



God Offers Israel Healing from Sin

Numbers 21:4–9



LESSON GOAL

Students will learn of the judgment and mercy of God.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- Israel complained about God's provision of manna.
- God punished Israel for complaining by sending fiery serpents to bite the people.
- The people admitted that they had sinned against God and against Moses' leadership.
- God had Moses make a bronze snake; anyone who looked at it would live.

KEY VERSE

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live'" (Numbers 21:8).

APPLICATION

- Do not complain about God's provision.
- When the temptation to not trust God comes, remember His faithfulness in the past.
- Trust Jesus as Savior. Rebellion deserves death, but God has provided a way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

NEXT WEEK

God Blesses Israel through Balaam
Read Numbers 22–24.

Symbol Key



Craft



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Activity



Q & A



Work Sheet



2 Grade Level

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.... You shall teach them to your children” (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

The book of Numbers records a disturbing account of Israel’s unfaithfulness. After Israel rejected God’s provision (Num. 11–12) and God’s plan for entering the Promised Land (Num. 14), they rejected God’s prophet, Moses, and His priest, Aaron (Num. 16–17). This pattern of rejection apparently continued throughout Israel’s 40 years of wilderness wanderings. While they fell into blatant idolatry only once (with the golden calf), the first generation of Israelites after Egypt repeatedly fell into the more subtle idolatry of self-worship. Not recognizing their true sinfulness, they always thought they deserved something better than what God had given, whether it was better food, a better place to settle, or better leadership. Every complaint was a terrible rejection of God’s faithfulness.

As the 40 years of wandering drew to a close, the last of those who had been over 20 when Israel rejected the Promised Land died. In the first month of the fortieth year (Num. 20:1), Miriam died at Kadesh, the same place where Israel had rejected the Promised Land nearly 40 years earlier. Sadly, the people were not finished rebelling and again complained against Moses for bringing them into the wilderness to die and for failing to give them figs, vines, or pomegranates—the very fruit Israel had rejected in the Promised Land! After 40 years of faithfully following God, Moses finally followed the people in their unfaithfulness. Moses disobeyed God when God told him to speak to the rock and provide water for the people (Num. 20:8–9). Instead, Moses hit the rock twice with his staff. God charged Moses (and Aaron, who was somehow involved) with failing to believe Him and spurning His holiness before the people (20:12). Moses and Aaron were punished by being denied entrance into the Promised Land, the same punishment that Moses had announced to the people 40 years earlier. At the end of Numbers 20, the first generation of Israel mourned the death of Aaron (20:22–29).

Numbers is unclear as to when the last person who was cursed to wander in the wilderness died. Most likely, the transition was complete with the death of Aaron in Numbers 20 (except for Moses, who dies in Deuteronomy 34). Numbers 21 begins with the exploits of the second generation of Israelites, the majority of whom had not been born in Egypt. Numbers 21 begins with the promising defeat of a Canaanite king who tried to attack Israel. Israel rightly trusted in God to deliver His people and won the victory (21:1–3). But much like the preceding generation, Israel did not show God the same faithfulness that He had shown to them. In Numbers 21:4–9, the second generation of Israel rejected God’s provision and were punished. God taught the people to depend on Him for deliverance.

The Bronze Serpent Lifted Up

Instead of entering the Promised Land from the south, via the most direct route from Kadesh, Israel sought to pass through Edom to its right and then head north. When the king of Edom refused them passage along the King’s Highway (Num. 20:14–21),

Additional Reference Materials

*The MacArthur Study
Bible* by John MacArthur

the Israelites were forced to take a long detour. They left Kadesh, which was very near the Promised Land, and returned to the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba (which extends from the Red Sea and can be seen on any map of the Middle East). They continued north following the eastern side of the Arabah, the valley that extends from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Dead Sea. The detour cost Israel approximately 200 miles, no small journey for two million people traveling through the desert on foot during summer months (with temperatures up to 120 degrees)!

Not surprisingly, “the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way” (Num. 21:4). Just as their parents had done when they lost sight of the sovereignty and goodness of God, this second generation “spoke against God and against Moses” (21:5). The complaints were the same as those of the previous generation. The people asked why God had brought Israel from Egypt to die in the wilderness, why they had no food and water, and why they had to eat manna, which they ungratefully referred to as “this worthless bread.” Once again, God punished the Israelites. This time, He sent “fiery serpents,” so called because of the fiery inflammation caused by their bites (21:6). Many of the people who were bitten died.

Because of God’s punishment, the people realized their sin and confessed it to Moses (Num. 21:7). They asked Moses to pray that the Lord would take away the serpents. Moses, true to his character, once again interceded for the people. God told Moses to make a fiery serpent and place it on a pole. Whenever someone who had been bitten looked at the serpent, he would live. Moses followed God’s commands, and those who looked at the snake were healed (21:8–9).

The fact that God had Moses make the bronze serpent is difficult to understand. But what must have been clear to the people when they looked at the bronze snake was that the God who sent the punishment was the same God who could ordain the means of healing. God’s power to punish was manifested in His control of real serpents, and His power to heal was manifested in His working through the symbol of a bronze serpent. As the stubborn, complaining Israelite’s hand or foot began to swell and he looked at the bronze serpent, he had to humble himself, admit that God had been just in the punishment, and trust that God would be true to His Word and heal as He had promised. This humbling may have included having to go to the section of the camp where the bronze serpent could be seen. The man had to come absolutely dependent on God; he had no other way to be healed.

The Son of Man Lifted Up

When Jesus was describing to Nicodemus in John 3 how someone is born of the Spirit (born again or saved), He, the perfect teacher, used the episode of the bronze serpent as an illustration. Jesus said, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14–15). Jesus’ reason for making the comparison may include that the bronze serpent was lifted on a pole similarly to how Jesus would be lifted on a tree at His execution. The comparison may also have pointed to the bronze serpent’s being lifted up or exalted as the means of physical healing, just as Christ (especially after His resurrection and ascension) would be exalted as the means of eternal salvation. But the most important comparison Jesus is making is in the way and the attitude of salvation. The dying Israelite could be healed only as he brokenly, desperately, and dependently trusted that God would heal him if he obeyed by looking at the bronze serpent. The only way man, who is spiritually dead and heading toward the eternal wrath of God, can be saved is by believing in Christ. Anyone who wishes to be saved must come to Christ in brokenness, repenting of his rebellion; in desperation, knowing the severity of his transgression; and in dependence, trusting Christ to take his

punishment. The faith of the dying Israelite who humbly looked to the bronze serpent and trusted God for healing is similar to the faith that the condemned man must have as he trusts in Christ for salvation.

POINT TO THE TRUTH

*“Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth”
(Psalm 78:1).*

This section includes questions to review last week’s lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week’s lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

Use these questions to review and reinforce key truths.

Who rebelled against Moses?

The families of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

What was the reason that they rebelled against Moses as their leader?

They said that Moses and Aaron were not the only men who were chosen by God to lead. They accused Moses of exalting himself over the congregation.

What did Moses do about the people’s accusation?

Moses fell on his face and told them of Korah’s judgment the next day.

What was the consequence of Korah’s rebellion?

Moses said that the next morning the Lord would demonstrate who was His. God would demonstrate this through the death of Korah. If Moses was not chosen by God, the people of Korah would die a natural death, but if Moses was chosen by God as their leader, the ground would open up and swallow Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and all their possessions.

What happened?

The ground split open and swallowed Korah, Dathan, Abiram, their families, and all their possessions. Then fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering incense to the Lord.

What was the reaction of the people the next day?

They were angry with Moses and Aaron and blamed them for killing the people of the Lord.

What did God want to do about their rebellion?

God told Moses to get away from the people because He was going to consume them. God was going to destroy the people because of their unfaithfulness and their accusations against Moses and Aaron. He sent a plague, and it began to spread throughout the camp.

What was the reaction of Moses and Aaron to God's judgment on the people?
Moses told Aaron to put fire in a censer and put incense in it. Aaron then ran among the people, between the living and the dead, to make atonement for their actions.

What began to happen when Aaron went into the assembly?
The plague stopped after 14,700 people died.



Trust Games

Do one or two of these games before the lesson. In today's lesson, the students will hear about Israel's need to trust God to save them.

Fall Back

Choose one student to stand in front of the class. Stand 2–3 feet behind the student, and tell him to fall straight back into your arms. Talk about the risk of falling and how the student will have to trust you to catch him.

Buddy Walk

Have each student choose a partner. Have one student close his eyes while his partner leads him around the room. Encourage the students to be careful with one another. Talk about trustworthy and not-so-trustworthy leaders.

Breath

Ask a volunteer to hold his breath for a short time. We need oxygen to breathe, and we trust that the air we breathe is good. We trust in it even though we do not see it. Ultimately, we trust in God to give us our next breath!



Emergency

Ask the students whether any of them have experienced a real emergency. Whom do we call for help when we have an emergency? We call firefighters, police officers, etc. Why should we trust these people? Who are other people we trust? In today's lesson, God judges the Israelites with fiery snakes. They learned to trust Him in order to be saved.



Remaining Thankful

God wants us to be thankful in all situations. When we grumble, we are being disobedient, and our hearts are no longer thankful. Sometimes counting our blessings helps remove those tendencies to grumble. Put a large piece of butcher paper up on the wall, and give each student a marker. Instruct the students to fill the entire paper with things they are thankful for. In today's lesson, the students will hear what happened when the Israelites were ungrateful for what God had given them.

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

“Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done” (Psalm 78:4).

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students’ understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

One thing we learned last week was that God gave the Israelites victory over the Canaanites. The Israelites should have learned by now that they could always trust God to provide for them.

But when they started on their trip around the land of Edom, the Israelites became very unhappy. Remember that the people of Edom were afraid of the Israelites and would not let them pass through the land. So the Israelites had to travel around the land of Edom. This path was about 200 miles. Two hundred miles would take us about four hours to drive by car on the freeway. Of course, the Israelites did not have cars back then; they had to walk. It would take them about 10 days of walking! It may also have been in the summer when it gets very hot. Can you imagine walking for 10 days in the hot summer?

The Israelites were unhappy, and they started grumbling against God. They complained that there was no food and water and that they hated the manna that God provided for them to eat. They even questioned God’s decision to bring them out of Egypt, saying it was just so that they would die in the desert. We know from the Bible stories we’ve learned so far that God was providing everything they needed—food, water, and protection from enemies. God was even with them by day in a cloud pillar and by night in a fire pillar. But it was not enough for them. They wanted more. Do you remember a time when your parents provided everything you needed but you still wanted more?

God was angry with the Israelites for grumbling, and He sent fiery snakes. The snakes bit the people, and many people died because of the snakebite. The Israelites realized that the snakes were God’s punishment for their grumbling. They confessed their sin to Moses and asked Moses to pray that God would take away the snakes. Moses prayed, and God took away the snakes. God also wanted to heal the people from the snakebites. He told Moses to make a bronze snake and to put it on top of a pole. Anyone who showed that they believed in God’s healing power by looking at the snake would be healed from the snakebite. So Moses did as God commanded; he made the bronze snake and put it on a pole. It happened just as God said it would; everyone who looked at the bronze snake on the pole became well again.



Lesson Questions

Why were the people of Israel unhappy?

They were unhappy because they had to take the long way around the land of Edom. They also complained about not having enough water and having only manna to eat.

What did God do to Israel because of their grumbling?

God sent snakes into the camp to bite the people.

What happened when the snakes bit them?

The snakebite would kill them.

Did they all die?

No, some of them lived.

How were they saved?

God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who was bitten by a snake and looked at the snake on the pole would live.

Presentation Ideas



A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces with the lesson.



Snakes

Bring in pictures of various kinds of snakes. Talk about how some are poisonous and some are not. Ask the students whether they ever have been bitten by or have seen a poisonous snake. In today's lesson, God judges the Israelites sin by sending fiery snakes to bite them.

Praise and Worship

God Is So Good

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

I Will Sing of the Mercies

Rejoice in the Lord Always

This Is the Day

Trust and Obey



Fiery Snakes

The people of Israel were tired and grumpy,
(Rub eyes; then frown.)

On their long journey beside the Red Sea.
(Slowly march in place.)

They complained about Moses and food and water,
(Move hands in talking motion.)

They spoke against God, their Heavenly Father.
(Continue moving hands in talking motion; then point up.)

So God sent a punishment, fiery snakes,
(Bend index and middle finger like fangs, and slither arm back and forth
in the air.)

And the people of Israel saw their mistakes.
(Nod and point to eyes.)

They repented, and with the bronze snake in their sight,
(Bow head, palms together; then look up and hold hand above eyes.)

They were healed by God from the deadly bites.
(Point up; pretend to bite hand with “fang fingers.”)

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

“That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments” (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



Clay Snakes

Materials: orange or brown clay, craft sticks, paper plates

Have the students use orange or brown clay to make their own snakes. Then give each child a craft stick and have him wrap the snake around the pole. Set the snake on a paper plate and let it dry.



Snake Pop-up Card

Draw a spiral on a half-sheet of cardstock. The spiral should be about four inches wide. Turn the spiral into a snake by adding eyes, patterns, and color. Decorate the back and cut out the spiral. Apply glue behind the snake’s head (the center of the spiral). Place the whole snake in the middle of the left side of a half-sheet of folded cardstock. Allow the glue to dry. Apply glue to the snake’s tail (the end of the spiral) and glue to the right side of the cardstock. Close card carefully and press firmly. Open the card carefully. The tail should be glued in place. Add a tongue to the snake and decorate the front and inside of the card. Choose a verse from today’s lesson, and have the students write it on the front or back of the card.



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Bronze Serpent Snack

Materials: pretzel sticks, gummy worms, frosting

Directions: Spread some frosting on a pretzel stick. Then take a gummy worm and wrap it around the pretzel stick. Make enough for the class. Remind the students why God judged the Israelites and what they had to do to be saved.



Yarn Snakes

Materials: coloring sheet from back of lesson, strips of red and yellow yarn, crayons.

Give each student one of the coloring sheets at the back of the lesson. Have him



color the picture and then glue red and yellow strips of yarn to the page to represent the fiery snakes.

A Serpent of Bronze

Materials: red cardstock with spiral snake outline, bronze metallic paint, paintbrushes, scissors, hole-puncher (optional), chopsticks (optional), red yarn or ribbon (optional).

Have the students cut out the spiral snakes; then allow them to paint bronze designs onto the “fiery” red snakes. Have older students attach the snake to a “pole” using the hole-puncher, ribbon, and chopstick.

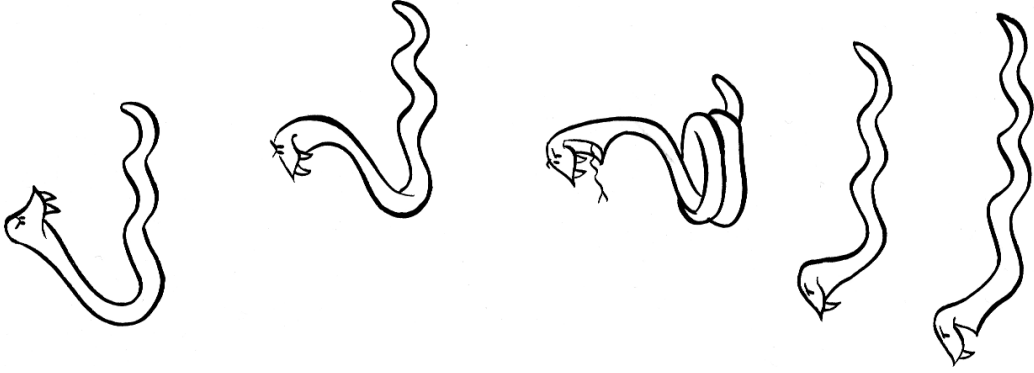
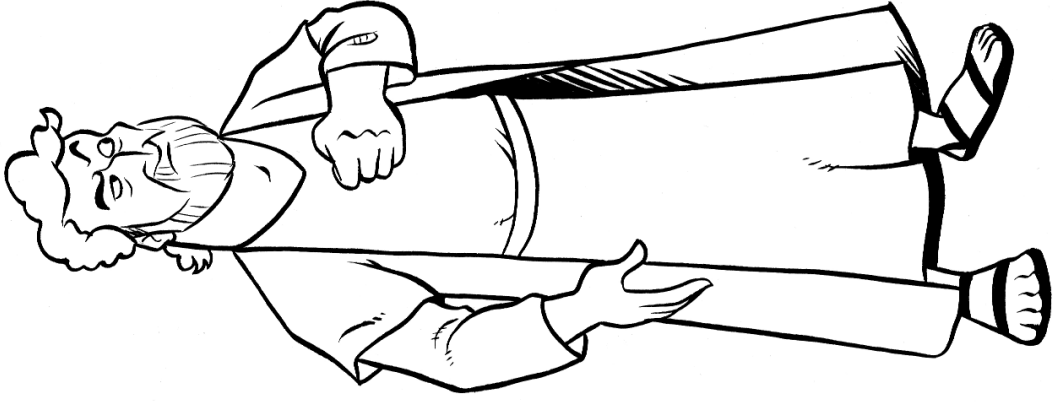
Coloring Sheets

Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets at the back of this lesson. The students can color the pages in class or at home.

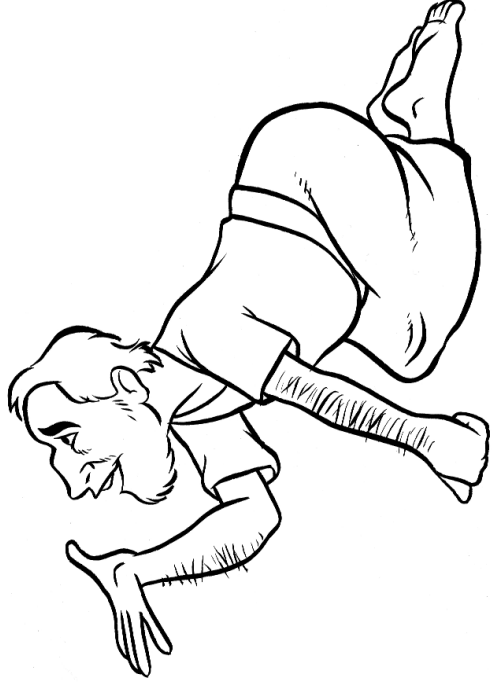
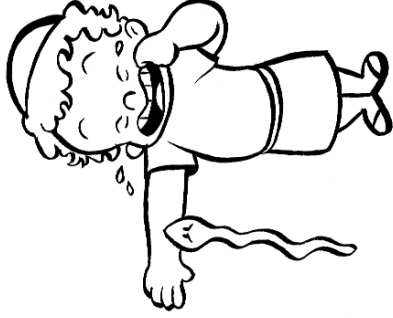
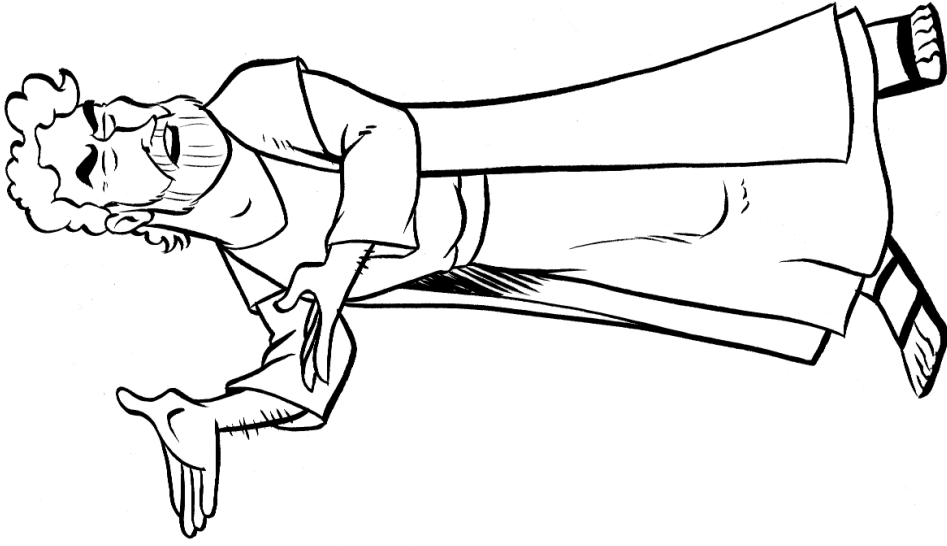
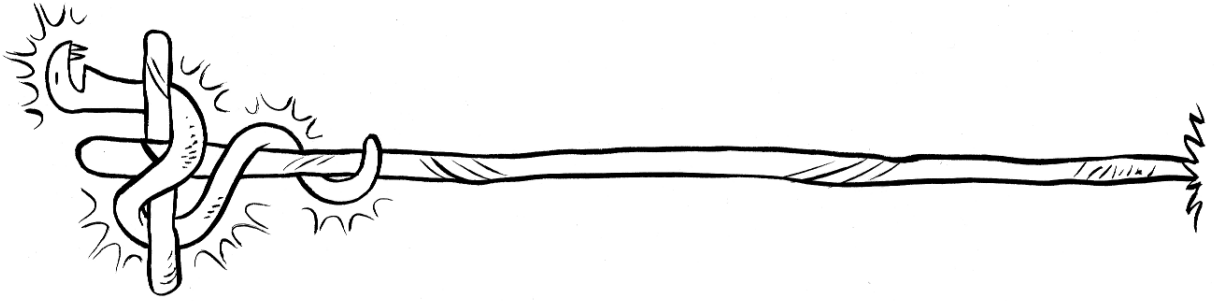


MEMORY VERSE

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14).



God punishes Israel



God offers healing



The people began to complain and speak against God and Moses, asking why they were brought into the wilderness to die. They said “There is no food and no water, and we don’t like the manna.” So the Lord sent fiery serpents to bite the people (Numbers 21:4–6).



“So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived” (Numbers 21:9).

