

October 1st
SNAKE ON A POLE PART 2

“From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. 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 we loathe this worthless food.” Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And 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. 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.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.” (Numbers 21:4–9, ESV)

NUMBERS 21:4-9

A rope. A branch. A life preserver. A boat. What do these all have in common? They all can be used to help save a person from drowning. The idea of drowning scares me. It's one of the reasons I'm afraid of waterfalls. In 8th grade I was under a large waterfall and couldn't breathe as the water was gushing over my head. I panicked at that moment. Thankfully, I was flushed out from the waterfall flow into the pool of water below. In my moment of fear, I couldn't think of any action that would save me. That's just the physical fear. But what about spiritual fear? How might people prepare to meet their God? This story of the snake on the pole teaches us some lessons.

James Boice speaks wisely about what this event teaches us. First, it reminds God's people that there is no human remedy for sin. This is a counter cultural idea, and unfortunately local churches can be pulled into teaching and believing that certain acts bring prosperity. Boice wisely states, “We want to hear that it all comes down to us.” He's not wrong. Our natural bent is to celebrate one thing...our achievement or our name. However, this event reminds us that only God saves. No human remedy will cure the soul. Second, Boice points out that salvation can't come through reforming/remaking yourself. He adds that the Hebrews may have believed that they just came to a bad part of the desert...so they learn to never go back to that place again. It's a classic case of avoiding the bad and pursuing the good. Today we call it the list of do's and don'ts. If we're not careful, we can fall into the same trap. We work to root out the bad consequences and chase after good results. Sounds great on paper. But do's and don'ts don't remove the sin in our hearts. We can only look to the Savior to do that.

Men, we stand as believers that have been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. What we can drift into is trading the God we trusted to save us for a God that only loves us when we're good. When you read that, it may repulse you or you may deny it. However, we're all tempted to begin treating God as a cosmic vending machine. What does this say about our God if He acts that way? God stops being all loving and all giving and begins to be a cosmic hoarder that only gives favor when you obey Him perfectly. That's not the God of the Hebrews that we see here in Numbers 21, and it's not the God of the rest of the Bible. That's the false gods of world religion. What sets our God apart from those fake gods? Our God saves out of His perfect love, justice, and grace! He freely gives at the cost of His Son. What a God that we serve!

Spend some time critiquing how you approach God in your daily walk. In what ways have you moved away from the truth of the Gospel? Repent of those ways and ask the Lord to help you trust in what He says about His love.

For Further Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10