



UNIT 6 | SESSION 3

## GOD HEALED THE PEOPLE

NUMBERS 21

### KEY PASSAGE:

Exodus 15:11

### BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

What is God like? God is holy, good, and loving.

### CHRIST CONNECTION:

God sent snakes to punish the people, but anyone who was bitten could look at the snake on the pole and live. We deserve to die because of our sin, but anyone who looks to Jesus on the cross and trusts in Him will live forever with God.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION



## LEADER Bible Study

If there was one thing the Israelites were good at, it was grumbling. They weren't just good; they were experts: "We have no food. We have no water. Why are we in the wilderness left to die? The land has big people in it." And on and on and on. We have to wonder how Moses put up with it all.

In Numbers 21, we encounter another time when the people grumbled—once again about food and water. Each time they doubted God's goodness and truthfulness, God had shown them mercy and grace. But on this day, He sent serpents into the Israelites' camp to strike them for their unfaithfulness. Many people died.

We might not like to think of it, but this is what the Israelites deserved all along. Their sin earned them judgment and death. God was perfectly just and righteous to give His people what they deserved.

Yet, as we have seen so often in the Old Testament and will continue to see throughout the rest of Scripture, God extends grace and mercy along with judgment. When the people pleaded for Moses to intercede on their behalf, God instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it on a pole. Whoever looked upon it would be healed.

Notice two things. First, God's response was not to remove judgment but to provide

salvation through judgment. This is another theme we have seen throughout the Scriptures (e.g., Noah, the plagues).

Second, God's instructions made little to no sense. Imagine you are an Israelite and were just bitten by a serpent. Although other serpents are all around still, you are to take your eyes off of that threat and turn them upward to look at a bronze serpent on a pole—an image of the very thing that has brought death to your door?

This detail in the story is a foreshadowing of what God has called us to do in Christ. While our faith is far from blind, it always has an aspect of not making sense, at least to the world around us. But this is how we are saved too: by taking our eyes off of the sin in and around us, and looking upon Christ lifted up on the cross—He who became sin (2 Cor. 5:21). We too are saved through judgment, for our judgment has been placed on Christ.

### BIBLICAL THEME

**Salvation through judgment:** Throughout the Old Testament, God judged and saved for His glory. Examples:

- the Fall (Gen. 3)
- the Flood (Gen. 6-9)
- the Exodus (Ex. 5-12)
- the battle of Jericho (Josh. 6)

## WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

**SAY** “Have you ever been around someone who complains a lot? Think about how you felt around him or her. Do you complain a lot? Why or why not?”

### 2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

#### OPTION 1: LOOK, LOOK

Before the session, print the phrase *Keep Your Eyes on Jesus* in size 2 font on a computer. The idea is to make it small enough that the kids are unable to read it without a magnifying glass.

Print a copy of the tiny text for each kid. Allow them time to try to figure out the phrase on their own. After a few minutes, allow them to use the magnifying glasses to figure it out.

**SAY** “What is the point of a magnifying glass? [Allow kids to respond.] A magnifying glass helps us see something small. We look through the magnifying glass and focus our eyes on one thing. In our Bible story today, we’ll learn how the Israelites were told to focus their eyes on something that would heal them. What do you think it was?”

#### OPTION 2: ACT IT OUT



Before the session, come up with two or three scenarios for kids to act out in front of the group. (e.g., cleaning their rooms, eating vegetables at dinner, doing dishes)

Choose volunteers to act out their scenario in front of the group. Designate one volunteer for each scenario to have a bad attitude/complaining while the other volunteers complete the scenario with a positive attitude. Allow each group to act out the scenario. Once each group completes their scenario, ask the kids in the class who finished their chores with a good attitude versus a poor attitude.

**SAY** “Sometimes we complain and have bad attitudes. When we have a bad attitude, it’s often because we’ve forgotten to be grateful for what we have. In today’s story, we’ll see a good example of how God’s people sinned by complaining.”

## INTRODUCE the Bible Story

### 1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (2 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

**SAY** “Hi, everyone. I’m [your name]. It sure is great to see you today! Did you bring your Bible today? [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one.] Can someone tell me why the Bible is important? [Allow a volunteer to respond.] The Bible is important because it tells us the incredible story of God’s plan to save sinners. In it, God tells us everything we need to know to have a relationship with Him. The stories in the Bible really happened, and whether you hear a story for the first time or the hundredth time, there is always something new to discover.”



## THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

### **LEARN** the Bible Story

#### **1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER** (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Numbers 21. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “God Healed the People.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

#### **GOD HEALED THE PEOPLE**

“**Moses and the Israelites traveled in the wilderness** on a long journey. **The people were impatient, and they complained.** “Why did you lead us into the wilderness? **We are going to die here.** There is no bread. There is no water. **We don’t like the food we have!”**

**God responded by sending venomous snakes that bit the Israelites.** Many of the people died.

**The Israelites went to Moses and said, “We sinned by complaining. Please talk to God for us. Ask Him to take away the snakes.”**

So Moses spoke to God for the people. **God told Moses what to do: “Make a snake image and put it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will recover.”**

**Moses** did what God said. He **made a bronze snake and mounted it on a pole. Whenever someone was bitten, that person looked at the bronze snake and recovered.**

Christ Connection: God sent snakes to punish the people, but anyone who was bitten could look at the snake on the pole and live. We deserve to die because of our sin, but anyone who looks to Jesus on the cross and trusts in Him will live forever with God. ”

#### **STORYTELLING TIPS**

**Use props:** Bring in a staff and/or rubber snake to illustrate the story.

**Vary tone:** As you tell the story, draw kids’ attention by changing your tone when speaking dialogue. Slow your pace or emphasize key words.

### 2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

**SAY** “ Open your Bible to Numbers 21. What was the reason the Israelites complained? Let’s look at verse 5 together. [Choose a volunteer to read verse 5 aloud.]

Last week, our story was from Numbers 20. The Israelites did something similar to what they did in this week’s story. The Israelites complained about not having any water. This week in Numbers 21, the Israelites complained again about not having bread or water, and they didn’t like the food they had. On and on the Israelites traveled, and on and on they complained.

Let’s look together in the New Testament at Philippians 2:14-16. The apostle Paul spoke about an attitude of complaining and arguing. [Choose a volunteer to read the verses aloud.] Think about the many ways God had provided for His people over and over. Yet, they continued to complain and doubted God’s presence, care, and ability to provide.

The complaining made God angry, and He punished the Israelites by sending venomous snakes that bit the Israelites. After God sent the snakes, how did the Israelites respond? They begged Moses to ask God to take the snakes away.

Although there were consequences for the people’s sin, God showed mercy. God gave Moses instructions to make a bronze snake and mount it on a pole. God told Moses that when people were bitten, if they looked at the bronze snake, they would recover. Even though the Israelites had sinned against God, He still loved them and gave them a way to be saved. Like the Israelites, we have sinned. But because of God’s mercy, when we look to Jesus to save us, we too can be forgiven. ”

### 3 CHRIST CONNECTION

**SAY** “ God sent snakes to punish the people, but anyone who was bitten could look at the snake on the pole and live. We deserve to die because of our sin, but anyone who looks to Jesus on the cross and trusts in Him will live forever with God. ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.)

### 2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

| **SAY** “ Why do you think the Israelites doubted God? ”

Guide the kids to discuss the consequences for Israel’s sin. Emphasize how consequences are the result of our sin and how the consequences helped change the attitude of the Israelites.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Num. 21:5-6.)

| **SAY** “ How does looking to Jesus help us trust Him? ”

Lead kids to discuss that the punishment Jesus took on the cross wasn’t for His sin, but ours. Knowing Jesus took the blame for our sin, it should lead us to take our sin very seriously. By remembering Jesus, we have hope because of His sacrifice for us.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read 2 Cor. 5:21.)

| **SAY** “ How can we live in a way that reflects our trust in God? ”

Help kids to discuss that our obedience reflects our trust in God. Jesus perfectly obeyed God and we should follow His example in all we say, think, and do. By living for Jesus, we declare our trust that God is on His throne and loving us.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read John 14:15.)