

NUM. 21:4-9 -- LOOK TO THE BRONZE SERPENT, (TO JESUS CHRIST) AND LIVE!

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TURN YOUR EYES ON JESUS – Michael W. Smith

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His Glory and Grace.

The Biblical Setting: In chapter 11, we saw the people complaining of “no meat” In chapter 12, we saw the jealousy and envy of Miriam and Aaron; Moses interceding for the healing of Miriam from leprosy. In chapter 13, spies were sent into Canaan. While two, Joshua and Caleb brought back a good report, believing in God and His promises, the report of the other ten and their unbelief, resulted in fear and total unbelief, causing all the congregation to weep and complain. Next, was the rebellion of Korah; the budding of Aaron’s rod; Moses’ error at Kadesh in striking the Rock the second time, which prevented him from entering the Promised Land. Now, we have the people refused passage through Edom and their need to go back into the wilderness, taking a very long and hard way around. Once again the people murmur and complain, and for the first time, **against the LORD** and Moses.

NUMBERS 21:4-9 *Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom;*

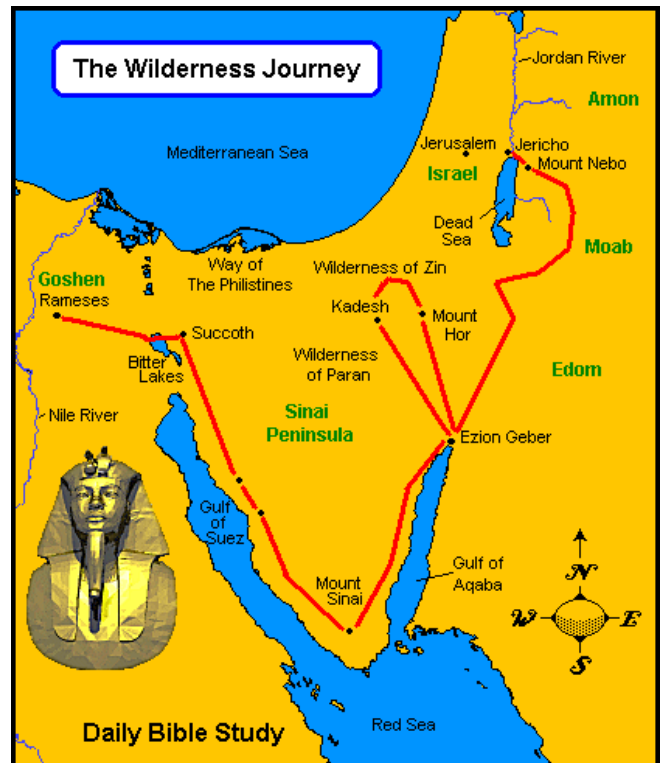
- **To go around the land of Edom:** They had to go far out of their way because the Edomites refused them passage (Num 20:14-21). They had to turn back towards the wilderness and away from Canaan.
- This was obviously discouraging. They had a reason to be discouraged, but had no excuse for their discouragement. They faced a real challenge and something that was not pleasant. Yet, they had no excuse for not trusting in God, and for not looking for His victory through it all.

[4b] and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. [5] And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."

- **The people spoke against God and against Moses:** Sadly, the new generation sounded like the old. If they continued in the steps of their fathers, this new generation would be no better able to enter the Promised Land than the previous generation was.
- Perhaps they acted worse than their fathers here. In eight previous passages (Exo 15:24; Exo 16:2; Exo 17:3; Num 12:1; Num 14:2; Num 16:3; Num 16:41; Num 20:2), the children of Israel are described as speaking against Moses. In those situations, Moses knew (Exo 16:7-8) and the LORD knew (Num 14:27) they were really speaking against God - but the people were not brazen enough to do it directly. **Now they are more brazen, because people spoke against God and against Moses!**
- This was a major problem! They were on the threshold of the Promised Land, closer to it than the previous generation of unbelief had been. But **now they were beginning to act with the same unbelief - or worse!** Something drastic had to be done.

[6] So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

- **The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people:** How were the serpents fiery? Possibly they were a red color, like the color of fire. Another possibility was that their bite caused an intense burning sensation and great thirst, so they



were called fiery serpents. These came from God, to get the nation's attention at this critical place in their journey to the Promised Land. If they kept going in the direction they were now going, they would never enter in.

- **Many of the people of Israel died:** These victims were mostly of the older generation of unbelief. God's final way of fulfilling His promise they would perish in the wilderness, and not enter the Promised Land.

[7] Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. [8] 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." [9] 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.

- ***We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you:*** This new generation, capable of deeper sin in openly complaining against the LORD. They also appear to have hearts softer and quicker to repent. **They quickly humble themselves before the LORD and Moses. They ask Moses to pray for them. They know their only answer lies in the saving work of God.**
- ***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:*** God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent, set it on pole, so that those who looked upon it could be saved - and they were! This was an unusual direction from God and miracle resulting. There is no logical connection between merely looking at a serpent on a pole and living; or refusing to look and dying. But God commanded that such a "foolish" thing be used to bring salvation to Israel. How many today think the same of looking to the cross and to Jesus Christ as their Savior!
- ***Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole:*** Jesus referred to this remarkable event in **Joh 3:14-15**: And 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. Jesus clearly said there is a similarity between what Moses did here, and what Jesus did on the cross.
- A bronze serpent speaks of evil; but evil having been judged - **just as Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us on the cross, and our sin was judged in Jesus. A bronze serpent is a picture of evil judged.**
- ***If a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent (a symbol of sin) , he lived:*** The people were saved **not by doing anything, but by simply looking to the bronze** (always a symbol of God's judgment) **serpent.** They had to trust that something as seemingly foolish as looking at serpent on a pole was enough to save them. Being lifted up on the pole is a symbol of the cross. Jesus said, So must the Son of man be lifted up. In another place, ***"And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me"*** (**John 12:32**), signifying that He would die on a cross.
- God is setting up a picture of that ***bronze serpent*** on the pole. You have been bitten by the fiery serpents. You are dying. You've been bitten by sin and sin is destroying you. You're dying as the result of it. But God, if you will just obey God, look at the serpent on the pole and see that your sins have been judged. The ***bronze serpent***, the judgment of God against sin and see that your sins are judged. You won't die from the bite of this fiery serpent. It's very easy this fitting Jesus.
- **Isa 45:22** ***"Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other".*** We might be willing to do a hundred things to earn our salvation, but **God says only trust and look to Him.**

SUMMARY:

- **Again when Israel gets discouraged, they complain bitterly, now against the LORD and Moses!**
- **In response the LORD is God sends poisonous serpents, who bite the people and they die!**
- **Moses responds and prays. He is told to *"Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole"***
- **Responsibility is given to the people: *Everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.***
- **John 3:15 - Jesus clearly said there is a similarity between what Moses did here, and what Jesus did on the cross.**

Pray Today For: Our Church, Internationally/Nationally/Locally; Kings and those in authority; Police officers/military.

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