise correlation. It's hard not to conclude that, as with Genesis 6:1–4, so with Deuteronomy 3, those who put the finishing touches on the Old Testament during the exile in Babylon were connecting Marduk and Og in some way. The most transparent path is in fact giant stature. **Og is said to have been the last of the Rephaim**—a term connected to the giant Anakim and other ancient giant clans in the Transjordan (Deut. 2:11, 20). **Marduk, like other deities in antiquity, was portrayed as superhuman in size**. However, the real matrix of ideas in the mind of the biblical author may be derived from wordplay based on Babylonian mythology. See: Heiser, [The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible](#), Lexham Press, 2015, p. 198-199.

²⁷ These verses (Numbers 31:16 and Revelation 2:14) seem to completely contradict what we read in Numbers 22-24! It seems as if the priestly writer, who many scholars say wrote much later than J or E (E being the supposed author of the main account of Balaam in Numbers 22-24) is creating a contradictory tradition about Balaam which is not represented anywhere else in the Old Testament. We also have a negative view of Balaam in Deuteronomy 23:4-5, where the Lord "turned the curse into a blessing". This account was written by the Deuteronomist, much later than the E version of Balaam than what we have in Numbers 22-24. See: [Is Balaam a good guy or a bad guy?](#)

²⁸ This can be translated as "dust-cloud," invoking an image of the dust raised up by Israel's marching armies. See: Milgrom, p. 197.

- a. Again, Balaam says positive things about Israel: “he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse!” – Num. 23.20. “God brought them out... the strength of a wild ox²⁹” – Num. 23.22.
- 7. The third oracle – Num. 23.25-24.9.
 - a. Balaam moves forward again to bless Israel. The spirit of God is upon Balaam (Num. 24.2), so he gives another positive oracle in Num. 24.5-6, “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! AS the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river’s side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters.”
- 8. The fourth oracle – Num. 24.10-19.
 - a. “There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth... out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion...” – Num. 24.17-19.
- 9. Oracles against the nations – Num. 24.20-25.
- 10. Reading Balaam’s story as an inner struggle.
 - a. Bryce discussed in the podcast that Balaam could very well represent the inner struggle that many have regarding whether to choose the right. He read the following quotes:

Here was a struggle indeed; for when he calmly reflected upon his errand, he knew that if God did not give, he could not obtain; and again, with the thought or hope of obtaining, his mind would be carried back to its former reflection of poverty, abuse, wealth, grandeur and ease, until before arriving at the place described, **this wholly occupied his desire**...And to use his own words it seemed **as though two invisible powers were influencing, or striving to influence his mind** one with the reflection that if he obtained the object of his pursuit, it would be through the mercy and condescension of the Lord, and that every act or performance in relation to it, must be in strict accordance with the instruction of that personage who communicated the intelligence to him first; and the other with the thoughts and reflections like those previously mentioned—contrasting his former and present circumstances in life with those to come. That precious instructions recorded on the sacred page—pray always—which was expressly impressed upon him, was at length entirely forgotten, and as I previously remarked, **a fixed determination to obtain and aggrandize himself, occupied his mind when he arrived at the place where the record was found** (Oliver Cowdery, "Letter VII," *Messenger and Advocate*, Jul 1835, 157-158; *Times and Seasons*, 2:377-378).

You [may wonder], perhaps, [why] the mind of our brother should be so occupied with the thoughts of the good of this world, at the time of arriving at Cumorah...after having been rapt in the visions of heaven during the night...but the mind of man is easily turned, if it is not held by the power of God through the prayer of faith, and you will remember that I have said that two invisible powers were operating upon his mind

²⁹ The KJV translates $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\iota$ as "unicorn," probably due to the LXX, which uses $\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\rho\omega\tau\omicron\varsigma$. Most of the translators I have read use “wild ox” for this word, although the Greek word does denote a one-horned animal.

during his walk from his residence to Cumorah, and that the one urging the certainty of wealth and ease in this life, had so powerfully wrought upon him, that the great object so carefully and impressively named by the angel, had entirely gone from his recollection that only a fixed determination to obtain now urged him forward. In this...do not understand me to attach blame to our brother: he was young, and his mind easily turned from correct principles, **unless he could be favored with a certain round of experience** (Oliver Cowdery, "Letter VIII," *Messenger and Advocate*, Oct 1835, 197; *Times and Seasons*, 2:392).

The Apostasy at Baal-Peor: Numbers 25

1. The apostasy – Num. 25.1-9.
2. The pact with Phineas – Num. 25.10-18.

The Generation of Conquest: Numbers 26.1-36.13

1. The second census – Num. 26.1-65.
2. The Laws of Succession in Inheritance – Num. 27.1-11.
 - a. The basic assumption here is that of Leviticus 25.23: The land belongs to God, who assigned it to the Israelite clans for their use; whoever alienates it from them is subject to divine punishment. Hence, in these verses, men who do not pass on their inheritance due to a lack of sons will pass their land to their daughters (Num. 27.4-8).
3. Joshua succeeds Moses – Num. 27.12-23.
4. The Calendar of Public Sacrifices – Num. 28.1-30.1
5. The Annulment of Vows and Oaths made by women – Num. 30.2-17.
6. The war against Midian – Num. 31.1-54.
7. Reuben, Gad, and part of Manasseh receive land as an inheritance east of Jordan – Num. 32.
8. The 42 Stations of the Exodus are reviewed – Num. 33.1-50.³⁰
9. The Division of Canaan – Num. 33.50-35.44.
 - a. "Ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you..." – Num. 33.52.
 - b. "But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you..." – Num. 33.55.³¹
 - c. The boundaries of the Promised Land – Num. 34.1-15.
 - d. Cities of the Levites – Num. 35.1-8.
 - e. Cities of refuge – Num. 35.9-15.
10. Marriage requirements for heiresses – Num. 36.1-13.³²

³⁰ For a view of how early Christians interpreted this part of the Bible, see: [The 42 Stations of the Exodus: Numbers 33](#)

³¹ This seems to hint at some of the things that happen to Samson later in the Bible ([Judges 16.21](#)).

³² Moses has ruled that daughters may inherit where there are no sons (Num. 27.1-11). The leaders of Zelophedad's clan respond with the following objection: If they marry outside their tribe then their land will pass to their husbands' tribes. Moses informs them that God finds their complaint justified and, as a result, He has decreed that all heiresses must marry within their tribe. Milgrom, p. 296.

