

Look to Live • Numbers 21:4-9

Read John 3:1-18

1. Maybe the most well-known verse in the Bible is John 3:16.
2. But few know it's context or setting.
3. It's this conversation Jesus had with a super-smart Jewish leader named Nicodemus.
3. And just 2 verses before v16, Jesus referred to a story out of Israel's history, using it as an example of what He came to do.
4. We're going to take a look at that story today in Numbers 21.

Vs4-5

⁴ Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; & the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. ⁵ And the people spoke against God & against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For *there is* no food & no water, & our soul loathes this worthless bread."

1. The yrs of wandering round the wilderness are soon ending.
2. Israel is once again back at the S'n border of Canaan where they balked at entering the PL some 38yrs before.
3. But they won't be entering from the S.
 - a. They'll enter from the E across the Jordan River into the ctr of Canaan.
 - b. To get there, they have to go round the region of Edom, relatives of Israel.
 - c. God doesn't want them messing with them, so He takes them on a detour around them.
 - d. But that means travelling thru some of the dreariest landscape in the Sinai Peninsula.
 - e. During which, the they slide into a deep funk.
4. Check it out: This is just weeks away from their entering the PL.
 - a. The gen that had balked at entering nearly 4 decades before ***is gone***.
 - b. This new gen has mostly been ***raised*** in the wilderness.
 - c. And ***ALL their lives*** they've known ***they were on a mission***
 - 1) A journey, not just thru territory, but in mental & spiritual preparation to enter Canaan;
 - 2) To take possession of what their parents had been too freaked out to go for.
 - d. They want to ***get at it***.
 - e. They're ***tired*** of trudging thru a dreary wilderness & start up the whining all over again.
 - f. Yep: Their complainer-parents were dead & buried, but they'd left ***this mark*** on their kids.
 - g. But whereas their parents had grouched at Moses, these ramp it up to include God Himself!
 - 1) "We're hungry! We're thirsty! And we're soooo over manna!"
 - 2) It wasn't that they didn't have food & drink. God provided for them miraculously.
 - 3) They were just ***bored*** with His provision.
 - 4) They wanted to be IN the PL NOW & grouched yet again about how God was getting them there.
5. We need to pause at this point & draw an important lesson from this.
 - a. There is a Destiny in Glory God has for each and every one of us in Christ.
 - b. But it's the journey ***He's ordained for us*** that makes us into the person we need to be to enter that glory.
 - c. The destination is the result of the journey.
 - d. There's no getting there apart from faithfully taking each individual step.
 - e. And that's why God rarely shows us the ultimate goal.
 - f. What He does show us is just the next step.
 - g. See, if we saw the end, we'd devise our own plan & path from where we are today, to there.
 - h. We'd take the shortcuts the devil suggests.
 - i. What we have to keep in mind is that our Destiny in Christ is the result, the fruit of the God-directed and ordained steps leading there.
6. Think about Israel at this point: They just want to go into Canaan; The Promise – their Destiny.
 - a. And if they had their way, they'd press in right now.
 - b. The problem is: They weren't ready! And this grouching they now break out in PROVES it.
 - c. People who whine about food & drink can't slay giants & lay siege to fortresses.

- d. People who fall apart at breaking a nail aren't going to do well in the octagon.
 - e. This and some of the things they are about to go through prove they just aren't ready to enter Canaan and effectively deal with its challenges.
7. Christian: Trust the plan and path God has you on. Don't get ahead of Him. Don't take shortcuts.
- a. There **IS** NO shortcut to glory; no quick & easy route to the holiness that glory means.
 - b. Trust the Spirit to guide you in each step. Be faithful TODAY, and let tomorrow come in its time.
 - c. That's a word for some of you today. [Share // Mission men]

V6

1. What happens next is a severe discipline.
 2. There's simply no way to soften this; it's hard.
 3. So before we read it, let's settle something: Is God ever unjust?
 - a. Does He ever go over-board? Yes! But only in His love with mercy & grace.
 - b. When God **must** mete out discipline on His wayward, erring kids, He's **never-ever** abusive.
 - c. Keep that in mind as we read
- ⁶So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, & they bit the people; & many of the people of Israel died.
4. 'Fiery' refers to the **color** of these snakes.
 - a. This area they're in is a habitat of all kinds of reptiles.
 - b. The Bedouin who travel here avoid it because of the many venomous snakes.
 5. As Israel traversed this region, bitterly complaining against God, their camp was infested with snakes.
 6. Why? Why THIS discipline? Let's answer it this way ...
 7. Most parents have a special form of communication they learned from **their** parents called "Parentese."
 - a. Even if you aren't a parent, you probably know it.
 - b. I'll say the 1st part of a parental phrase; you complete it.
 - 1) This is going to hurt me –
 - 2) Eat your dinner. Don't you know there are –
 - 3) Mom says, "Just wait till –"
 - 4) Well, if someone told you to jump off –
 - 5) Do you think that money grows –
 - 6) Your room looks like a –
 - 7) Close the door! Were you –
 - 8) Don't run with scissors. You could poke –
 - c. Let's bring that all back to this ch in Israel's story & remember what a parent says when a child's just being a spoiled brat & is unreasonably whining & complaining.
 - d. That parent will often say, "If you don't quit your crying, I'll give you **Something to cry about.**"
 8. Israel's complaint here is utterly unreasonable.
 - a. Whining about a daily diet of the miraculous????!?!?!? Come on: We all recognize that's ridiculous.
 - b. So God allowed these venomous snakes to infest their camp to show them what things are like when He's NOT preserving & providing for them.
 - c. You wanna complain? Okay here's something to REALLY complain about: Snakeapalozza! Serpentnado!
 - d. You've heard of the **Burning Man** festival held in the Nevada desert every Summer? This was the **Fiery Snake Festival.**
 9. God issues Israel a serious "wake-up call" about their attitude.
 - a. Maybe the scenery isn't the most cheery, & yes, their diet was bland.
 - b. But for 40 yrs God has a **flawless record of faithfulness** in providing for them.
 - c. All they need to do is hang on a little longer and the PL will be theirs.
 - d. All that was keeping them OUT at this point was **THIS** silly habit of complaining they'd picked up from their parents.
 - e. Let's not miss the lesson here: These snakes **proved** they weren't ready to enter Canaan.
 - f. They came to rid Israel of its bad 'tude.
 10. They learned their **attitude** was **less** a matter of their **circumstances & more** a matter of their **faith**.
 11. They realized that truth by what happens next ...

⁷ Therefore the people came to Moses, & said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord & 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*, & set it on a pole; & it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” ⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent, & put it on a pole; & so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

1. Note that God ***didn't take the serpents out of the camp.***
 - a. No Pied Piper arrived to whistle them away.
 - b. God devised a different remedy that moved the people to realize the problem lay with them not God.
2. He told Moses to raise a pole high over the camp of Israel bearing a likeness of 1 of the snakes.
3. Anyone bitten just had to turn their eyes on it to be healed.
4. God made this remedy to the challenge of the snakes as a ***crucial moment of decision*** for the people of Israel.
6. Remember; not long after this, they enter Canaan.
 - a. A few of the seniors who'd left Egypt are still alive.
 - b. They are their whining slave mentality are still polluting the mindset of Israel.
 - c. Their faithlessness needs to die off.
 - d. Some of the younger generation taken up their faithless mantle of unbelief. They too must quit the camp.
 - e. Only Faith can lay hold of God's Promise.
7. Listen: There's no ***natural*** remedy for a poisonous snakebite in looking at a bronze replica of a snake.
 - a. If you go hiking in the hills above Ojai and get bit by a rattlesnake,
 - b. The remedy is a dose of antivenom, not whipping out your cellphone & Googling a picture of a snake.
 - c. In this case, that was ***precisely*** the remedy!
8. The people needed desperately to realize their problem wasn't the natural realm of scenery, food or drink.
9. There was a spiritual problem only a supernatural solution could remedy.
10. They needed to TRUST GOD. The way to demonstrate that trust was by simply doing something that seemed to have no connection to being healed: Look up! Look to the remedy God's provided!
 - a. Those who took God at His word and promise looked and were healed.
 - b. Those who heard of the remedy but said, “How can looking at a bronze serpent on a pole heal me? That's absurd” Died!
 - c. Needlessly! Foolishly! All they needed to do was look.
 - d. But oh, how smug & superior they felt in their refusal to look as they perished.

Application

1. As do millions today, bitten & dying by the fiery serpent of sin.
2. All they need to do is look to Christ who was lifted up on the Cross to die for them.
3. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:21
God made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
4. All people need to do to Live is to Look to Jesus.
5. But as even He said, MOST don't & won't.
 - a. Though bitten & dying, they pretend everything's fine.
 - b. They're ***offended*** by the thought they're perishing, even as their sin consumes them.
 - c. They refuse to accept that the Cross is the remedy for their brokenness.
6. If that's you this morning, we who've looked to Jesus plead with you to do the same.
 - a. A moment ago as we considered those in this story who refused to look at the raised serpent,
 - b. You rightly assigned them the label of foolish rebel. Don't repeat their error.
 - c. Right now: Look to Jesus and Live!
12. Look to Him ***now*** & live.