

SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 35

God offers Israel healing from sin

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



DAY 1

Moses and Aaron rebelled against God • Numbers 20:2-11

READ

Numbers 20:2-11

EXPLAIN

The truth of Numbers 20:2-11

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. In Numbers 20, the children of Israel were again without water (cf. Exod 17:4). So this generation, just like their parents, gathered themselves together against Moses and Aaron (20:2-3). As they had done many times before, Moses and Aaron responded to the people's complaints by seeking the LORD (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 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 (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). However, Moses had failed to follow God's command; he struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock.

ASK

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. When the people complained, what did God tell Moses to do?
God told Moses to get his rod, assemble the people, and speak to the rock. Then God would provide water from the rock.
3. How did Moses disobey God?
He struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock.

DISCUSS

1. Discuss with your family the importance of obeying every part of God's word.
2. Talk about God's faithfulness even when we sin.

DAY 2

God punished Moses and Aaron for their rebellion •
Numbers 20:12–13

READ

Numbers 20:12–13

EXPLAIN

The truth of Numbers 20:12–13

The LORD's evaluation of Moses and Aaron's sin 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 self-centeredness, and his actions demonstrate his anger and frustration. As a result, Moses and Aaron would not be allowed to enter 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. Why did God include Aaron in His punishment since it was Moses who struck the rock? First, God's instructions were to both Moses and Aaron (20:8). Second, Aaron served alongside Moses, even helping him gather the assembly before the rock (20:10). Moses' words should have been enough for Aaron to stop his brother from striking the rock, but Aaron did nothing. This was his third time joining with those around him in rebellion against the LORD (Exod 32:21–24; Num 12:1–16).

ASK

1. Did Moses obey God?
No. Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it.
2. How did God punish Moses and Aaron?
He told them that they would not enter into the Promised Land.
3. Why did God include Aaron in His punishment?
(1) God's instructions were to both Moses and Aaron (20:8); (2) Aaron served alongside Moses, even helping him to gather the people before the rock (20:10); and (3) Aaron did nothing to stop his brother from sinning.

DISCUSS

1. Define "holy" and provide examples of times when you've failed to treat God as holy.
2. Discuss how anger and frustration quickly lead to more sin.

DAY 3

God punished the people's rebellion • Numbers 21:4–6

READ

Numbers 21:4–6

EXPLAIN

The truth of Numbers 21:4–6

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. This was because the king of Edom refused them passage along the King's Highway (20:14–21). The refusal meant 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 or 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 (21:6). These serpents were venomous and many of the people died after being bitten.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Why did Israel have to travel an additional 200 miles to reach the Promised Land?
The king of Edom refused them passage along the King's Highway (20:14–21).
2. How did Israel respond to this delay?
They became impatient and complained (21:4–5).
3. What was God's response to Israel's impatience and grumbling?
He punished them by sending venomous snakes. Many of those who were bitten died.

DISCUSS 

1. Explain why trials or disappointments are never excuses for sin.
2. Discuss how 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).

DAY 4*God saved those who believed His word • Numbers 21:7–9***READ** 

Numbers 21:7–9

EXPLAIN **The truth of Numbers 21:7–9**

In response to the people's lack of faith, God sent "fiery serpents" among the people (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.

ASK 

1. 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.
2. 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 look upon it and be healed.
3. What did the Israelites need to do 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.

DISCUSS 

1. Describe how the people responded to God's punishment of their sin.
2. Discuss the role of faith in salvation.

DAY 5

As Moses lifted up the serpent, so too was Jesus lifted up •
John 3:9–21

READ

John 3:1–21

EXPLAIN

The truth of John 3:13–17

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a religious leader in Israel. However, even though he was an established teacher in Israel and very familiar with the Old Testament, he did not understand spiritual truths (3:4–9). Nicodemus was unwilling to accept Jesus as God and unwilling to admit that he was a helpless sinner. In desperate need of salvation, Jesus drew from the Old Testament to instruct this teacher concerning eternal life. Jesus referred to the story of Numbers 21:5–9 where the Israelites who looked at the serpent lifted up by Moses were healed. Just as the serpent was lifted up, so also was the Son of Man lifted up (3:14–15). The bronze serpent illustrates that salvation is by faith alone. 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.

ASK

1. What did Nicodemus not understand?
He did not understand spiritual truths.
2. What Old Testament story did Jesus use to teach Nicodemus about eternal life?
Jesus referred to the story of Numbers 21:5–9 where the Israelites who looked at the serpent lifted up by Moses were healed.
3. What does the bronze serpent illustrate?
The bronze serpent illustrates that salvation is by faith alone.

DISCUSS

1. Compare and contrast Moses' lifting up of the bronze serpent with Jesus being lifted up on the cross.
2. Discuss why everyone must be healed from sin.

NEXT WEEK

God blesses Israel through Balaam

Numbers 22:1–24:45

