

God Establishes His People

Date: 10.04.2026 | The Bronze Serpent
Scripture: Numbers 21:4-9

CENTRAL TRUTHS



PRESCHOOL:

God made a way to save His people. We can trust Jesus to save us.

YOUNGER KIDS (K5-2ND GRADE):

When we sin, God provides the only way to be saved through Jesus by trusting in Him.

OLDER KIDS (3RD-5TH GRADE):

Sin brings judgment, but God graciously provides salvation for everyone who looks to Jesus in faith.

STUDENTS:

Our sin deserves God's judgment, but God alone provides salvation through Jesus Christ. Eternal life belongs to those who trust in His finished work rather than themselves.

ADULTS:

Numbers 21 reveals God's holy judgment against sin and His gracious provision of salvation. The bronze serpent foreshadows Christ, who was lifted on the cross so all who look to Him in faith are forgiven, reconciled to God, and receive eternal life.

MEMORY VERSE

Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring to you today...The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." Exodus 14:13-14



DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

What is the law of God stated in the Ten Commandments? You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below - you shall not bow down to them or worship them. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not covet. NCC q.8

BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

In the second half of Exodus, God makes the Mosaic covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, where He gives the people the law and explains what will happen if they obey and if they don't. Yahweh then leads the people to construct the tabernacle where He comes to dwell in Israel's midst.



The book of Leviticus explains the necessary changes Israel must make to live and worship God, since He now resides among them. The book of Numbers returns to the narrative. In **Numbers 10**, the Israelites are led by God from Mount Sinai and on to Canaan. Now that God has established a wonderful relationship with His people through the Mosaic covenant, He wants to move them into the promised land, where they can truly enjoy the blessings of that relationship. This is the land that God promised to Abraham in Genesis. Now He is fulfilling the Abrahamic promise and giving Abraham's descendants the land.

The Israelites reject the land, whining with exaggeration that it would have been better to have died in the wilderness than to die while trying to conquer the promised land. God hears their complaints and turns their grumbling into judgment against them. He sends them back into the wilderness, where they wander for forty years until that unbelieving generation dies. Israel's disobedience does not mean that the Lord will cancel His promises. The wilderness generation is judged for its lack of faith and resulting disobedience, but God's covenant faithfulness remains. The promise of the land is not revoked despite Israel's rebellion.

God continues to watch over Israel as they wander in the wilderness. Eventually, the disobedient generation dies, and a new generation

arises. As God faithfully leads His people back toward the promised land, they experience victories over Arad (*Numbers 21:1-3*), Sihon (*Numbers 21:21-30*), and Og (*Numbers 21:31-35*). God is clearly fulfilling His promise to bring His people into the land He swore to give Abraham's descendants. Yet even after witnessing God's provision, protection, and faithfulness, the people quickly return to their old pattern of grumbling. In *Numbers 21:4-9*, they grow impatient with the difficult journey, complain against God and Moses, and despise the manna God had graciously provided. Their sinful hearts reveal that the greatest problem facing Israel is not their circumstances but their unbelief.

In response to their rebellion, the Lord sends fiery serpents among the people as an act of righteous judgment, and many Israelites die (*Numbers 21:6*). Realizing their sin, the people come to Moses in repentance and ask him to intercede for them. Moses prays, and instead of removing the consequences immediately, God provides a gracious way of rescue. He instructs Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it on a pole so that anyone who has been bitten may look upon it in faith and live (*Numbers 21:8-9*). The term translated "bronze" may also be translated "copper," a fitting symbol since the reddish color was associated with atonement (*Numbers 19:1-10*), and the region itself contained copper mines. Archaeologists have even discovered a small copper serpent at Timna, providing historical evidence consistent with the setting of this account.

This unusual act of salvation points beyond itself to God's greater plan of redemption. The bronze serpent possessed no power of its own; healing came only because God promised to save those who trusted His word. Centuries later, Jesus would explain that this event foreshadowed His own work on the cross: "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 3:14-15*). Just as the Israelites could not save themselves from the deadly effects of the serpent's bite, we cannot save ourselves from the deadly effects of sin. Our only hope is to look in faith to Jesus Christ, who was lifted up on the cross to bear God's judgment in our place. Everyone who trusts in Him receives forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Sadly, what God originally intended as a symbol of His grace eventually became an idol. By the reign of King Hezekiah, the Israelites were worshiping the bronze serpent itself rather than the God who had provided salvation, so Hezekiah rightly destroyed it (*2 Kings 18:4*). This serves as a reminder that God's gifts must never

replace God Himself. Salvation has always been by grace through faith in God's provision, ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ alone.

TELL THE STORY

Numbers 21:4-9



Remember where we are in God's Big Story. In Genesis, God promised Abraham that his family would become a great nation and live in a special land. In the first half of Exodus, God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt through the Passover and brought them safely through the Red Sea. In the second half of Exodus, God made a covenant with His people at Mount Sinai, gave them His law, and instructed them to build the tabernacle so He could dwell among them. In Leviticus, God taught His people how to worship Him and live as His holy people. Then, in Numbers, God began leading the Israelites toward the Promised Land.

But instead of trusting God, the Israelites rebelled. They refused to enter the land God had promised because they feared the people living there (*Numbers 13–14*). Because of their unbelief, God judged that generation, and they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Even though the people were unfaithful, God remained faithful to His promises. He continued to provide for them every day and raised a new generation to enter the Promised Land.

As the Israelites traveled again toward Canaan, God gave them victory over several enemies, including the kings of Arad, Sihon, and Og (*Numbers 21:1-3, 21-35*). It looked like they were finally getting close to the land God had promised! But the people fell back into an old habit—they complained.

The journey became difficult, and the Israelites grew impatient (*Numbers 21:4*). They complained against both God and Moses, asking, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?" They grumbled that there was no food or water, even though God had faithfully provided manna for them every day. They even said they hated the food God had given them (*Numbers 21:5*). Instead of remembering God's goodness, they focused on what they didn't like.

God is perfectly holy and cannot ignore sin. Because the people

continually rebelled against Him, God sent fiery serpents into the camp. Many Israelites were bitten, and many died (*Numbers 21:6*). The people finally realized they had sinned. They came to Moses and confessed, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you.” They begged Moses to pray for them (*Numbers 21:7*).

Moses prayed, and God answered unexpectedly. Instead of taking away all the snakes, God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and place it on top of a pole. God promised that anyone who had been bitten could look at the bronze serpent in faith and live (*Numbers 21:8-9*). The bronze serpent itself had no power to heal anyone. God was teaching His people that healing came by trusting Him and believing His promise.

This story points us to Jesus. Hundreds of years later, Jesus said, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (*John 3:14-15*). Just as the Israelites could not save themselves from the poison of the snakes, we cannot save ourselves from the poison of sin. Our sin deserves God’s judgment, but God lovingly provided a way to rescue us. Jesus was lifted up on the cross to take the punishment for our sin. Everyone who looks to Jesus in faith and trusts Him as Savior receives forgiveness and eternal life.

Many years later, the Israelites forgot what the bronze serpent really represented and began worshiping it instead of worshiping God. During King Hezekiah’s reign, he destroyed the bronze serpent because it had become an idol (*2 Kings 18:4*). God’s people were never meant to worship the bronze serpent—they were meant to worship the God who saves. In the same way, we don’t trust in symbols or good works to save us. We trust in Jesus Christ alone, God’s perfect provision for our salvation.

REBUILD THE STORY

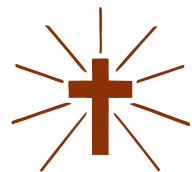
1. Why were the Israelites still traveling through the wilderness instead of living in the Promised Land?
(*Numbers 13:26-33; 14:26-35*)
2. Even after God gave Israel victories over their enemies, how did the people respond during the journey? (*Numbers 21:1-5*)
3. What did the Israelites’ complaining reveal about their hearts?
(*Numbers 21:4-5; Exodus 16:35*)



4. How did God respond to the people's rebellion and complaining?
(Numbers 21:6)
5. How did the Israelites respond after God's judgment came?
(Numbers 21:7)
6. What did God tell Moses to make, and what promise did He give the people? *(Numbers 21:8-9)*
7. Did the bronze serpent have power to heal the people by itself? What brought healing? *(Numbers 21:8-9)*
8. What happened when the people looked at the bronze serpent, and what does this teach us about faith?
(Numbers 21:9; John 3:14-16)
9. Why do you think the Israelites kept complaining even after they had seen God rescue, protect, and provide for them so many times? What does this teach us about our own hearts?
10. God could have removed all the snakes immediately, but instead He gave the people a way to respond in faith by looking at the bronze serpent. Why do you think God chose to save them this way? What does that teach us about trusting Him?
11. Jesus compared Himself to the bronze serpent in *John 3:14-15*. In what ways are these two stories similar, and what makes Jesus' salvation even greater than the healing the Israelites received?
12. Complaining often happens when we focus on what we don't have rather than on what God has already done. What are some practical ways you can remember God's faithfulness this week when life doesn't go the way you want?

GOSPEL EMPHASIS

Throughout this unit, we have seen that God is perfectly holy and that sin separates people from Him. We have watched the Israelites repeatedly grumble, rebel, and refuse to trust God, yet we have also seen God's incredible patience, mercy, and faithfulness to His covenant promises. From the Passover lamb that spared Israel from judgment to the crossing of the Red Sea to God's daily provision of manna and water in the wilderness to the sacrifices and the Day of Atonement that temporarily covered sin, every story has pointed to God's greater plan of redemption through Jesus Christ.



In **Numbers 21**, God's judgment against sin is seen once again as fiery serpents enter the camp because of the people's rebellion. Yet even in judgment, God makes a way of salvation. He instructs Moses to lift up a bronze serpent so that everyone who looks to it in faith will live (**Numbers 21:8-9**). The bronze serpent itself had no power to save; healing came because God graciously provided a way and the people trusted His promise.

Jesus tells us that this event was always pointing to Him. In **John 3:14-15**, Jesus says, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." Just as the Israelites could not save themselves from the deadly poison of the serpents, we cannot save ourselves from the deadly curse of sin. We deserve God's righteous judgment, but God, in His great love, sent His Son to be lifted up on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Everyone who turns from their sin and looks to Jesus in faith receives forgiveness, eternal life, and reconciliation with God. The bronze serpent offered temporary physical healing, but Jesus offers complete and eternal salvation to all who believe in Him.

WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE TEACH US ABOUT GOD?

Use the attributes of God list and determine the characteristics of God that we see in today's story. How can knowing these characteristics of God to be true change the way we live in Christ?

PRAYER PROMPTS

God, thank You so much for who You are and what You do. Help us to remember Your goodness and respond to You in worship and trust in all things. Thank You for salvation in Your death on the cross, as You always provide forgiveness, no matter how many times we mess up or question and doubt Your sovereignty. We love You! Help us to follow You!



THIS WEEK'S BIBLE READING

Deuteronomy 6