

Lesson 26

Ezra 8:15

15 And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi.

Ezra 7:6-8 briefly mentioned Ezra's departure from Babylon, but here we are given more details. The returnees assembled at the Ahava River, which was most likely a canal of the Euphrates, and they camped there for 3 days, which is a common period of time when beginning or ending a journey. (See 8:32 and Neh. 2:11.)

One thing that happened during those three days was that Ezra reviewed the people, and what he discovers is that there were no Levites among them. As we discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the Levites do not seem to have been very numerous at this time. Sheshbazzar also had difficulty in finding Levites willing to return to Jerusalem back in 2:40-42.

We discussed some reasons for the paucity of Levites back in Chapter 2. 2 Kings 24:14 tells us that the Babylonians had left the poorest of the land behind, and many of the Levites may have been in that group. Also, the Levites in exile had likely changed professions and saw little to gain from returning to Judah as Levites.

Recall that the very small number of Levites in relation to priests is strong evidence that the law did not originate with Ezra as some today argue. In the law (Numbers 18:21, 26), it is assumed that the Levites would greatly outnumber the priests because, for example, the Levites received the tithes and passed only a tenth (a tithe of the tithe) to the priests. (That implies that at that time priests were about 10% of the tribe of Levi.) Plus, under the Law, the Levites lived in 48 Levitical cities—whereas here we have only 38 Levites total! Had the law been rewritten during this time as some argue, it would never have reached us in the form that we now have it. “Nothing proves more clearly how mistaken is the view that in post-exilic times, the Torah was still being added to and revised.”

Ezra 8:16-17

16 Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding. 17 And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God.

Ezra then sends 11 men (which, not being 12, should make the critics happy) to go find some Levites. The 11 men include 9 leaders or family heads and 2 interpreters. The leaders were no doubt intended to use their influence to convince some Levites to join them, whereas the interpreters

(or “men of understanding”) were likely meant to use the law to persuade the Levites to accompany them to Jerusalem. Ezra sent leaders and diplomats, and he told them what to say. Ezra knew this mission was important, and so he left nothing to chance. That he sent so many suggests again that it would be difficult to convince the Levites that they should return.

Verse 17 mentions “Iddo, the chief at the place Casiphia.” Who was Iddo and where was Casiphia? Casiphia is related to the word “silver” and may have been named after a guild of silversmiths. Most likely a school was located there, and Iddo was the head of the school. As for Casiphia, it is curious that the text makes a point of calling it a “place.” (Unless you are using the NIV, which for some reason failed to translate that word.) Some argue that the Hebrew word translated “place” actually refers to a sanctuary or a synagogue, which would further support the idea that this was a school.

Ezra 8:18-20

18 And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; 19 And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; 20 Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.

Ezra’s plan is successful, and verses 18-19 tell us that two independent Levitical families decide to accompany them to Jerusalem. The total number of returning Levites is 38.

Recall from our earlier lessons that the Levites were members of the tribe of Levi who were not also descendants of Aaron. They were prohibited from offering sacrifices on the altar. They were butchers, doorkeepers, singers, scribes, teachers, and sometimes even temple beggars.

Verse 20 tells us that 220 “Nethinims” or temple servants also accompanied them. As we have discussed, the role of the temple servants was to assist the Levites, and having such a large number may have been a factor in convincing these Levites to join them on their return. Verse 20 points out the important role played by King David in organizing the priestly families. It is not clear at all why so many Nethinims were willing to return, when so many Levites were not.

Ezra had a list of their names, but that list is not given here. The purpose of the list was two-fold – to serve as a roll call on the trip back, and the record and confirm the Jewish ancestries of those who returned. (Ezra was a very organized leader!)

The total number of those who returned with Ezra was about 1500 men plus women and children, perhaps a total of close to 5000 people.

Ezra 8:21-23

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. 22 For

I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. 23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.

Verses 21-22 describe the preparations for the journey. First, Ezra proclaims a fast as a way to seek God's protection for the hazardous journey. Whether commanded or not, fasting often occurs at times of great anxiety. David fasts while pleading for the life of his child (2 Samuel 12:16). The people of Nineveh fast upon hearing news of the imminent judgment announced by the Lord (Jonah 3:5). Nehemiah fasts upon hearing the bad news concerning the state of the city of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:4). Darius fasts while Daniel is in the lions' den (Daniel 6:18).

Unlike the fasts we saw in Esther, this one we are told is accompanied by prayer. Specifically, the people ask God in verse 21 to grant them a safe journey or "a right way," literally a "straight road."

When the Pilgrims left England for America in 1620, Ezra 8:21 was the text of the last sermon they heard before departing on their voyage.

The phrase "our little ones" in verse 21 reminds us that entire families were returning, but the Hebrew word can also refer to anyone who is weak, including the aged.

The reference to "our substance" in verse 21 is a reminder that the road was unsafe due to bandits and the nearby Egyptian rebellion.

This danger, as well as the reason for the fervent fasting and prayer, is highlighted in verse 22, where Ezra explains why he did not ask the king for a band of soldiers to accompany them. He had told the King that God would protect them, and so to ask for soldiers would have indicated a lack of faith on his part. But, in ancient times (and likely as well as in modern times!), the roads between Babylon and Judah were teeming with gangs of bandits. And this group was loaded down with gold and silver.

Would asking for troops have indicated a lack of faith on Ezra's part? Perhaps – but I am reminded of the story of the man who was in a flood, and stranded on the roof of his house, as the waters were rising. A man came by on a canoe and offered to help, but the man refused, saying, "God will provide." Another person came by in a motorboat and offered to help, but again the man refused, saying, "God will provide." Then a helicopter came by and offered to help, but for the third time the man refused, saying, "God would provide." The waters eventually rose above him and he drowned. In Heaven, he asked God, "Why didn't you help me? I had faith in you." God replied, "I sent you a canoe, a motorboat, and a helicopter ... what more did you want?" God helps those who help themselves!

In any event, God answered their prayers – and they arrived safely without the troops.

Some commentators try to pit Ezra against Nehemiah, and they point to these verses as a jab by Ezra against Nehemiah, who traveled with a military escort in Nehemiah 2:9. (And, if so, Nehemiah would likely have responded with a story about helicopters!) But the two missions were

different. Ezra's mission was religious, whereas Nehemiah was sent as a political official, a governor, to Judah. He was likely given no choice about having a military escort.

Ezra 8:24-27

24 Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them, 25 And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered: 26 I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents; 27 Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold.

A better translation of verse 24 is "twelve men as well as Sherebiah and Hashabiah and with them from their kinsmen, ten men" because it is clear from 8:18-19 that Sherebiah and Hashabiah were Levites. Thus, Ezra chose 12 priests and 12 Levites. This choice confirms that Ezra was fond of the number 12, which likely explains why he chose 12 families earlier.

These priests and Levites are assigned to be treasure bearers. In the Law, the priests and Levites were given the responsibility of caring for the furnishings of the tabernacle. The priests handled the sacred objects and cared for them while the Levites carried them without touching them. In this passage, these groups are essentially given the same responsibility with coins and vessels replacing the items of furniture.

Verses 25-27 describe a staggering amount of wealth. A Babylonian talent weighed approximately 75 pounds. Therefore, the 650 silver and 100 gold talents together weighed almost 30 tons! Equally impressive are the various gold, silver, and bronze utensils. The silver articles alone weighed 7,000 pounds. The gold bowls probably weighed about a pound each. Also mentioned are 1,000 darics or "drams." A Persian daric was a thick gold coin that was named after the Persian king Darius. Ezra carefully weighs the silver and gold to make sure that none of it was lost.

Many commentators have questioned the amount of treasure detailed here. But, as we have already seen, the Persian kings had tremendous wealth and enjoyed displaying it. We should also keep in mind God's role in this return – if God wanted his people to return loaded down with Persian treasure, then that is what was going to happen – and that is what did happen! (Although they are called a "freewill offering" in verse 28.)

This great wealth also reminds us of Ezra's decision not to use a military escort – a decision that must have astonished (and perhaps worried) the king and the other Persians in view of the great treasure they were carrying.

Ezra 8:28-30

28 And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers. 29 Watch ye, and keep them,

until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD. 30 So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God.

These verses record the instructions that Ezra gave to the treasure bearers. Ezra, after announcing that they were “holy unto the Lord,” (that is, set apart for a divine purpose), told the treasure bearers to carefully protect (“watch and keep”) the valuables because they were designated as a freewill offering for God.

Their assignment to guard the treasure was to last until they were able to weigh out the treasure in the chambers of the temple in Jerusalem.

Ezra 8:31-34

31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. 32 And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days. 33 Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites; 34 By number and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time.

Verse 31 helps us with the chronology. On the first day of the first month, the exiles assembled at the river. (This is the official beginning of the journey from Ezra 7:9.) They stayed there for 3 days while Ezra discovered the lack of Levites. They searched and found the Levites, and then arrived back at the river. On the 12th day of the first month, the caravan began its journey from the river to Jerusalem. Ezra 7:9 tells us they arrived on the first day of the fifth month. The party set out on its journey just two days before Passover.

Verse 31 tells us that they were delivered from enemies and ambushes along the way. The Hebrew used does not mean that unsuccessful ambushes occurred, but more likely means that God made sure that the exiles were never attacked at all during their journey to Jerusalem.

With classic Biblical understatement, the entire 900 mile trek is described in verse 32 with only four words—“We came to Jerusalem.” The people had traveled an average of about nine miles a day.

After resting for three days, the first thing they did was weigh the silver and the gold to confirm that none was missing.

Why the three day wait? Perhaps this was just a time of rest following the rigorous journey. It is also possible that they arrived late in the week and waited until the Sabbath was over before

weighing out the valuables, an activity that would have been considered work.

The valuables were weighed out to the priest Meremoth, the son of Uriah. This Meremoth was of the line of Hakkoz, which had been unable to prove its ancestry in Ezra 2:61-63. Evidently, the family had been accepted when evaluated by the priest with Urim and Thummim and by this time had produced one of the leading priests of the temple.

Accompanying Meremoth was Eleazar, the son of Phinehas. It is possible that this is the same Eleazar as that of Nehemiah 12:42, one of the priests who led the dedicatory celebration of the walls of Jerusalem.

Although the text does not note it here, the treasure would have been placed in one of the chambers of the temple.

Ezra 8:35-36

35 Also the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the LORD. 36 And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

With verses 35-36, the narrative switches back to the third person. (“I” and “we” become “those” and “they.”) In 7:17, Artaxerxes commanded that certain offerings be made, and here in 8:35 we see that command being carried out.

The offering included 12 bulls, 96 rams, 77 lambs, and 12 goats. Why those numbers? 96 is divisible by 12, but why 77? Some argue that 77 should be 72, which is also divisible by 12. I think the most likely explanation is simply that there were 96 rams and 77 lambs! There is no reason to look for any symbolic significance with the rams and the lambs, although the 12 bulls and the 12 goats were likely chosen for their symbolic significance.

The plural “satraps” in verse 36 (“lieutenants” in the KJV) is seen by some as a problem because Trans-Euphrates or Beyond the River was a single satrap. Most likely the phrase also includes at least the Egyptian satrap, which was nearby and which also had a substantial Jewish population. Others were perhaps also included.

The final phrase in Chapter 8 is important: “they furthered the people, and the house of God.” What that phrase shows is that Ezra’s mission was not solely to discipline the people. His intention was constructive, although, as we will soon see, discipline was needed as well.

Ezra 9:1-2

Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according

to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.

In verses 1-2, the princes approach Ezra to tell him about the problem of foreign marriages. Already Ezra's campaign to teach people the Law was bearing "the characteristic fruit of reform." Apparently, these same princes had not tried to solve the problem themselves (or perhaps had been unable to solve the problem) prior to Ezra's arrival. Verse 2 tells us that some of the princes were the chief offenders!

Why were some of the princes so willing to overlook the sin? Because they and their families were the most involved in it. But we know that not all of the leaders were involved in the sin because some of the leaders had told Ezra about the sin in verse 1. Some of the leaders had integrity, but apparently many others did not.

Who were these princes? Most likely they were the family leaders of the descendants of the Jews who had returned 80 years earlier under Sheshbazzar.

Four months have passed since they arrived. 10:9 tells us we are in the 9th month, and 7:8 tells us Ezra arrived in the 5th month. Why did it take so long for Ezra to notice the foreign marriages? In fact, he does not notice them himself, but rather is told about them, and we will see his shock and dismay in verse 3.

What is the reason for the delay? The first few words in verse 1 answer that question. Verse 1 begins – "now when these things were done." What things? It was likely the delivery of the edicts to the satraps and the governors from 8:36. How long did that take? Probably about four months. The most likely explanation for the delay is that Ezra had been traveling after his arrival to visit the officials in the surrounding areas, and he had just now returned. The plurality of the word "satraps" indicates that Ezra delivered these documents to satraps in several different provinces. This obligation would have taken several months, especially if the provinces in northern Africa are included.

So what was wrong with the foreign marriages? For starters, marriages between the Israelites and certain foreign nations were prohibited under the Mosaic Law:

Exodus 34:11-16 "Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 12 Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. 13 You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim 14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), 15 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, 16 **and you take of their daughters for your sons**, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore

after their gods.”

Deuteronomy 7:1-4 “When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, 2 and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. 3 **You shall not intermarry with them**, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, 4 for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.”

Not only do these passages prohibit the foreign marriages, they supply the reason for the prohibition – the foreign marriages would turn the Jews away from following God. The influence of the foreign mother would turn the husband and the children to her foreign gods and would introduce the foreign worship and idolatry into the worship of God. And, of course, we see that very thing happening over and over again throughout the Old Testament. The issue was not that of racial purity but rather that of religious purity.

How do we know it was not a racial issue? Joseph had an Egyptian wife, Moses married a Midianite and a Cushite, and Ruth, a Moabitess, and Rahab, a Canaanite, hold honored positions in Jesus’ genealogy. God accepted marriages to foreign believers. The problem was when the marriage was to a foreign unbeliever. Such foreign wives could and often did lead the people away to foreign gods, particularly when, as here, the problem had become so widespread.

The phrase “holy seed” in verse 2 also shows the issue was religion rather than race – not just seed, but holy seed. That phrase is a clear link to the phrase “holy people” that is used throughout Deuteronomy in reference to the Israelites. (7:6; 14:2, 21; 28:9)

The emphasis of the passage is on the fact that the male Jews had married female foreigners. Why the emphasis on foreign women? First, women usually have a greater influence on their children’s religion. Later Jewish tradition decreed that a Jew is one who is born of a Jewish mother (remember Timothy in Acts 16:1-3). This ruling was not because of the blood of the child but because mothers raise children. Second, a Jewish woman who marries a foreigner becomes part of his nationality and adopts his gods. Therefore, there was no need to discuss this situation. It is very unlikely that there were many or any foreign men with Jewish wives who were part of the remnant. They had all left already, and while that was not good, there was not much Ezra could do about it.

The peoples mentioned in verse 1 are similar to those listed in Exodus and Deuteronomy: the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

Who were these nations?

The first group mentioned is the Canaanites. The Canaanites were the descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham. The Canaanites lived along the eastern Mediterranean coastal regions from Egypt to the area of Lebanon (Num 13:29). Their most significant impact on Israel came in the area of religion. The Canaanite fertility cult has been called “the most immoral and vile religion known to

man.” The chief god of the Canaanites was Baal. The Canaanites worshiped their gods by engaging in sexual immorality involving male and female prostitutes and sacrificing their children. Israel’s worship of Baal seems to have been the most significant sin among those that led to the nation’s deportation (Jer 11:17; Hos 2:1-13; 11:2; Zeph 1:4).

The second group mentioned is the Hittites. The Hittites were the descendants of Heth, the son of Canaan (Gen 10:15). The Hittites dominated Asia Minor. Groups of Hittites migrated south, eventually settling in the hill country of Canaan near the city of Hebron (Gen 23:19; Num 13:29). Notable Hittites include Ephron, from whom Abraham purchased a burial site (Gen 23), and Uriah, one of the mighty men of David (2 Sam 23:39). Esau married two Hittites (Gen 26:34), and Solomon had Hittite women in his harem (1 Kgs 11:1).

The third group mentioned is the Perizzites. The origin of the Perizzites is unknown. They first appear in Gen 13:7, where they are simply identified as dwelling in the land of Canaan with the Canaanites at the time of Abraham. During the period of the judges they lived in the heavily forested region near Mount Ephraim in the territory allotted to the tribes of Ephraim and West Manasseh (Josh 17:15).

The fourth group mentioned is the Jebusites. The Jebusites were the descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham (Gen 10:16). They lived in the hill country (Num 13:29) and were the original inhabitants of Jerusalem. Jebusite Jerusalem was taken by King David in about 1004 B.C. During the period of the judges they lived in the general region of Jerusalem in the territory allotted to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Notable Jebusites include Adoni-zedek, the king of Jerusalem who formed the alliance against Gibeon (Josh 10:1-4), and Araunah (also known as Ornan), from whom David bought the threshing floor that would become the site of Solomon’s temple (2 Sam 24:16-24; 1 Chr 21:14-27). If Salem is identified as Jerusalem, then Melchizedek may have been a Jebusite (cf. Gen 14:18).

The fifth group mentioned is the Ammonites. The Ammonites were the descendants of Ben-ammi, the son of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his younger daughter. The Ammonites lived on the eastern side of the Jordan River. The earliest documentation of hostilities between the Ammonites and the Israelites is the record of Judg 3:12-14, where the Ammonites join the coalition formed by Eglon, king of Moab. Jephthah later defeats an unnamed king of Ammon (Judg 11). Notable Ammonites include Naamah, the wife of Solomon and mother of Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:21, 31; 2 Chr 12:13), and Tobiah, one of the major antagonists of Nehemiah (Neh 2:19; 4:3). Solomon built a sanctuary for Molech, the “detestable” chief god of the Ammonites, on the Mount of Olives (1 Kgs 11:7). Child sacrifice was a significant part of the Ammonite Molech cult (Lev 18:21; 20:2-5; 2 Kgs 23:10; Jer 32:35).

The sixth group mentioned is the Moabites. The Moabites were the descendants of Moab, the son of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his older daughter. The Moabites lived on the eastern side of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, just to the south of the Ammonites. The chief god of the Moabites was Chemosh (1 Kgs 11:7, 33). The worship of Chemosh included a priesthood (Jer 48:7) and a sacrificial system (Num 22:40; 25:2). Solomon married Moabite women and built a sanctuary for Chemosh on the Mount of Olives (1 Kgs 11:1, 7). Notable Moabites include the following: Balak, the king who hired Balaam to curse the Israelites (Num 22-24); Eglon, the king who was assassinated by Ehud (Judg 3:15-30); Ruth, the widow of Mahlon and wife of Boaz (Ruth

4:10, 13); and Mesha, the king who rebelled against King Jehoram of Israel (2 Kgs 3).

The seventh group mentioned is the Egyptians. The most significant feature of the land of Egypt is the Nile River. In fact, Egypt is often called “the gift of the Nile.” Because the Nile River flows from south to north, southern Egypt is known as Upper Egypt while northern Egypt is known as Lower Egypt. The Egyptians may be the descendants of Ham, the son of Noah. The land of Egypt is sometimes identified as the land of Ham in the OT (Pss 78:51; 105:23, 27; 106:22). Like Israel, Egypt was a land of religion. Herodotus notes, “They [the Egyptians] are beyond measure religious, more than any other nation. ... Their religious observances are, one might say, innumerable” (Hist. 2.37). The chief god of the Egyptians was Ra, the sun god. However, many other gods were routinely worshiped including Osiris, god of the Nile, and Isis, goddess of children. And, of course, they considered the Pharaohs to be gods. Notable Egyptians include Shishak, the pharaoh who invaded Israel during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:25-26), and Neco, the pharaoh of the army who met Josiah in battle at Megiddo, a battle in which Josiah was fatally shot by the Egyptian archers (2 Kgs 23:29; 2 Chr 35:22-23).

The eighth and final group mentioned is the Amorites. They were the descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham (Gen 10:16). The Amorites lived to the west of Mesopotamia and thus were called “westerners.” The Amorites had their origins in Syria and migrated south into the land of Canaan. The Amorites lived in the hill country on both sides of the Jordan River (Num 13:29; Josh 5:1). The so-called King’s Highway traversed their territory (Num 21:21-22). They were largely nomadic shepherds, supplying sheep and goats to the Canaanite cities. Notable Amorites include Sihon and Og, two kings who were defeated by the Israelites on their way to the promised land (Num 21).

Why spend so much time talking about these peoples? Because it is important to know about them as we approach the final scene in this book, which involves a punishment that many consider overly harsh.