



God Offers Israel Healing from Sin

Numbers 21:4–9



LESSON GOAL

Students will learn of the judgment and mercy of God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Describe Israel's sin.
- Recount God's response to Israel's sin.
- Tell the people's response to the judgment of God.
- Describe how the people received God's mercy.

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!



Discouraging Detour

Materials: map of the Middle East during the time of Israel's journey from Egypt to the Promised Land

Directions: Use this activity to provide important background information leading up to the second generation of Israelites' sin of complaining. Show the class a map of the Middle East, and outline the detour the Israelites had to take from Kadesh to get to the Promised Land because the king of Edom refused their passage in Numbers 20:14–21. Draw the straight route on the map as well so the students can compare the two distances. Explain that the detour added 200 miles to the people's journey on foot. Make sure the students understand there were two million people traveling on foot through the desert during the summer months, when temperatures can reach 120 degrees. Lead the students in a discussion of this new challenge faced by the Israelites by asking some of the following questions:

1. What is the longest distance you ever have walked?
2. Have you ever driven 200 miles in a car? How long did it take you to drive that distance?
3. How long do you think it would take to walk 200 miles? [You may choose to calculate the amount of time it would take based on average walking speed.]
4. Should the Israelites have complained during this trial?
5. What does the Bible tell us to do when we face a difficult trial? [Refer to James 1:2–8; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10; and 1 Peter 3:13–17; 4:12–19; 5:6–11.]



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

Reading of the Text

Read Numbers 21:4–9.

Introduction

Have you ever seen a poisonous snake? Have you ever been near one so poisonous that if it bit you, you could die? The people of Israel are going to run into some poisonous snakes, and many people will die. We will see why these snakes are among the people and how the people are rescued.



Leadoff Questions

LOQ: How did the Israelites respond when they had to take a longer route to the Promised Land?

Answer: They became impatient and frustrated. They complained against God.

LOQ: What did the Israelites complain about?

Answer: They complained that there was no food and water and said that God had brought them into the wilderness to die. They also said they hated the manna that God had provided for them.

LOQ: Had God provided for the Israelites in the past?

Answer: Yes. He had provided them with water, manna, and quail throughout their journey in the wilderness.

LOQ: How should the Israelites have responded when they became frustrated?

Answer: They should have trusted God's Word and remembered the promises He had made to them in the past. Instead, the Israelites showed their wickedness by being unthankful for what God had so graciously provided.

LOQ: What was God's response to Israel's sin?

Answer: He punished them by sending fiery snakes. Many of those who had been bitten died.

LOQ: Why does God judge sin?

Answer: God hates sin. He has to judge sin because He is holy and righteous, and sin deserves punishment.

LOQ: What did the Israelites do when they saw people dying from the snakebites?

Answer: They went to Moses and confessed their sin. They admitted that they were wrong to complain against God and Moses, and they asked Moses to pray to God on their behalf.

LOQ: What did God tell Moses to do?

Answer: God told Moses to make a snake out of bronze. Moses was to set this snake up on a pole so the Israelites could see it. God said that those who looked at the snake would live.

LOQ: What would happen to those who would not look at the bronze serpent?

Answer: They would die.

LOQ: What did the Israelites need in order to be saved?

Answer: They needed to have faith in God. They had to listen to His words and believe that everything He said was true.

Summary

God provided for every need Israel had. Lasting clothes, food, and water were some of the blessings the Israelites saw God provide daily. They had been miraculously rescued from slavery and had conquered many opposing nations. God's guiding hand and loving provision daily were seen in their lives. Even so, the people grumbled and complained about God's goodness. They wanted more. When they grumbled about the route they had to take and the food and water that God provided, God punished them. He put fiery serpents in their path, and many people were bitten and died. When they realized that they had done wrong and that God was in control, the people confessed their sin and asked God to remove the snakes. God provided a way of salvation for those who were bitten. Anyone who looked at the bronze snake on the pole was saved.

Application

Sin deserves punishment, and that punishment is death. All who have sinned deserve eternal punishment and separation from God. In our selfishness, we turn our backs on God's wonderful provision for our lives and want more. We want to

be God. Man desires to be in control of his destiny. Fortunately, God has provided a way of salvation. Just as God graciously gave Israel the bronze serpent so they could live, He has given us the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. As all who would look to the bronze serpent for salvation would live, so all those who look to Jesus for salvation will 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 any of them 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

'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus

Trust and Obey

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

Directions: Have the students use orange or brown clay to make their own snakes. Then give each student 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 the 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.



Bronze Serpent Snack

Materials: pretzel sticks, gummy worms, frosting

Directions: Spread some frosting on a pretzel stick. Wrap a gummy worm around the 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

Directions: 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)

Directions: 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 a chopstick.



Sin Brings Punishment

As we study Numbers 21, it is clear that the people of Israel did not trust God to provide for all their needs. They did not depend on God to be God and in control of their situation. They decided to complain that their situation was not in their control. Their sin brought punishment. That punishment was the fiery serpents. Throughout the Old Testament, people sinned and were punished with a consequence. Sin brings punishment and makes us rely on God again. Think of some examples of times when Israel sinned and was punished, bringing them back to a correct view of God.



Serpent Tag

Materials: 11 plastic snakes, sidewalk chalk, chair, pole, masking tape

Directions: Before class, tape one plastic snake to the pole, and attach the pole to the chair. Place the chair in the middle of a large playing area. Draw or tape a small circle (about six feet in diameter) around the chair, and label it "safe zone." Draw or tape a larger circle around the smaller circle (30–50 feet or large enough for your entire class to safely run around in).

During class, direct all students to stand inside the larger circle. Pass out the remaining 10 snakes to various students, and explain to the class that these students represent the "fiery serpents" in Numbers 21. Instruct the serpents to run around the circle, biting the Israelites. When a student is bitten (touched on any part of the body) by a snake, he must run to the smaller circle, or safe zone, within 10 seconds to be healed by the bronze serpent. If time runs out, or if the student

is bitten by a different snake on the way to the safe zone, he is dead and must trade places with one of the fiery serpents. If the student does make it to the safe zone, he must look at the bronze serpent and recite aloud five things he is thankful to God for before returning to the game healed. If a student runs outside the larger circle, he is considered dead and must trade places with a fiery serpent.



“God Offers Israel Healing from Sin”

Use this work sheet to reinforce the key truths of today’s lesson. The work sheet is located at the back of the lesson.



Journal Page: “Saved from Sin”

Give each student a copy of the journal page at the back of this lesson. The students can complete the page individually, in small groups, or at home.

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 Offers Israel Healing from Sin



Numbers 21:4-9

Name _____

1. The children of Israel became _____ on the way to the Promised Land.

encouraged discouraged

uplifted satisfied

2. How did the people sin in verse 5? _____

3. Because of their sin, God sent _____ to bite and kill the people.

sandwiches servants

snakes sandals

4. Did the people confess their sin? _____

5. What did Moses do for the people? _____

6. God told Moses to make a _____.

7. What did the people have to do in order to be saved from the deadly snakebites?

Saved from Sin

“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).

What if you were very sick and had only to look at the cure in order to be made well? Would you look? In today’s lesson, the Israelites had only to look at God’s provision for them in order to be cured from the fiery serpents’ bites. This was a picture of Christ being lifted up on the cross (John 3:14–15). Just as the serpent was lifted on a pole to cure the Israelites from the serpents’ bites, Christ was lifted up on the cross so that whoever believes on Him will not perish but have eternal life. Have you taken a look at the cross and what it means for your salvation?

In the space below draw two pictures—one of the cross and another of the serpent on the pole.

Explain how these two pictures are similar.

Saved from Sin

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In the space below draw two pictures—one of the cross and another of the serpent on the pole.

Explain how these two pictures are similar.

John 3:14 says, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."

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What happened when the people looked up to the serpent on the pole?

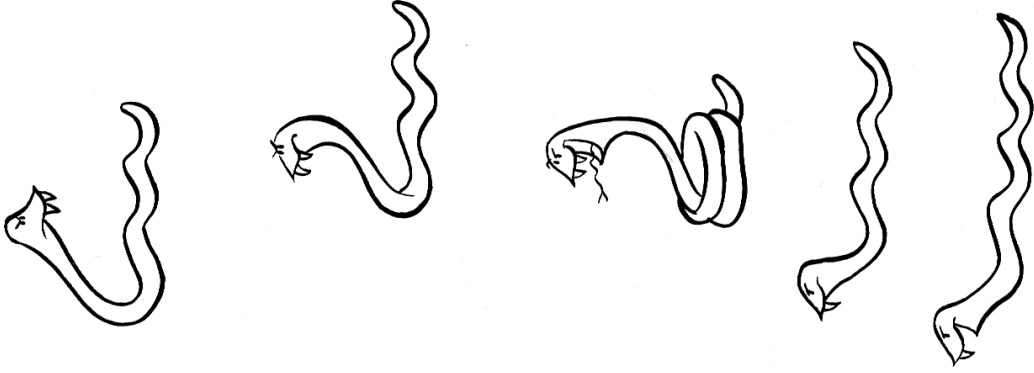
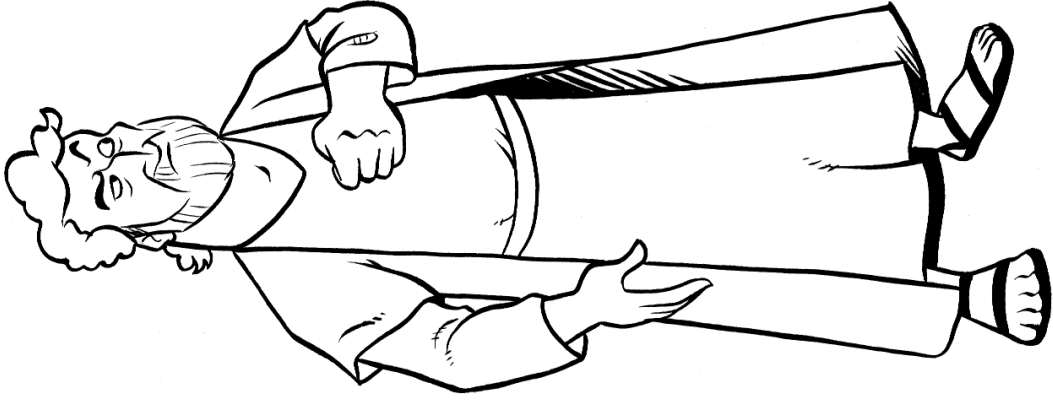
What happened when the people looked up to the serpent on the pole?

What happens when people look to Jesus and trust Him for the salvation of their sins?

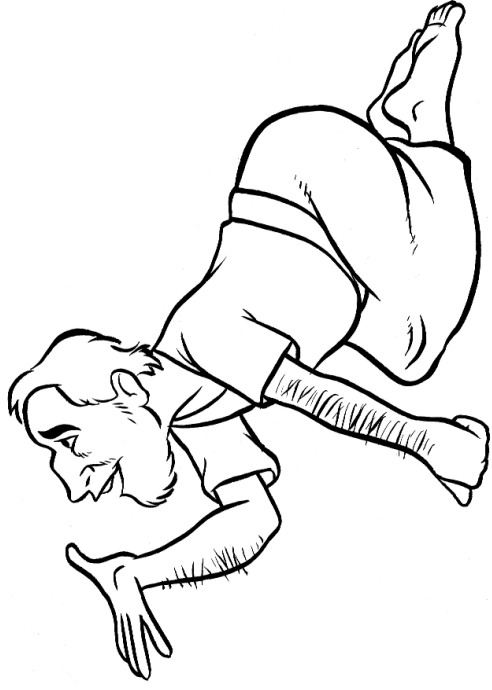
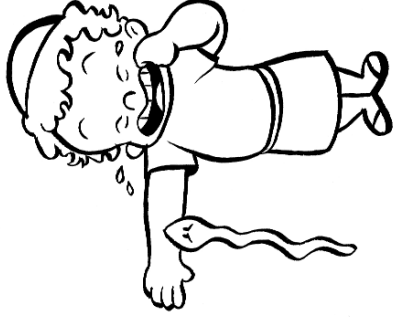
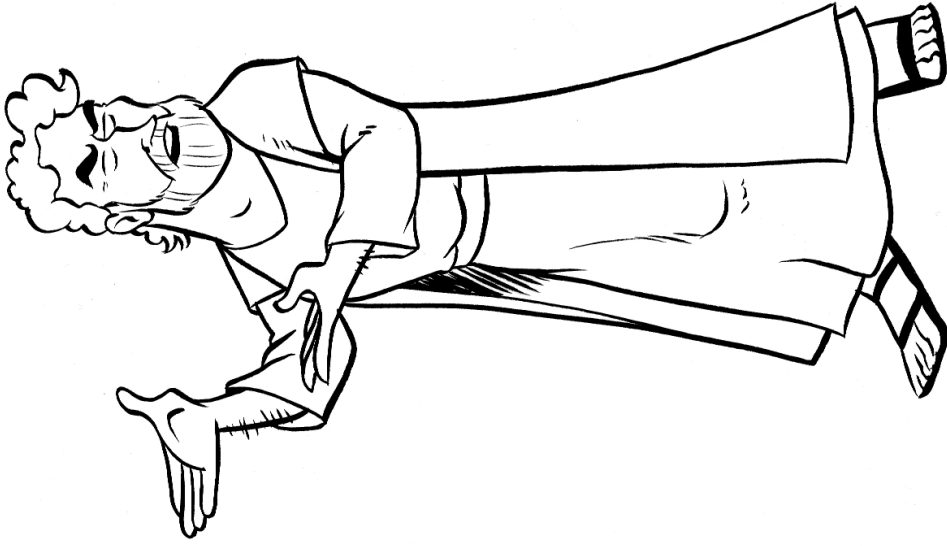
What happens when people look to Jesus and trust Him for the salvation of their sins?

Do you understand about God's provision for your salvation? If not, ask your parents or a teacher to explain it to you.

Do you understand about God's provision for your salvation? If not, ask your parents or a teacher to explain it to you.



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).

