

Bronze Snake on a Pole

Scripture Reference: [Numbers 21:4-9](#)



Suggested Emphasis: We should learn to be content and to be grateful for what God gives us.

Memory Verse: "...for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." [Philippians 4:11b, NIV](#)



Background Study



Story Introduction



Telling the Story



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Story Overview:

During the time Israel camped in the wilderness, the Lord continually provided them with manna and quail to eat. Even though He provided for their needs, their impatience and discontentment caused them to reject the food that God had provided. As a lesson for all to see, the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people so that many of them were bitten, became sick, and subsequently died. The people realised their sin and told Moses that they were sorry for what they had done. The Lord told Moses to make a bronze snake and mount it on a pole. Anyone bitten by the poisonous snakes could look at the bronze snake and be healed.

Background Study:

This lesson speaks to us today. Our children are barraged with countless reminders that they should not be satisfied with what they have. Television, newspapers, sporting events, and magazines are filled with advertisements that are aimed at making people feel that they need the advertised product. The difference between need and desire are often blurred.

Just before the events of today's lesson, Aaron passed his responsibilities as High Priest on to his son, Eleazer ([Numbers 20:22-29](#)). After this, Aaron died.

This is the last “complaint story” we read about in Numbers. As the people continued to wander in the wilderness they became “impatient”. They must have known that the forty years was almost complete. It was as if the time was getting so close that the people thought more and more about their situation. What might have begun as simple comparisons grew into grumbling and finally into a need to place blame.

The people were “speaking against God.” Moses was the leader that the Lord had chosen and so they rejected him too. The Lord had consistently provided manna and quail and yet the people called it “miserable.”

Anyone who has spent time and effort producing a special meal for someone knows how devastating it would feel if the recipient rejected it and showed disgust. The rejection would not be a simple rejection of the food but a rejection of the person who prepared it. In the same way, the Israelites were rejecting the Lord. They were saying that He did not know how to take care of them. They felt they knew better than He what they needed.

The Lord sent venomous snakes among the people. Some versions describe the snakes as “fiery.” This could refer to the burning pain they caused or even their colour. Forty years earlier the Lord told the Israelites that no one who was at that time older than twenty would enter the Promised Land ([Numbers 14:26-35](#)). Perhaps some of those people died at this time from the snake bites.

The Israelites knew that they had been wrong. They came to Moses and confessed their sins they had committed against him and against the Lord. This is interesting to note because sometimes we confess to the Lord but fail to ask forgiveness of others that we might sin against.

Moses inquires of the Lord and is instructed to make a bronze snake and mount it on a pole. It is interesting that the Lord chose this symbol because the snake or serpent was a symbol associated with evil.

Those who had been bitten were to look upon the bronze serpent and be healed. Instead of stopping at a general group admission of responsibility, each individual had to look at the snake before being healed. The snakes must have continued to be a problem because the Israelites kept the pole and it seems that it continued to be used ([Numbers 21:9](#)).

We don’t hear about the bronze serpent again for many, many years. Sadly, it seems that the pole was eventually used in idol worship. King Hezekiah broke it into pieces because the people were burning incense to it.

Jesus later parallels himself to the bronze serpent on a pole ([John 3:14](#)). Just as the serpent was lifted up on the pole, Jesus would be lifted up on a cross. Anyone who “looks to Him” will be saved. Another note of interest is that many modern medical associations use the symbol of a serpent on a pole to symbolize healing.



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Way to Introduce the Story:

“Raise your hand if you have ever been to a restaurant. What was it like? (Let them describe menu, service, cost, etc.) Did you ever eat food that you didn’t like? (Let them describe or share your own experience) Did you know that when the Israelites travelled around in the desert, God gave them good food to eat every day? Every day He gave them manna (sweet honey tasting flakes) and meat to eat (quail). It was like eating at a restaurant every day and not having to pay anything! Raise your hand if you would like that. Do you think the people were happy with what God gave them?”

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The Story:

Every day the Israelites were getting closer and closer to the time when they could enter the land that God had promised to them. The Lord always took care of them and gave them delicious manna and quail to eat. He wanted them to be happy.

Some of the people became very impatient. They were tired of waiting. They started complaining to Moses. They didn’t like the food. They wanted more water. Then they started complaining about God. They said that He didn’t give them good bread to eat. They said that He gave them miserable food. The Israelites said that they wished that they were back in Egypt!

The Lord was upset with His people. He had given them good food to eat and provided them with water. He always took care of them and protected them from the wild animals and snakes in the desert. They should be content. “Content” means being happy with the things you have or the way your life is without always being unhappy and thinking that you should have more. The Israelites were not content. The people did not thank Him for what He did. They always thought they should have more!

The Lord decided to teach the Israelites that He was the only one that could save them. He sent poisonous snakes into the camp. The snakes bit the people and many of them got sick and died. Now the people knew that they needed the Lord to protect them. They knew that they had been wrong to complain about the way the Lord took care of them. They told Moses that they were very sorry for all of their complaining.

Moses prayed to the Lord about the snakes. He told the Lord how sorry the people were. The Lord answered Moses’ prayer. He Lord did not take the poisonous snakes away from the camp but He did something that would help the Israelites remember that they should always look to Him for help. He told Moses to make a snake out of a shiny metal called “bronze”. Moses was to put the bronze snake on a pole so all the people could see it. If anyone was bitten by a poisonous snake, they could look at the bronze snake and be made well. This would help them remember that God would take care of them.

Many of the Israelites who had been bitten by the snakes looked at the bronze snake on the pole and were made well. They remembered that God takes care of His people. Only God could make them well. They learned to be happy and content with the things the Lord gave them. They learned not to complain about the Lord’s gifts!

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion. [Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download these illustrations and slideshow.](#) Be selective. Each teacher is unique so only use the illustrations that best relate to the way YOU are telling the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Review Questions:

1. What does it mean to be content? To be happy with the things you have or the way your life is without being unhappy and thinking you should have more.
2. What did the Israelites complain about? God didn't give them good food.
3. What did God send into the camp? Poisonous snakes.
4. How were the people healed from snake bites? They looked at a bronze snake on a pole.
5. Who was the only one who could make the people well? God.

Song Suggestions:

- [My God is So Big Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Have play-dough ready so that you and the children can practice making "snakes" when they first arrive. [Here's a link to a few dough recipes from teachnet.com.](#)
- Find pictures of snakes in books.
- Look up colourful advertisements in magazines or newspapers and discuss how these try to make the consumer feel like we really need to buy the product.
- Find photos of people who are genuinely in need and compare their needs to some of our "needs."
- Older children can read and discuss the parallel between this story and the crucifixion of Jesus ([John 3:14](#)).
- Role-play opening gifts at a birthday party and talk about how to show thanks for the thoughtfulness and not complain if we get something we don't want.
- Have older children read [Philippians 4:11-12](#) and put it in their own words as if Paul was writing in our current times.
- Say a chain prayer thanking the Lord for the things He has given us. Be sure to lead the children in expressing appreciation to God for His gifts.
- Write the words of the memory verse on separate pieces of paper. Mix up the papers and let the children take turns racing to put the words in the correct order.
- Discuss ways that we can show gratitude for things that people give us (food our mums cook, clothes our parents buy, birthday and Christmas gifts, etc.)

Crafts:

- Write "[Numbers 21:4-9](#)" on a craft stick. Help children to wrap a chenille wire (pipe cleaner) around the stick as a snake. Make sure the children understand that the snake was a reminder that God gives us what we need.
- Make a collage with pictures of things that the Lord blesses us with.

Check the [Teaching Ideas](#) page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.



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Other Online Resources:

- [The bronze serpent colouring page & puzzle worksheets \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Printable paper snake craft \(DLTK\)](#)
- [Snake made out of a man's tie craft \(Make and Takes\)](#)
- [Simple oragami snake \(Origami-Instructions\)](#)
- ['Journey to the Promised Land' activities \(Christian Crafters\)](#)

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