



LESSON 35

God offers Israel healing from sin

NUMBERS 20:2-13; 21:4-9



God mercifully provides salvation.



“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live’” (Num 21:8).

Supporting Truths

1. God provides a way of salvation for sinners.
2. God is just to punish sin.
3. God is merciful to provide salvation.
4. God is holy.
5. Salvation is by faith alone.

Objectives

1. Describe how God provided healing for the Israelites.
2. Explain how God was just in punishing Moses and Aaron.
3. Explain why God was merciful in providing healing for the people.
4. Explain how Moses failed to treat God as holy before the people.
5. Describe how this passage is used in John 3:13–17.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON



God offers Israel healing from sin • Numbers 20:2-13; 21:4-9

Lesson Summary

After forty years of wandering the wilderness, the Israelites had not learned from their parents' faithlessness. They angered the LORD at Meribah, and they made Moses's spirit bitter to the point that Moses sinned and spoke rashly to them (Ps 106:33). Only a few months later, they rebelled again. God sent serpents to punish the rebellion, but He also provided a way of salvation. The people had only to look to the bronze serpent and they were healed.

Spotlight on the Gospel

Just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, so too was the Son of Man lifted up on the cross (John 3:14-15). Like the bronze serpent, anyone who looks to Jesus in faith will be saved and live. Those who looked to serpent were given physical life, but those who look to Jesus are given eternal life (3:16). Everyone who looked at the serpent was healed, just as everyone who looks to Jesus is saved through Him (3:17).

LAST WEEK



Israel rejects God's prophet and priest
Numbers 16:1-17:11

THIS WEEK



God offers Israel healing from sin
Numbers 20:2-13; 21:4-9

NEXT WEEK



God blesses Israel through Balaam
Numbers 22:1-24:25

REBELLION

Lesson Commentary

God mercifully provides salvation.

The first generation of Israelites had all but died out, and the second generation was coming of age as Israel again looked to the Promised Land. However, the passing of time had done nothing to remove the rebellion stirring in the people's hearts. Israel's return to Kadesh, almost 40 years later, was accompanied by another rebellion—this time prompted by a lack of water (Num 20:2; c.f. 10:12; 11:1). God faithfully provided for the people, supplying water from a rock (20:11). However, the people were not alone in their rebellion. Moses and Aaron, in the midst of satisfying the people's thirst, ignored God's word.

God punished Moses and Aaron for their rebellion (20:2–13)

The book of Numbers records five instances when the first generation of Israelites after the Exodus rebelled against the LORD: 1) grumbling against the LORD's goodness (11:1–3), 2) complaining about the LORD's provision (11:4–35), 3) challenging Moses' leadership (12:1–16), 4) rejecting God's promises (13:1–14:45), and 5) rejecting the mediator that the LORD had appointed (16:1–17:11). The second generation was not unlike their parents. They complained against Moses for bringing them into the wilderness to die, and for failing to give them figs, vines, or pomegranates (20:2–5)—the very fruit the previous generation had rejected when they failed to enter the Promised Land.

For forty years, Moses had faithfully led the people. Although there were times his faith was weak (11:11–15; 21–22), he had obediently led God's people. He saw how God, time and time again, graciously provided for His people. One such time, in Exodus 17, the people were so upset concerning their lack of water that they were on the verge of stoning Moses (Exod 17:4). But God provided, instructing Moses to strike the rock with his staff (17:5–6).

In Numbers 20, the children of Israel were again without water—their greatest physical need throughout all their wilderness wanderings. So this generation, just like their parents, gathered themselves together against Moses and Aaron to argue with them (Num 20:2–3). Beginning at Horeb (Exod 17:1–7) the LORD had continually provided water for the people, but the situation seemed so desperate to the people that they told Moses that they wished they had died along with Korah and those who followed him in his rebellion (Num 20:3; 16:41–50).

As they had done many times before, Moses and Aaron responded to the people's complaints by seeking the LORD's presence (20:6; c.f. 14:5; 16:4). The LORD spoke to Moses, commanding him to take the staff, assemble the people, and speak to the rock with his brother, Aaron (20:7–8). Like He had done before at Horeb (Exod 17:1–7), God was going to provide water from a rock.

Moses began by faithfully obeying God's word (Num 20:9). But instead of speaking to the rock, Moses spoke harshly to the people, accusing them of being “rebels” against God (20:10). He struck the rock twice with

his rod, and God graciously provided water for the people and their animals (20:11). Moses had failed to follow God's command; he struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock. While decades earlier at Horeb God had commanded Moses to strike the rock (Exod 17:5–6), here at Kadesh, God's instructions were clear: Moses was to speak to the rock (Num 17:8).

The LORD's evaluation of Moses and Aaron's actions reveals the severity of their disobedience. They had failed to believe the LORD and to treat Him as **holy**, set apart and separate from sin, in the sight of the people. Moses' words demonstrate his

THINK ABOUT IT

Man's faithfulness in the past never removes his ongoing obligation to continual obedience in the present.



STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

God offers Israel healing from sin • Numbers 20:2–13; 21:4–9



self-centeredness, and his actions demonstrate his anger and frustration. As a result, Moses and Aaron would not be allowed to bring the people into the Promised Land (20:12). A few months later, Aaron would die on Mount Hor (20:22). Moses would be allowed to view the land, seeing it from a distance (Deut 34:1–6). They both died in the wilderness, just like the first generation.

God saved those who believed His word (21:4–9)

Witnessing Moses and Aaron's disobedience and punishment did nothing to stop the people's rebellion against God. Instead of entering the Promised Land from the south, which would have been the most direct route from Kadesh, Israel was forced to enter from the east. The king of Edom refused them passage along the King's Highway (Num 20:14–21). The refusal would mean that Israel would have to travel an additional 200 miles. As a result, the people became impatient (21:4). However, the extended journey was no excuse for Israel's impatience.



THINK ABOUT IT

God cares more about man's holiness than He does about man's happiness.

Their impatience resulted in their complaint (21:5). They accused God and Moses of bringing them out of Egypt only to kill them in the wilderness. The people were questioning God's faithfulness to His promise.

They did not consider the reality that God's promises may come through difficulty and suffering. God often uses suffering to produce holiness in the lives of His children (Jas 1:2–4; cf. Phil 1:29; Rom 8:28–30).

In response to their lack of faith, God sent "fiery serpents" among the people (Num 21:6). These serpents were venomous and many of the people died after being bitten. But this time, in response to God's judgment, Israel responded with repentance (21:7). They confessed their sin against the LORD, and asked Moses to intercede on their behalf. Moses, no longer angry with the people,

responded with humility and prayed for the people (21:7).

God **mercifully**, showing kindness to people who do not deserve it, provided a means of forgiveness. The LORD instructed Moses to create a bronze serpent and to mount it on a signal pole for the healing of

those who were bitten (20:8). If anyone was bitten, he needed only to look at the serpent in order to live (20:9). This incident emphasizes the vital role of faith, or trust in God, in salvation. Those Israelites who had been bitten simply had to look to the serpent in order to be saved. They were healed by faith. By fixing their gaze upon the snake, the people demonstrated that they believed God's word.

The bronze serpent illustrates that salvation is by faith alone. Just as the serpent was lifted up, so also was the Son of Man lifted up (John 3:14–15). While the serpent was lifted up to provide physical life, the Son of Man was lifted up to provide spiritual life (3:16). As God raised up the serpent so that anyone could be healed, God raised up Jesus so that anyone could be saved through Him (3:17). We must, like the Israelites, demonstrate that we believe God's word by looking to His Son for healing from sin.

THINK ABOUT IT

Salvation is always by grace through faith alone (Gen 15:6; Eph 2:8–9).



Lesson Outline

God mercifully provides salvation.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. God punished Moses and Aaron for their rebellion (20:2–13).
2. God saved those who believed His word (21:4–9).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. God punished Moses and Aaron for their rebellion (20:2–13).

- The people gathered and grumbled against Moses (20:2–5).
- Moses and Aaron went to the entrance of the tent of meeting and the LORD appeared to them (20:6–7).
- The LORD told Moses to take his staff, assemble the people, and speak to the rock (20:8).

- Moses and Aaron did not obey the LORD (20:9–11).
- God punished Moses and Aaron but graciously provided water for the people (20:12–13).

2. God saved those who believed His word (21:4–9).

- The people were impatient and complained against God and against Moses on the way around Edom (21:4–5).
- The LORD sent poisonous serpents to judge the Israelites (21:6).
- The people repented and asked Moses to pray for them (21:7).
- The LORD was merciful and provided a way for the Israelites to be saved (21:8–9).



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

God offers Israel healing from sin • Numbers 20:2–13; 21:4–9



Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. When the people complained, what did God tell Moses to do?**
God told Moses to get his rod, assemble the people, and speak the rock. Then God would provide water from the rock.
- 2. Did Moses obey God?**
No. Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it. As a result, Moses could not enter the Promised Land.
- 3. What did God do to Israel because of their grumbling?**
God sent snakes into the camp to bite the people.
- 4. How were the people 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.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. What did the Israelites complain about?**
They complained that there was no food and water and said that God had brought them into the wilderness to die.
- 2. How should the Israelites have responded when they became frustrated?**
They should have trusted God's Word and remembered the promises He had made to them in the past.
- 3. What did Moses do?**
He disobeyed God. He spoke harshly to the people and struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock.
- 4. How did God punish Moses and Aaron?**
He told them that they would not enter into the Promised Land.
- 5. What was God's response to Israel's impatience and grumbling?**
He punished them by sending venomous snakes. Many of those who had been bitten died.
- 6. What did the Israelites do when they saw people dying from the snakebites?**
They went to Moses and confessed their sin and asked Moses to pray to God on their behalf.
- 7. What did God tell Moses to do?**
God told Moses to make a serpent out of bronze. Moses was to set this serpent up on a pole so the Israelites could see it and be healed.
- 8. What did the Israelites need in order to be saved?**
God said that those who looked at the serpent would live. They needed to have faith in God and look up at the serpent.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



FALL OF TRUST

In today's lesson, the children will hear about Israel's need to trust God to save them. Choose one child to stand in front of the class. Stand 2–3 feet behind the child, and tell him to fall straight back into your arms. Talk about the risk of falling and how the child will have to trust you to catch him.

SNAKES

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



SNAKE ON A POLE

Attach a bronze serpent to the top of a pole to use as a visual aid during the lesson.

WATER FROM A ROCK

Bring a large rock to class. Tell the children that you're going to get water from this rock. Take out a cup, and try to pour water into it from the rock. Next, take out a large water jug, put the rock inside, and see if any water comes out the nozzle. Finally, take out a straw and try to suck water out of the rock. Ask the children why you couldn't get any water from the rock. Then ask them who is able to make water come out of a rock? Explain that only God can make water come out of a rock.



THE BRONZE SERPENT

See *Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2*.

Materials: Craft sheet, paper plate, brown pipe cleaners, craft sticks, crayons, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Pre-cut the picture from the craft sheet. Have children color the picture and glue it to the back of a paper plate. Help them tape two craft sticks together. Form a "bronze serpent" by coiling two brown pipe cleaners around each other, forming a triangular shaped head on one end. Wrap the coiled pipe cleaner around the craft sticks and tape to secure. Tape the bottom craft stick to the paper plate as shown below.

The Bronze Serpent
See *Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2*.



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

God offers Israel healing from sin • Numbers 20:2–13; 21:4–9



AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

EMERGENCY

Ask the children 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, and they called out to God for help. 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 child a marker. Instruct the children to fill the entire paper with things they are thankful for. In today's lesson, the children will hear what happened when the Israelites were ungrateful for what God had given them.



ILLUSTRATE

WORLD'S MOST VENOMOUS SNAKE

Use this illustration to communicate the severity of some snake bites. The African **Black mamba**, native to much of Sub-Saharan Africa, is one of the most feared and dangerous snakes in the world. Their strikes are very quick, extremely accurate, and their venom is the most rapid-acting venom of any snake species. If bitten, symptoms quickly begin to develop, usually within less than ten minutes. The venom has been known to cause permanent **paralysis** in some cases, and untreated black mamba bites have a mortality rate of 100%. There is an antivenom that can, in some cases, prevent death, but it must be administered quickly and in large doses.

ABUNDANT WATER FROM A ROCK

Use this illustration to help the children understand the enormity of God's miraculous provision. It would have taken 187,500 gallons of water just to give every Israelite a 12 ounce drink of water (2 million Israelites). This is over 1/4th the volume of an Olympic sized swimming pool (660,000 gallons of water). And this doesn't even include the animals that drank from the rock too! (Num 20:11)



APPLY

SERPENT POP-UP BOOK

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheet, yarn, cardstock, crayons, scissors, glue, and hole punch.

Directions: Have children fold a piece of cardstock in half width-wise to form a book. Insert a half sheet of cardstock into the book. Punch two holes through all pages in the binding. Tie yarn through the holes to hold book together. Color and cut out pictures and verses from craft sheet. Create two pop-up serpents by folded strips of green cardstock like an accordion. Glue picture of Israel complaining and Num 21:5 to front of book. Glue two pictures of people with serpents, the paper serpents, and Num 21:6 to page 2. Glue pictures of Moses and man seeking healing and Num 21:8 to page 3.

Serpent Pop-Up Book
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2



AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

DISCOURAGING DETOUR

Show the class a map of the Middle East during the time of Israel's journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. On the map, 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 children can compare the two distances. Explain that the detour added 200 miles to the people's journey on foot. Lead the children 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. What do you think the temperature was like during Israel's journey?
3. Have you ever driven 200 miles in a car? How long did it take?
4. How long do you think it would take to walk 200 miles?
5. Should the Israelites have complained?

RESPONDING TO DIFFICULT TRIALS

Use these sword drills to discuss what the Bible tells us to do when we face a difficult trial: James 1:2–8; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10; and 1 Peter 3:13–17; 4:12–19; 5:6–11.



ILLUSTRATE

LIFE WITHOUT WATER

We cannot live long without water. In severe heat with no water, dehydration can occur within an hour (adults can lose as much as 1.5 liters of water through sweat alone). Someone performing intense activity in the heat without replacing fluids can actually die within a period of several hours. We lose water through sweat, urine, feces, and breathing, and this water must be replenished in order for our organs to continue functioning properly. How long can we survive without water? Anywhere from 3 to 5 days under ideal circumstances. In less than ideal circumstances the time can be much shorter.

TRUST EXERCISE

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!



APPLY

LOOKING TO THE SON OF MAN

Read Numbers 21:6–9 and John 3:14–15 together as a class, noting the similarities and difference between these passages.