

BIBLE STORY: THE BRONZE SERPENT

Numbers 21:4-9

Central Thoughts

- The rebellion of sin and unbelief brings separation from God, judgment, and death.
- In love for us, God uses suffering and hardship to call us to repentance and faith in Christ.
- The fiery serpents represent the poisonous bite of Satan who brought sin and death into our lives.
- The bronze serpent lifted up on a pole represents Christ who was made to be sin for us and who was lifted up upon the cross for our salvation.
- “To look” to the bronze serpent or “to look” to Christ is to believe in Him whom the Lord provided for our salvation.

Discussion Questions

Note: *The Children of Israel were redeemed by the Lord from slavery in Egypt by the blood of the Passover Lamb. Nevertheless, after they left Egypt and received the Law on Mount Sinai, and throughout their 40 years in the wilderness, they often grumbled and complained against the Lord. Even though the Lord had saved them, they often spoke against Him in unbelief.*

What happened to the Children of Israel in their journey from Mount Hor, around Edom, on the other side of the Red Sea?

They became discouraged and impatient because they had not yet entered the Promised Land.

What often happens to us when our lives become difficult, when we struggle with sin, temptation, sickness, and the problems of life?

We become discouraged and impatient and are often tempted to lash out in anger and unbelief against the Lord.

What did the people say to God and His servant Moses?

They spoke against God and Moses, saying, “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.”

What were the Children of Israel despising and rejecting when they spoke against God?

They were despising His salvation and the provisions He had given them.

What do we often despise and accuse God of when our earthly pilgrimage becomes difficult?

We often doubt God’s love and accuse Him of not providing us what we really need.

What did the Lord send upon the Children of Israel in judgment for their rebellion against Him?

“Fiery serpents” or poisonous snakes to bite the people.

Why did the Lord afflict them with fiery serpents and death?

That they might repent of their sin and believe in Him.

What does the Lord send into our lives because of our doubts, fears, and rebellion against Him?

Suffering, sickness, famine, hardship, and other adversities that we might repent of our sin and believe in Christ alone.

Did the Lord afflict the Children of Israel with fiery serpents because He hated them or because He loved them and desired to save them?

He loved them and desired to save them from their sins.

What moves God to permit such things to come into our lives?

His love and desire to save us from our sins. “Whom the Lord loves He chastens, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:12).

What did God cause to happen through the affliction of the fiery serpents?

The people came to Moses and confessed, “We have sinned for we have spoken against the LORD...”

What did the Lord instruct Moses to do to save the people from their sins and from the bite of the fiery serpents?

He instructed Moses to make a bronze image of a fiery serpent and to lift it up on a pole so that anyone who looked to the bronze serpent would live.

What did the fiery serpents represent?

The poisonous bite of the Serpent, Satan, who leads us into sin and death with his lies and temptations to turn away from the Lord.

What did the bronze serpent represent?

Jesus, the Son of God, our Savior, who was made to be sin for us when He was lifted up upon the cross for our salvation. (See 2 Corinthians 5:21, “[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”)

What did it signify when the Children of Israel looked to the bronze serpent lifted up on the pole?

Faith in the Lord who provided salvation for them through the bronze serpent.

Where and with what words in the New Testament does Jesus teach us about the bronze serpent and His death upon the cross?

John 3:14-17 “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. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

How are we saved from our sins, death, and the misery we have brought into our lives?

Through faith in the Son of God, our Savior, who was lifted up in love for us upon the cross.

Meditation on the Bible Story

The fiery bite of the poisonous snakes brought the judgment of death upon the Children of Israel for their sin and rebellion against the Lord. He sent the fiery serpents to them to call them to repentance. In the same way, the Lord uses affliction and suffering in our own lives to call us back to faith in Him. As a father disciplines his son in love, so the Lord disciplines us through the suffering in our own lives to call us to repentance and faith. It is the Lord in love who provided salvation for the Children of Israel through the bronze serpent that He instructed Moses to lift up upon a pole. Everyone who looked to the bronze serpent would live and escape the judgment of death. In the same way, God Himself provided salvation for us in the gift of His only begotten Son. Jesus was made to be sin for us and lifted up upon the cross to bear the punishment and condemnation of death that we by our sins deserved. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Looking in faith to the bronze serpent whom the Lord had provided saved them from the bite of the fiery serpent. Looking in faith to the Lord Jesus whom the Father provides for our salvation saves us from sin, death, and the power of the evil one.

Prayer on the Bible Story

Heavenly Father, You lifted up Your Son upon the cross to save us from the poison of Satan’s lies and the wickedness of our own sinful rebellion; You made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us that we might be forgiven and receive the gift of everlasting life. In times of suffering and in the hour of our death, give us faith to look to Jesus alone, who was lifted up upon the cross on our behalf; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



The Bronze Serpent
Numbers 21:4-9