

Looking Unto Jesus

Numbers 21:4-9

February 22, 2009

Intro

As we come to Numbers chapter 21, we have spanned almost 40 years of Israel's time in the wilderness. At this point, Aaron has died and his son Eleazar has been placed as high priest over Israel. This is also an important section of scripture because it points so clearly to our Lord Jesus.

The issue at hand is once again complaining and grumbling by the sons of Israel against God and against Moses. Israel had wanted to go through the land of Edom and had sent emissaries to request permission, but they were refused. This would have been especially disheartening because the Edomites were the descendants of Esau and were therefore their brothers.

So Israel had to head south in order to go around the land of Edom, even so far south as to pass near the Red Sea. It says in verse four that the people became impatient because of the journey. Many commentators believe that this would have been during the hottest part of the year and therefore a difficult time to be traveling this far south in the wilderness.

In verse five it is very clear that the people spoke against God and against Moses with the same complaint that we have heard many times, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?" They insulted God even further, however, when they said untruthfully, "For there is no bread and no water." There most certainly was. And then they brought their complaining to new heights when they said, "And we loathe this miserable food." In other words, they hated and despised God's provision.

God uses the difficult times in our lives to train us and prepare us for what He knows is coming into our lives in the future. Wouldn't it be great if we could respond by saying, "Man, this is hard, I wonder what God is preparing me for."

I. There's Always Something to Complain About

- 1 No doubt there were many more times that Israel could be heard complaining, but God includes these examples because there are many things for us to learn from them.

A. There's a lesson from complaining

- 2 What was different at this point than at any point in the last 39 years? Nothing, other than the fact that they were weary and impatient and tired.
 - 1 There's always something to complain about for those who have a heart to complain.

Illus- for some people, there's always something wrong. It's too hot, it's too cold, it's raining, it's not raining, I'm not waiting too long, why are you trying to rush me?

Do outward circumstances determine whether you are happy? If that is the case, you're in big trouble, because there are a lot of things wrong with this world.

- 2 Other people seem to always find something to be thankful for, and that is what God wants in each of us.

1 Thessalonians 5:18, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- 3 Another lesson from complaining is learning to be content. In other words, if Israel cannot learn to be content, then they will never be content with anything. If they could learn to be content in God, they could be content anywhere.

Illus- this is an important lesson for people who are single. The best marriages come from having two people who are content and mature in God. If someone is unhappy and discontent when their single, they will be even more so married.

- 4 We need to get to the root issue; it's about the heart.

B. Sin bites hard

Illus – How is it that all parents seem to be able to speak the same language?

- 1 This is going to hurt me...
- 2 If you won't listen to me, wait...
- 3 If everyone jumped off a cliff...
- 4 We can't afford that, do you think money...
- 5 Please close that door, do you think we...
- 6 If you don't stop your crying...

- 5 Maybe that last one is biblical...

- 6 Verse six tells us that God then sent fiery serpents among the people.

- 7 More than likely, they are called fiery because they were poisonous and their bite would have burned painfully; and many people died.

- 8 There are many serpents or snakes in that region and God may well have been protecting them as they journeyed through the wilderness. But now, their complaining has brought them face to face with the reality of their sin.

- 9 A serpent has long been a symbol both of judgment as well as sin. When Satan appeared in the Garden of Eden, he came as a serpent.

- 10 The point is that sin is poisonous. It hurts and burns, is very painful, and

ultimately leads to death.

- 11 One good thing we see in verse seven is that Israel immediately recognized their sin and asked Moses to intercede for them.
- 12 This is a very important part of the lesson that we must take careful note of because there is great spiritual significance to the confession of our sin.

Psalm 32:5, I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”; and You forgave the guilt of my sin.

- 13 Sometimes when people confess their sins it isn't really a true confession of their heart.

Illus – Pharaoh made a sort of confession, but he went back and did very same thing over again.

Exodus 10: 16-17, Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, “I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and make supplication to the Lord your God, that He would only remove this death from me.”

- 14 Moses did intercede for them, but God did not simply remove the serpents. Instead, he gave to them, and to us, a picture of his Son, Jesus Christ.

II. Look Unto Jesus and be Healed

- 1 Verse 8, God told Moses to make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard, a pole of wood, perhaps with a cross beam, and to lift it up for all the people to see. Then, anyone who looked upon the serpent lifted up in the wilderness would be healed.
- 2 As we will see from scripture, God gave them a prophetic picture of the cross of Jesus Christ.

A. Jesus is the serpent of our sin

- 1 At first, that statement may seem very provocative, but this is a very powerful spiritual point that we must carefully and thoroughly understand.
- 2 God told Moses to make a fiery serpent and set it on a standard, a wooden pole and lift it up for all to see.
- 3 Clearly, the serpent was a picture of their own sinfulness, the complaining and discontent and bitterness that was in their heart.
- 4 The serpent, then, could also be a picture of our own sinfulness.
- 5 Jesus was the one who gave us the understanding that this very event was

prophetic of Himself.

- 6 The occasion was that a man named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus at night...

John 3:1-19 He is the serpent lifted up

- 7 How is it that Jesus could be pictured as a serpent? That is a very powerful question and requires a very powerful answer.
- 8 In fact, Jesus said that this has everything to do with whether a person will have eternal life.
- 9 Paul gave us great insight into this question when he wrote to the church at Corinth...

2 Corinthians 5:21, He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

B. God did what we could not do

- 10 The people were dying and could not heal themselves. In fact, all along, God was providing for them what they could not provide for themselves, if they could only have seen it.
- 11 The scripture tells us that God also does for us what we could not do...

Romans 8:3, For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,

- 1 What was it that the Law could not do? It couldn't make us righteous. That's why it says in the very next verse...

Romans 8:4, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- 2 There are two parts of 2 Corinthians 5:21 that we must understand. First, that Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin on our behalf. Secondly, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.
- 3 That is why this is called the good news – the gospel – there is anti-venom that brings life out of death.

C. Simply look with eyes of faith

12 In order to be healed, the people simply needed to look upon the serpent lifted up in the wilderness.

13 The serpent on a tree has become a very powerful symbol of healing even today.

Illus – in fact, the whole medical community uses the symbol of a serpent on a pole to represent the healing aspect of their profession.

Illus- Unfortunately, The brass serpent became an idol later in the history of Israel. During Hezekiah's time the people started to worship the bronze serpent, so Hezekiah broke it into pieces shouting, "Nehushtan!" which simply means, "A piece of brass."

Today at the St. Ambrose Cathedral in Italy, you can find some broken brass pieces in a glass case that they say was the very same serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. People will even kiss the glass case surrounding it and lift up their prayers to it. Some things never change.

- 1 We are bitten by our own sinfulness and our only hope is to simply look upon the cross of Jesus Christ in faith believing that there is nothing else we need to do.
- 2 Simply look to the cross and believe!

Hebrews 12:2, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith,

Isaiah 45:22, "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."

Illus – What must I do to be lost? Nothing, just keep doing what you've been doing. What must I do to be saved? Simply look to Jesus.

- 1 We who have looked unto Jesus must tell those who are dying the power of simply looking unto Jesus. "I got bitten by a snake, too, and look, I've been healed."