



August 18, 2013
Numbers 21
"Born Again"
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The Israelites who left Egypt with Moses have all died in the wilderness, and their children are now about ready to enter into the Promised Land. They are near the border at a place called Kadesh, which means holy, in the Desert of Zin. Their journey will require them to go through a territory called Edom, so they sent a message to the king of Edom asking permission to make a shortcut through his country, but the king was unwilling and refused their request. His decision caused them to have to circumvent Edom by going further south, all the way back to the Red Sea at the Gulf of Aqaba, and, as you might imagine, if you were on a long road trip, the "people in the back seat" became very cranky!¹

Their story sounds like a scene from the movie *Ground Hog Day*, in which things keep repeating themselves over and over again. The people complained and people died! You'd think they would have learned by now, especially since all of their parents had all died in the desert over the past 37 to 38 years.² They continued to put God to the test with their grumbling and complaining, so God judged them by bringing venomous snakes into the camp. God, in his mercy, told them the remedy would come in the form of a bronze/brass snake Moses was to make and put on a pole so they might look on it and be healed.

In this study, Pastor Gary will help people understand the importance of being born again and looking to the crucified and resurrected Christ for spiritual healing.

¹ [Numbers 21:4-9](#)

² There is an approximate time gap of 37 to 38 years between Numbers 19 and Numbers 20.

Historical Background - Bronze Snake

1. Some 700 years later, the bronze snake Moses made actually became an Israelite idol!
 - a. **2 Kings 18:4** - *"[Hezekiah] removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)"*³
2. Several hundred years after Moses' snake showed up in Greek and Roman mythology.
 - a. One example is the Greek god of medicine, Asclepius, who carried a staff with a serpent on it.⁴
3. Today, the most widely known emblem or symbol for healing is a serpent on a pole, as evidenced by the insignias of the National Medical Library and the American Medical Association (AMA).

Historical Background - The Israelites

4. The people in this account were staying the course as habitual gripers and complainers who seemed to always have something to say about their hunger, thirst, and the fact that they hated manna!
 - a. The most amazing thing to consider concerning the ways God cared for 2 to 3 million people is the enormity of his provision.
 - i. It's been estimated that it took 1,500 tons of food and 11 million gallons of water every single day to sustain them!
 - b. **Psalm 78:14-16, 23-29** - *"He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire at night. He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas; he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers... he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat. He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by his power. He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore. He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents. They ate till they had more than enough..."*

³ In Hebrew, Nehushtan means, "a thing of brass."

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asclepius>

5. God's judgment for their complaining and grumbling attitude came in the form of venomous snakes.
 - a. The King James Version (KJV) uses the term "*fiery serpent*," which describes their appearance and the fiery nature of their venom.
 - b. The Hebrew word is seraph, which is the word used for angels in [Isaiah 6:1-6](#).
 - c. These may have been special snakes God brought or God could have simply used the sand viper, which is indigenous to that region.
 - i. The sand viper buries its body in the sand so that the only thing above ground is its eyes and nostrils. They even have flaps over their nose and eyes that keep the sand out.
6. There's nothing like having a large number of people dying from poisonous snakes to make you want to get right with God!
 - a. [Numbers 21:7](#) - "*The people came to Moses and said, 'We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.'* So Moses prayed for the people."
7. God heard Moses' prayer and offered a remedy or anti-venom, if you will.
 - a. [Numbers 21:8-9](#) - "*The Lord said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.'* So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived."
 - b. In the Bible, bronze/brass is a symbol of judgment, and snakes are a picture of sin, evil, and death.⁵
8. God told Moses to lift the snake up so the people could look on the symbol of sin and judgment, and in this way, God's wrath would be satisfied and they would not die.

Jesus' Interpretation

9. The concept of looking at the very thing that's killing you seems very peculiar, but fortunately for us, Jesus interprets things for us.
10. In [John 3:1-16](#), we read about Jesus' encounter with a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Sanhedrin.⁶
 - a. It's interesting to note that he came to Jesus secretly at night, because a man of his standing in the religious community couldn't afford to be seen

⁵ In [Genesis 3:1](#), the Hebrew word for snake, is nachash, which is the word used for Satan.

⁶ The Sanhedrin was a Jewish ruling council of 70 elders.

- with Jesus in public in broad daylight, because Jesus was a controversial figure who claimed to be the Messiah.
- b. Nicodemus was persuaded that Jesus was who he claimed to be, so he took steps to investigate further.
 - c. Jesus made what probably seemed like a highly unusual statement, when he said, *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."* ([John 3:3](#))
 - d. Naturally, Nicodemus wondered how in the world someone could enter their mother's womb again, so Jesus gave him the explanation when he said, *"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."* ([John 3:5-6](#))
 - i. There is a natural birth (being born of water) and there is a spiritual birth (when someone is born of the Spirit).
 - e. Jesus expressed surprise when Nicodemus didn't understand these things, especially since Jesus called him *"Israel's teacher."* ([John 3:10](#))
 - f. Jesus' explanation of these spiritual matters included a comparison of himself with the bronze snake in this account.
 - i. [John 3:14-15](#) - *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."*
 - ii. [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) - *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*
11. Looking to Jesus on the cross is to see our sin and God's judgment for our sin satisfied, in this singular, eternal, and complete moment in time, and just as the Israelites exercised faith in the remedy that God provided, so we are saved by exercising our faith in Jesus Christ who died for our sins.

We Are All Sinners

Sin Is Rebellion Against God And His Perfect Standard

12. [Romans 3:10](#) - *"... There is none righteous, no, not one."* (KJV)
13. [Romans 3:23](#) - *"... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

God's Holiness, Righteousness, And Justice

Require That Sin Must Be Judged And That Sin Must Result In Death

14. [Romans 6:23](#) - *"For the wages of sin is death..."*

15. **Hebrews 9:27** - *“... man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...”*

Jesus Assumed Our Sin And Our Punishment On The Cross
And Satisfied The Wrath Of God

16. **Isaiah 53:5-6** - *“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*
17. **2 Corinthians 5:21** - *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

To “Believe In Jesus” Means You Accept By Faith His Sacrifice On The Cross
For Your Sins, And That You Yield Your Life To His Lordship

18. **John 3:17-18** - *“For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”*

The Result Is Forgiveness Of Sins And “Eternal Life” Through Jesus Christ

19. **Romans 6:23** - *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
20. **2 Corinthians 5:8** - *“We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”*
- a. Paul makes it very clear that when Christians die, their spirit separates from their body and goes immediately to heaven to be with the Lord forever. The body, however, returns to dust, from whence it came.
21. **John 1:12-13** - *“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Numbers 21:4-9](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Do you know someone who is a “professional complainer”?
4. How would your friends or members of your family rate you as a grumbler/complainer?
5. Read and discuss [Philippians 2:14-15](#).⁷
6. Read and discuss [Romans 3:10](#) and [Romans 3:23](#).
7. Considering the fact that most people believe themselves to be a “good person,” how would people you know respond to the question, “Do you think you’re a sinner?”
 - a. Use this quote by Lindsey Lohan as part of your discussion: “I’m really a good person and I have a good heart... I don’t drink, I don’t do drugs and I don’t lie.”⁸
 - b. Do you think their answer is based on a comparison between themselves and someone they know who is not as good as they are?
8. Spend time reading and talking about the Scriptures included in what is commonly known as the Romans Road: [Romans 3:10, 23; 6:23; 5:8; 10:9-10](#).
9. Read and discuss [John 3:1-18](#).
 - a. This would be a good opportunity for the people in your group to share their story of coming to faith in Christ.
10. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: give thanks to the Lord for their salvation; purpose in their heart to not only know the basics of salvation, but to share their story of what the Lord has done in and through him or her since they came to know Jesus, with the hope of leading people to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).

⁷ “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God...”

⁸ <http://www.thehollywoodgossip.com/2009/03/lindsay-lohan-im-a-good-person/>