

GOD HEALED ISRAEL WITH A BRONZE SNAKE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: NUMBERS 21

*God saves His people individually.*

The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

God delivered Israel in response to their faith – When the Canaanite King of Arad attacked the people of Israel, they called out to the Lord and asked for His help in making a vow to destroy the Canaanite cities. The Lord responded to Israel and they defeated the Canaanites and destroyed their cities. The place where the battle took place was called Hormah. This same name was given to the place where the Canaanites defeated Israel, who attacked without God's blessing, see Numbers 14:45.

Israel grumbled in unbelief again and was judged by God – No sooner did Israel trust in God then they began to complain about both a lack of water and food that they didn't like. God sent upon them a judgment of venomous snakes to bite the people, and many died.

God raised up salvation for Israel – The people of Israel realized their mistake and asked Moses to mediate for them. They asked Moses to pray to the Lord so that God would take the serpents away. Rather than take them away, God instructed Moses to tell the people to make a similar serpent out of bronze and put it on a pole. If anyone was bitten they were to look upon the serpent on the pole and be saved from death. Here God provided a glimpse of how salvation would come in the future: every man and woman would need to look to the source of salvation individually. Prior to this, God dealt with Israel as a nation. But in this situation, each afflicted person needed to look upon the lifted serpent personally. The principle extends to us: to be saved from eternal death, each man and woman must look upon Jesus Christ in faith, for himself or herself.

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WHERE IS JESUS?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)

The Old Testament is filled with stories that point to Jesus. Here we see God sending the judgment of death upon sinners for their sin. But we also see those same sinners saved from death when they looked to the remedy God raised up. It was God who told Moses to put the bronze snake up on a pole.

This whole scene reminded God the Father of His plan to send Jesus who would one day be lifted up for forgiveness of people's sins. Mindful of the mercy coming at the cross, God showed mercy to Israel, healed the people, and did not count their sins against them. Isn't it interesting that this Old Testament story precedes the most quoted verse of the entire New Testament (John 3:16)? When we read of the bronze snake being lifted up we should think of Christ, who alone can deliver us from eternal death.

ON THE ROAD TO EMMANUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

Bible Passage: Isaiah 28:16

Connecting the passage to Christ:

Jesus is the cornerstone described in the passage. 1 Peter 2:5-9 directly connected this passage to Christ.

Questions for reflection:

- What is a cornerstone? (A cornerstone is the very first stone laid by which all of the other stones in a wall find their place. If the cornerstone is laid crookedly then the entire wall will be crooked. If, however, the cornerstone is laid perfectly, then the entire wall will be perfect if aligned to that stone.)
- Why is a precious cornerstone a good description for Jesus? (It is to Jesus that all of the church looks for our example. Our lives are to follow His example of perfect righteousness. It is because He was without sin that we can be without sin. His righteousness is given to us.)

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SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.

ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

CREATE YOUR OWN BRONZE SERPENT

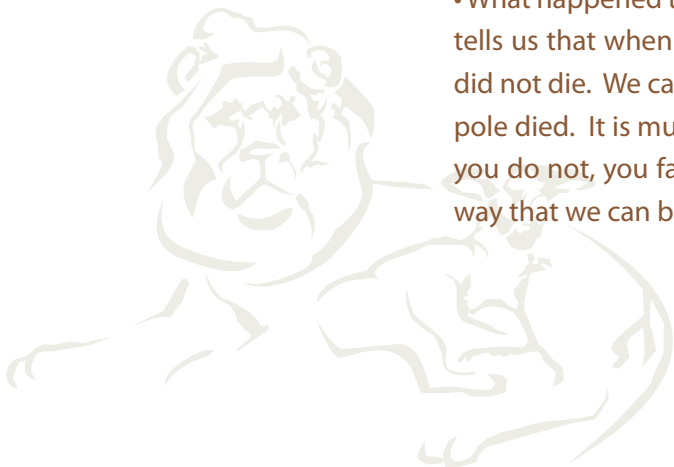
Supplies

- 8.5x11 card stock
 - ¼" wooden dowel
 - paper punch
 - colored pencils,
 - crayons, or markers
- (enough supplies for each child to have one)

Have the children create their own bronze snake. Have the children draw a snake in the shape of the letter "S" on their paper. On the front they should draw and color their snake. (Children can work alone or in groups of two.) Have the children cut out their finished serpents and then write along the snake on the back, "Look upon the Son and be saved." (John 3:14-15)

Then ask the class the following questions:

- When we read the story of the people of Israel looking at the serpent on the pole, who should we be reminded of? (John 3:14-15 tells us that the serpent on the pole points to Jesus. Now that we are looking back on that story, it should remind us of Jesus being lifted up on the cross. It is by His death on the cross that we are saved from eternal death.)
- What happened to the people who did not look upon the serpent? (The Bible only tells us that when someone got bit by a snake and looked upon the serpent they did not die. We can assume that anyone who refused to look to the serpent on the pole died. It is much easier to look toward God's salvation when you realize that if you do not, you face eternal death. Apart from looking to Jesus there is no other way that we can be saved, see Acts 4:12.)



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MEMORIZE JOHN 3:14-15

Supplies

- white board

Many of the children will have memorized John 3:16 and following. See if you can get them to memorize the prior to verses as well. Write verses 3:14-16 on the board. Have the children repeat the verse several times. Then, erase one word at a time (start with the 16th verse for the first few words). See who can recite the entire verse from memory. Then repeat this throughout the class time.

EACH ONE MUST LOOK

Supplies

- create a bronze serpent on a pole (a rubber snake and a broomstick handle work well, or draw a snake and pole on poster board.)

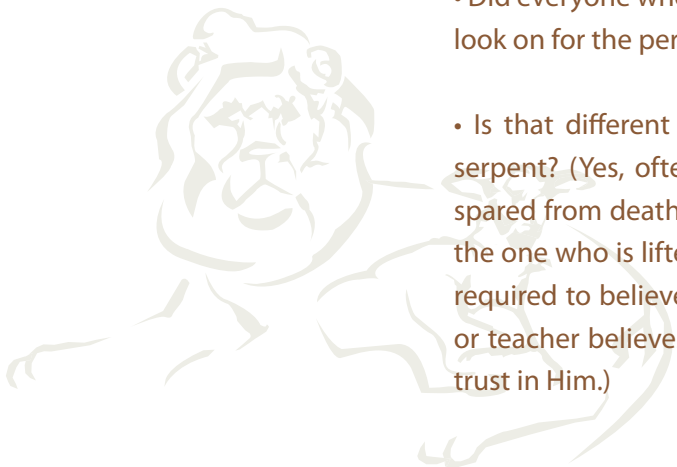
The idea behind this lesson is to help the children see that God required individual faith to be healed from the poisonous bite of the snakes.

Have each child close their eyes and cover them with their hands. Read the passage while they are closing their eyes and tell them to pretend they are the Israelites. Tell them that they have all grumbled and when they feel their leg tapped that means that a snake has bitten them. Remind the class to keep their eyes closed. Take the snake on the pole to the back of the room. Explain to them if they get bitten the only thing that will heal them is to look upon the snake on the pole. If they get bitten they may open their eyes and look on the snake. As soon as they see it they should stand up and shout, "The Lord healed me."

Slowly move through the class until everyone goes through the process.

Then ask the class the following questions:

- What did you have to do to be healed after being bitten? (We had to look at the serpent.)
- Did everyone who wanted to be healed need to look for themselves, or could you look on for the person next to you? (Everyone needs to look for themselves.)
- Is that different from the way God forgave Israel before He commanded the serpent? (Yes, often Moses spoke on behalf of all the people and they were all spared from death. Here, God shows us that the salvation to come, when Jesus is the one who is lifted up on the cross will require individual faith. Everyone will be required to believe for themselves. This means that even though your mom, dad, or teacher believes in Jesus, you will not be saved unless you yourself place your trust in Him.)



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PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

IN CLASS PROJECT

The first and second grade children can use the preschool coloring sheet and questions. Have the older children draw a picture of the bronze serpent.

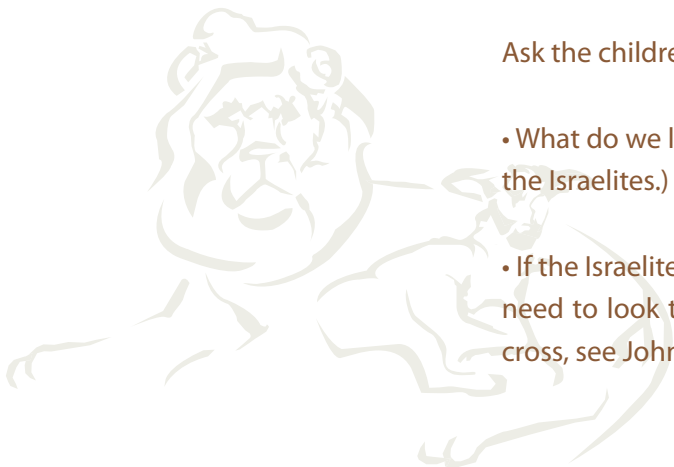
FOR OLDER GRADES

Divide the class into groups of six. Explain to them that you want them to come up with a skit that will depict the same sins the people demonstrated against Moses but in a way that it could occur in our current time. Some examples might be a child who is upset and impatient with their mother or father, a student who thinks his class is boring and starts fooling around and grumbling against his teacher, or baseball player who is tired of practicing drills and just wants to take a break and get a drink of water so he starts grumbling against his coach to the other players.

Have each group pick one of these three or come up with another on their own that you can approve. Give them 15 minutes to plan and practice, and then allow them to quickly perform their skits.

Ask the children the following questions:

- What do we learn from watching these skits about our lives? (We are just like the Israelites.)
- If the Israelites needed to look to the bronze serpent for salvation, who do we need to look toward? (We need to look to Jesus who was lifted up upon the cross, see John 3:14-15)



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A LITTLE BIT MORE

Serpent – The serpent is often depicted as evil. It can be Satan himself (Genesis 3:1-4, Revelation 12:9) or it can be an evil person or people (Jeremiah 46:22, Jeremiah 51:34).

Jesus used the word vipers (a group of poisonous snakes) to describe the Pharisees (Matthew 3:7). Jesus is compared to the serpent lifted up because He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). What a sobering picture, that Jesus would take upon himself our evil so that we could be forgiven.

