

Life Lesson 36
The Brass Serpent
Text: Numbers 21:4-9
John 3:1'21

Introduction

The children of Israel were so close, but they weren't allowed to enter the wonderful land God had promised them. Their sin and selfishness and unbelief kept them out. Sadly they traveled back into the wilderness. It wasn't much fun traveling through it the first time when they were really going somewhere. Now that they were just wandering around, it was terrible! As usual, the people began to gripe and complain. They were griping to and about Moses, but they were really complaining to and criticizing God. What a fearful thing to do!

The Story

"We're sick of this manna," the people said. "We wish we had died with the others."

God didn't let them get by with their complaining before, and he didn't let them continue complaining this time, either. He sent something worse than the plague -- poisonous snakes. These fiery snakes bit many of the complainers and lots of those people died.

The people again came to Moses.

"We have sinned," they said. "Ask God to forgive us and to take away these serpents."

Moses prayed for the people, but God had a different kind of answer than usual.

"Make a serpent out of brass that is just like the poisonous ones and set it up on a pole," God said. "Everyone who is bitten will live if he looks at the serpent on the pole."

What strange instructions! God could have just taken the serpents away or made all the sick people get well again. God knows what he is doing, though, and He had a purpose for the

poisonous snakes.

The Israelites must have been surprised then they heard God's answer. Look at a brass snake! What good could that possibly do?

When the sick people heard about it, though, they had to make a decision. Would they believe God and trust Him? If they did, they would crawl out of their tents and look up at the serpent. Those who didn't believe God would try their own cures. Maybe they would try drinking snake-bite medicine. Maybe they cut their skin with a knife and tried to suck out the poison.

Those who believed God and looked up at the brass serpent lived. Those who didn't believe and tried to cure themselves, died.

Many years later Jesus reminded a man called Nicodemus about this very story. Nicodemus was an important man. He not only went to church (the synagogue) but he was a teacher. He tried very hard to be good. But he came to Jesus by night to ask Him how he could be sure he would go to Heaven.

Jesus told Nicodemus that as Moses lifted up the brass snake on a pole, so Jesus would be lifted up on a cross. Only by looking to Jesus could Nicodemus be made right with God.

The Life Lesson

We are just like the children of Israel, and like Nicodemus, too. All of us are selfish and self-centered, just like those complaining Israelites were. We all want our own way. We have the poison of sin in us, and we are doomed to eternal death in hell.

The brass serpent represents Jesus. We can't be saved by trying to cure ourselves. We can't be saved by trying to be good, or by going to church. Even joining the church and being

baptized won't save us. We must believe that Jesus' death on the cross alone can pay for our sins.

We must believe Him, and surrender our lives to Him.

When we look to Jesus, we can be saved.

Review Questions

Why couldn't the children of Israel go into the promised land?

They didn't trust God and were afraid.

What did they complain about as they headed back to the wilderness?

They complained about eating only manna.

What did God send to punish them?

Poisonous snakes.

What did God tell Moses to make?

A brass serpent on a pole.

How would the people get well?

By looking up at the serpent on the pole.

Who reminded Nicodemus about this story?

Jesus

What does the brass serpent on the pole represent?

Jesus on the cross.

What is the only thing that can save us?

Looking to Jesus.