



"Snakes on the Plains"

Pastor Jason West | November 5, 2023

Shiloh Community Church

(1 Corinthians 10:5-6)

I. The _____ of Sin

A. Impatient

Numbers 21:4 "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."

B. _____

Numbers 21:5 "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 we loathe this worthless food.'"

1. Obsessed With the _____

Numbers 21:5a "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt?"

2. Fearing the _____

Numbers 21:5b "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?"

3. Hating the _____

Numbers 21:5 "For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food. We don't like the food."

C. _____

1 Corinthians 10:7 "Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.'"

D. Sexually Immoral

1 Corinthians 10:8 "We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day."

E. Testing God

1 Corinthians 10:9 "We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents"

F. _____

1 Corinthians 10:10-11 "nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come."

II. The _____ of Sin

(Numbers 21:6)

A. Sin is _____

B. Satan, the Serpent, is the Enemy of Mankind

III. The _____ for Sin

A. Recognize the _____

B. _____

(Numbers 21:7)

C. Listen to the Lord

(Numbers 21:8)

D. _____ and Live

John 3:12-13 "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."

John 3:14-15 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

John 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

• We have a _____ Problem

E. Your Salvation is Effective _____

Numbers 21:9 "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."

F. Remember that it's All About God's _____

Deuteronomy 8:14b-15 "you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock"

Deuteronomy 8:16-17 "who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.'"

G. Beware of Poor _____ for Jesus

(2 Kings 18:4)



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1. Familiarize Yourself With the Passage

- a. Read Numbers 21 and John 3
- b. Read the context around the narrative (Numbers 20-21)
- c. Note repetition of words, content, and progression of ideas

2. Literary Context

- a. Literary Context: The story of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21:4-9 is situated between two major victories that Israel had against the nation of Arad and the Amorites. It also is the fifth rebellion/complaint in a succession of these incidents in the book of Numbers (Numbers 11, 14, 16, and 20). However, the fact that this is situated between two generally victorious battles (some were taken captive, but then rescued in 21:1-3) may communicate the graciousness of God toward Israel, but more so the depravity of Israel to keep complaining to God while he has given them significant success in war. External miracles and acts of God are not sufficient by themselves to change the heart. Only a supernatural work from God on the heart can change the heart's attitude (Jeremiah 31:33).
- b. Biblical/Cultural/Historical Context: According to our passage, the serpent that was crafted to be put on a pole was made of bronze/copper (Numbers 21:9). While they apparently had metals available for this occasion while not yet entering the promised land, the Bible describes the promised land as "a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper" (Deuteronomy 8:9). Although not super important, possible identities about the kind of snake represented are the carpet viper (most likely), puffadder, or sand viper.¹ Copper snakes have been excavated dating to the time period of this event which was the late bronze age (1600-1200 B.C.).² Snakes are not always evil in the Bible. They appear hovering above God's throne in Isaiah 6 called seraphim. However, the most notable allusion to this account is John 3 where Jesus compares himself to the serpent who was lifted up for the healing of the Israelite nation. In this situation, the snake symbolizes two things: bearing the curse for the Israelite people who was offered up in their place, as well as protection from Egypt, who considered the snake to be a symbol of power.³ Unfortunately, the Israelite people treated the bronze serpent as a source of power and offered sacrifices even during the period of the kings until Hezekiah destroyed it (2 Kings 18:4).

3. Questions about the Passage and Life

- a. What do you find in this passage that is most comforting? What do you find in this passage that is most frightening (Numbers 21:4-9)?
- b. What is the significance of them looking at the serpent in verse 9? Why did they need to look at it in order to be healed?
- c. Jesus asked Nicodemus a very pointed question regarding heavenly things in John 3:12. What heavenly things is Jesus talking about?
- d. Israel was healed from their snake bites in Numbers 21. What kind of healing does Jesus bring to sinners when they look at him with eyes of faith?
- e. As the Israelites experienced healing from their sin and disobedience by looking at the snake, how have you experienced healing from your sin by trusting in Jesus? Share specific victories.
- f. Satan is depicted as a serpent in the Bible (Genesis 3:1; Revelation 20:2). The choice to use the bronze serpent on the pole in Numbers 21 probably foreshadows Jesus' role to slay the serpent when he is lifted up on the cross (Colossians 2:15). What does Jesus disarm or slay regarding the serpent in relation to us and the world by going to the cross (Helpful passages to consult include Ephesians 1:20-21; 2 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 6:20-23)? What joy might this bring to Christians?

¹ John Walton, ed. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 375.

² Walton, 375.

³ Andrew David Naselli, The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer, SSBT (Crossway: Wheaton, 2020), 79. Snakes often appear extending from the headaddresses of important royalty figures in the nations surrounding Israel.