

# The Bronze Serpent in the Wilderness

Numbers 20:14 - 21:9 & Deuteronomy 2:1-9



## The Story

The people of Israel had been camping in the desert for 40 years. Does anyone remember why they had to spend 40 years in the desert? (They had shown distrust in the Lord when the twelve spies gave their report. They didn't trust God to help them fight their enemies.) The people of Israel were tired of living in the desert and were eager to get to their new land.

Moses asked the King of Edom if they could take a short cut through his country. Moses promised the king, "We will not go into any of your fields or eat any of your food. We will not take any water from your wells unless we pay for it. We will only stay on the road."

But the King of Edom said, "No, you may not come through my country." Then he sent his soldiers to make sure the Israelites did not come into his country.

The people of Israel were discouraged. Now they would have to walk hundreds of miles around the country of Edom. That would take a long time. What a long, hot walk that would be!

The people were so unhappy they started to complain against God and against Moses. "Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the desert?" (They were forgetting that many years before they had prayed to God to help them get free from slavery in Egypt.) The people cried, "There is no bread or water, and we're sick of this miserable food!"

In all of their grumbling and complaining they were forgetting how God had miraculously given them water from a rock, and that God sent them manna every morning. They were in no danger of

dying in the desert from lack of food or water with their loving heavenly Father providing for all their needs.

This was a sin not to thank God for His blessings, but to complain instead. They were showing that they were not trusting God to provide for them.

So the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people. They bit the people, and many in Israel died. The people came to Moses. "We've sinned," they said, "by talking against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord to take the snakes away from us."

Moses prayed for the people. God would show His love for His people by saving them.

"Make a snake," the Lord told Moses, "and put it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will live."

Moses made a bronze snake (out of metal) and put it on a pole. When a snake bit a man, he looked at the bronze snake and stayed alive.

**When the children of Israel turned away from God, He chastised them and lovingly brought them back.**

**The bronze serpent is a picture of Christ on the cross,**

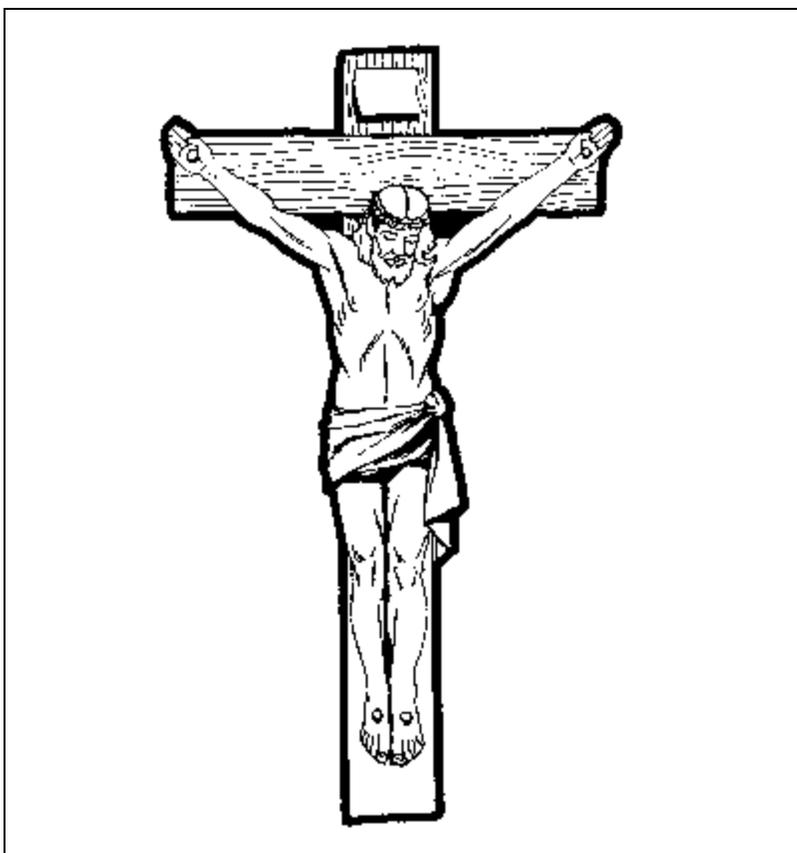
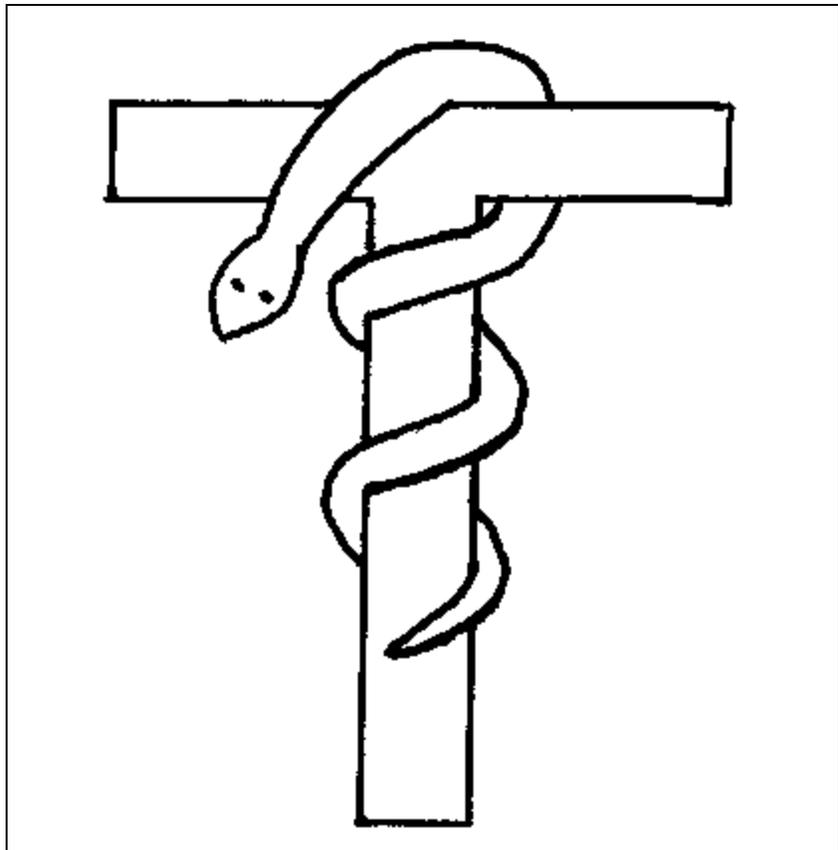
the cure for our souls.

## Activity One & Passages

- Color the pictures as you review the Bible passages.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

*John 3:14-15*



"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

*John 3:16*

## Activity Two

- Circle T if the sentence is TRUE or F if the sentence is FALSE.

1. T F The people of Israel thanked God for their food.
2. T F The complaining of the people was a sin.
3. T F God sent harmless snakes to bite them.
4. T F The people were not sorry for their sins.
5. T F They asked Moses to pray for them.
6. T F God told Moses to put a bronze snake on a dish.
7. T F Everyone who looked at the snake lived.
8. T F God showed His love for them by saving them.
9. T F God forgave their sins.

## Hymn

- TLH #394 v. 1

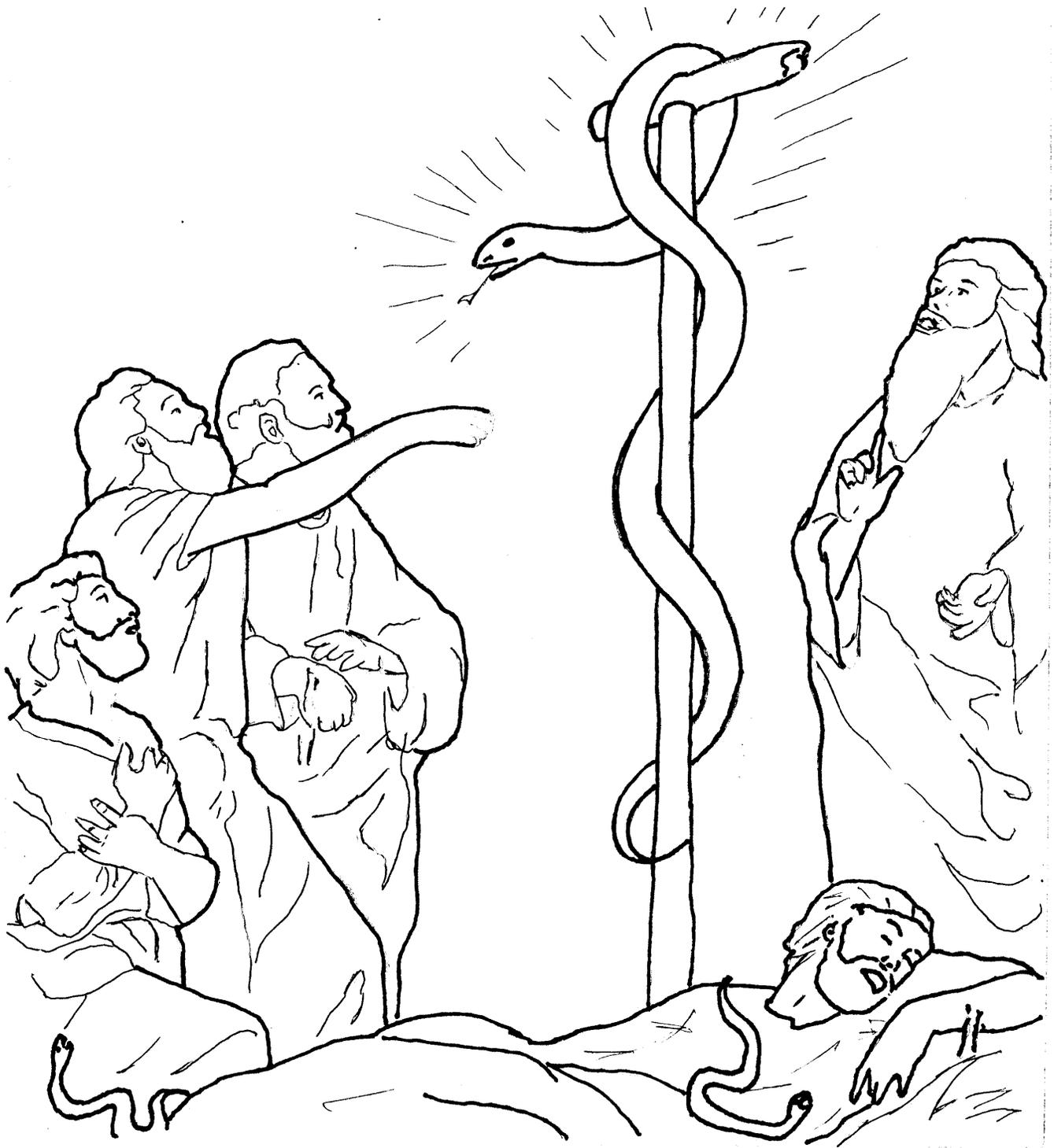
My faith looks up to Thee,  
Thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine.  
Now hear me while I pray;  
Take all my guilt away;  
Oh, let me from this day be wholly Thine!

## Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, we admit that we sin against You every day when we complain and don't obey our parents and teachers. We are sorry for our sins and ask that You forgive us for Jesus' sake. We know that You will save us because You love us. We pray that You will help us to always trust that Jesus paid for all our sins on the cross. Help us to trust in Your promise of eternal life. We thank You for Your love and mercy. Amen.

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The people of Israel were discouraged. Now they would have to walk hundreds of miles around the country of Edom. That would take a long time. What a long, hot walk that would be!

The people were so unhappy they started to complain against God and against Moses. "Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the desert?" (They were forgetting that many years before they had prayed to God to help them get free from slavery in Egypt.) The people cried, "There is no bread or water, and we're sick of this miserable food!"

In all of their grumbling and complaining they were forgetting how God had miraculously given them water from a rock, and that God sent them manna every morning. They were in no danger of dying in the desert from lack of food or water with their loving heavenly Father providing for all their needs.

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So the Lord sent poisonous snakes. They bit the people, and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses. "We've sinned," they said, "by talking against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord to take the snakes away from us."

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"Make a snake," the Lord told Moses, "and put it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will live."

Moses made a bronze snake (out of metal) and put it on a pole. When a snake bit a man, he looked at the bronze snake and stayed alive.

**When the Children of Israel turned away from God, He chastised them and lovingly brought them back.**

**The bronze serpent is a picture of Christ on the cross, the cure for our souls.**

## Activity One

- Fill in the blanks with the words from the cross.

1. The people of Israel complained against \_\_\_\_\_ and Moses.
2. This complaining was a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. God sent poisonous \_\_\_\_\_ to bite the people.
4. The people were \_\_\_\_\_ for their sins.
5. They asked \_\_\_\_\_ to pray for them.
6. God told Moses to put a bronze snake on a \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Everyone who looked at the snake \_\_\_\_\_.
8. God \_\_\_\_\_ their sins.
9. God showed His \_\_\_\_\_ by saving them.

sin  
sorry  
forgave lived snakes  
Moses  
God  
pole  
love

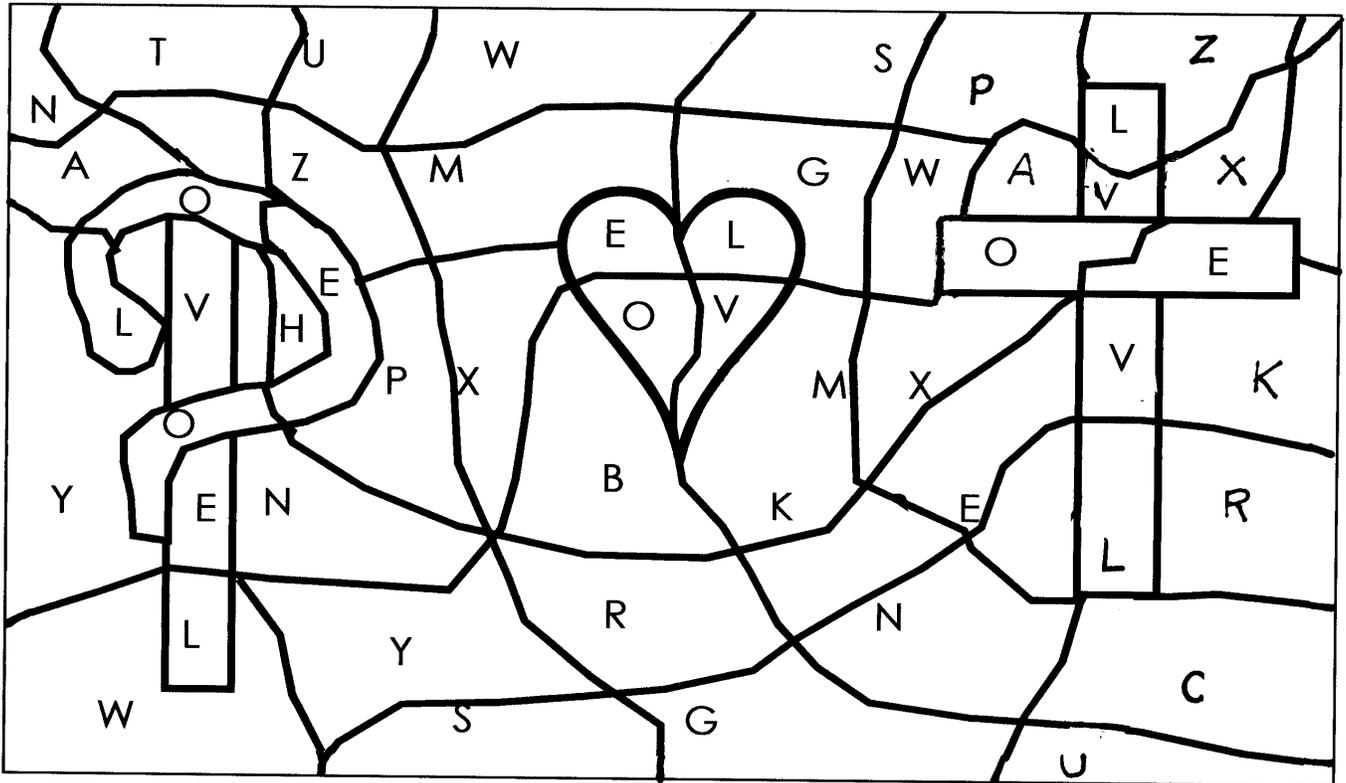
## Activity Two

- Fill in the blanks with the words from John 3:14-16(NKJV).

"And as \_\_\_\_\_ lifted up the \_\_\_\_\_ in the wilderness, even so must the \_\_\_\_\_ be lifted up, that whoever \_\_\_\_\_ in Him should not \_\_\_\_\_ but have \_\_\_\_\_.

For \_\_\_\_\_ so \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ that He \_\_\_\_\_ His only begotten \_\_\_\_\_, that whoever \_\_\_\_\_ in Him should not \_\_\_\_\_ but have \_\_\_\_\_."

## Activity Three - Color only the spaces with the letters L O V E.



## Hymn - TLH #394 v. 1, 2

My faith looks up to Thee,  
Thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine.  
Now hear me while I pray;  
Take all my guilt away;  
Oh, let me from this day  
Be wholly Thine!

May Thy rich grace impart  
Strength to my fainting heart, my zeal inspire!  
As Thou hast died for me,  
Oh, may my love to Thee  
Pure, warm and changeless be,  
A living fire!

## Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, we admit that we sin against You every day when we complain and don't obey our parents and teachers. We are sorry for our sins and ask that You forgive us for Jesus' sake. We know that You will save us because You love us. We pray that You will help us to always trust that Jesus paid for all our sins on the cross. Help us to trust in Your promise of eternal life. We thank You for Your love and mercy. Amen.

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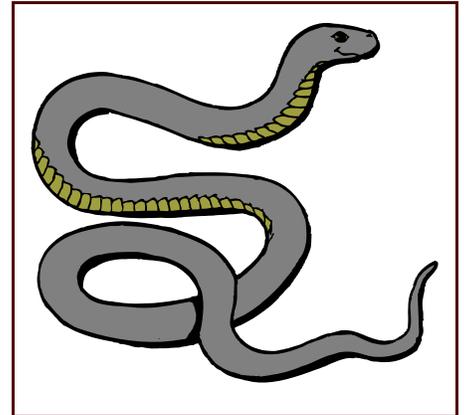
How could this animal be dangerous?

What do you think would be a cure for a snake bite?

What would happen if you didn't get a cure for the bite?

## Prayer

Dear Lord, As I study Your Word today, send Your Holy Spirit to open my heart to learn and believe Your message. Teach me to obey Your commands and to realize that Jesus Christ is the only remedy for my sin. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



## The Story - Numbers 20:14 - 21:9

Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel:

'You know all the hardship that has befallen us, {15} 'how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. {16} 'When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. {17} 'Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory.'

{18} Then Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through my land, lest I come out against you with the sword."

{19} So the children of Israel said to him, "We will go by the Highway, and if I

or my livestock drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing more."

{20} Then he said, "You shall not pass through." So Edom came out against them with many men and with a strong hand. {21} Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him.

{22} Now the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. {23} And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying: {24} "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. {25} "Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor; {26} "and



strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered to his people and die there."

{27} So Moses did just as the LORD commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. {28} Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. {29} Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.

The king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South, heard that Israel was coming on the road to Atharim, then he fought against Israel and took some of them prisoners. {2} So Israel made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities." {3} And the LORD listened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites, and they utterly destroyed them and their cities. So the name of that place was called Hormah.

{4} Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. {5} And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."

{6} So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. {7} Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

{8} Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." {9} So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

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**Outer Aim - When the children of Israel turned away from God, He chastised them and lovingly brought them back.**

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## What the Story Tells Us - Fill in the blank with the correct word or words.

1. The king of \_\_\_\_\_ would not let the children of Israel pass through his land.
2. When Aaron died, his son \_\_\_\_\_ became the new \_\_\_\_\_.
3. On the way around Edom, the children of Israel became very \_\_\_\_\_.
4. They spoke against \_\_\_\_\_ and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_?"
5. The Lord sent fiery \_\_\_\_\_, and they bit the people and many of them \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The people confessed to Moses that they had \_\_\_\_\_ and Moses \_\_\_\_\_ for the people.
7. The Lord told Moses to put a \_\_\_\_\_ serpent on a pole.
8. Everyone who looked at the serpent \_\_\_\_\_.

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**Inner Aim 1 - Although God deals severely with sinfulness, He deals graciously with repentant sinners.**

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## What God Tells Us - Mark each statement (T)rue or (F)alse.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ God sent the fiery serpents in order to teach the Israelites a lesson.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ When problems come to us, they are God's way of punishing us for our sins.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ We should try to solve our problems on our own.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ The only way our sin problem can be cured is to look to God in faith and repentance.

**What God's Word Also Tells Us** - The bronze serpent is a type or picture of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Match the statements from the story with the statements about Jesus.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. _____ The children of Israel were infected by poisonous venom. | A. All who believe in Jesus as their Savior will be saved. |
| 2. _____ The snake bite resulted in death.                        | B. We are all sinful.                                      |
| 3. _____ The bronze serpent was raised up on a pole.              | C. Jesus was raised up on a cross.                         |
| 4. _____ All who looked at the serpent would live.                | D. The punishment for sin is eternal death.                |

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**Inner Aim 2** - The bronze serpent is a picture of Christ on the cross, the cure for our souls.

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**Your Turn** - Use the messages from the story, passages, and hymn to complete the following activities.

1. Someone you know is feeling extremely guilty about something she has done. What could you tell her to comfort her?
2. You have been talking to your friend about Jesus and the Bible. Your friend says, "I believe in God, but there are just some things in the Bible that I can't believe because they don't make sense to me." What could you say to him?

## Passages

John 3:14-16 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

John 12:32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."

1 Corinthians 1:18 "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

**Hymn** - TLH 171, v. 1, 3, 4, 6, 7. Choose one verse that explains our problem and one verse that gives the cure.

Upon the cross extended,  
See, world, thy Lord suspended,  
Thy Savior yields His breath.  
The Prince of Life from heaven  
Himself hath freely given  
To shame and blows and bitter death.

I caused Thy grief and sighing  
By evils multiplying  
As countless as the sands.  
I caused the woes unnumbered  
With which Thy soul is cumbered,  
Thy sorrows raised by wicked hands.

Who is it that hath bruised Thee?  
Who hath so sore abused Thee  
And caused Thee all Thy woe?  
While we must make confession  
Of sin and dire transgression,  
Thou deeds of evil dost not know.

The load Thou takest on Thee,  
That pressed so sorely on me,  
It crushed me to the ground,  
The cross for me enduring,  
The crown for me securing,  
My healing in Thy wounds is found.

A crown of thorns Thou wearest,  
My shame and scorn Thou bearest,  
That I might ransomed be.  
My Bondsman, ever willing,  
My place with patience filling,  
From sin and guilt hast made me free.

## Prayer

Dear Jesus,

When problems occur in my life, show me that these are intended to turn me to You. When I remember what You have done to cure me of my sin sickness, I realize how greatly You have blessed me. Help me to remember this all my life and to share it with others. In Your name I pray. Amen.

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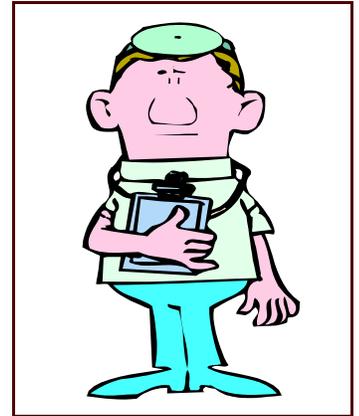
If you were sick, you might go to this man for help.

What other kind of sickness do people have besides bodily sickness?

To where do we turn for the cure of soul sickness?

## Prayer

Create in me a clean heart, Lord,  
That gladly I obey Thy Word  
And naught but what Thou wilt desire,  
With such new life my soul inspire. Amen.



## The Story - Numbers 20:14 - 21:9

Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel:

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now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. {17} 'Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory."

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pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing more."

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"You shall not pass through."

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Record Any Notes Here:

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**Outer Aim - When the children of Israel turned away from God, He chastised them and lovingly brought them back.**

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## **What the Story Tells Us** - Answer these questions from the Bible lesson.

1. What land were the Israelites not allowed to pass through?
2. Who died at the top of Mount Hor?
3. Who was appointed the next High Priest?
4. Whom did the Lord deliver to the Israelites?
5. As the Israelites were going around Edom, how did they begin feeling?
6. What did the people complain about?
7. To whom did they complain?
8. What did the Lord send to the people?
9. What began to happen to many of the people?
10. What did the people say in their requests to Moses?
11. What did the Lord tell Moses to do?
12. How were the people cured?

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**Inner Aim 1** - Although God deals severely with sinfulness, He deals graciously with repentant sinners.

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## **What God Tells Us** - Read and discuss the following.

1. Read I Corinthians 10:5-11. These verses speak of the many chastisements God sent His people.
  - a. Why did God send the serpents to the Israelites?
  - b. How are we often like the children of Israel in this lesson?
  - c. Why does God often send chastisements to His children?
  - d. What will God do if we confess our sins and repent of them?

2. The bronze serpent is a type, or picture, of our Savior Jesus Christ. For each of the following statements from the lesson, explain what they are a picture of regarding us and our Savior.
  - a. The Children of Israel were infected by a poisonous venom:
  - b. If left to run its course, the snakebite would result in death:
  - c. The bronze serpent was raised up on a pole:
  - d. Those who looked at the bronze serpent would be cured of the snakebite and live:
  
3. Read John 3:14-16 (see passages section). From this passage and from your previous answers, explain why the Israelites with the bronze serpent, and we with our Savior, must by faith, not reason, receive the cure and live.

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**Inner Aim 2 - The bronze serpent is a picture of Christ on the cross, the cure for our souls.**

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**Passages** - Discuss together how these passages apply to our lesson today.

John 3:14-16 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

John 12:32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."

1 Corinthians 1:18 "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Lamentations 3:22-24 Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

**Hymn** - TLH #171, v. 1, 3, 4, 6, 7. Read these verses and discuss them.

Upon the cross extended,  
 See, world, thy Lord suspended,  
 Thy Savior yields His breath.  
 The Prince of Life from heaven  
 Himself hath freely given  
 To shame and blows and bitter death.

Who is it that hath bruised Thee?  
 Who hath so sore abused Thee  
 And caused Thee all Thy woe?  
 While we must make confession  
 Of sin and dire transgression,  
 Thou deeds of evil dost not know.

I caused Thy grief and sighing  
By evils multiplying  
As countless as the sands.  
I caused the woes unnumbered  
With which Thy soul is cumbered,  
Thy sorrows raised by wicked hands.

The load Thou takest on Thee,  
That pressed so sorely on me,  
It crushed me to the ground,  
The cross for me enduring,  
The crown for me securing,  
My healing in Thy wounds is found.

A crown of thorns Thou wearest,  
My shame and scorn Thou bearest,  
That I might ransomed be.  
My Bondsman, ever willing,  
My place with patience filling,  
From sin and guilt hast made me free.

## Prayer

Thy cross I'll place before me,  
Its saving power be o'er me,  
Wherever I may be;  
Thine innocence revealing,  
Thy love and mercy sealing,  
The pledge of truth and constancy.

**STORY**

8/17/04

The Bronze Serpent in the Wilderness - Numbers 20:14 - 21:9 (and Deut. 2:1-9)

**TEACHER PRAYER**

Dear Lord, I am ready and willing to teach again today. In Your loving kindness bring blessing to me and my class as we study Your holy Word. May the meditation of my heart and the words of my mouth be acceptable to You. Amen.

**VOCABULARY**

*Brazen serpent* (KJV) - *bronze serpent* (NKJV) Bronze is a metal alloy composed chiefly of copper and tin melted together; this was cast into a serpentine form in a soil/sand mold.

*Edom* - the land of Idumea, named after the descendants of Esau who were regarded in the Mosaic Law as brothers to the Israelites.

*Mt. Hor* - the mountain on the east side of Arabah, halfway between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Akaba; highest and wildest of the whole Edomite range.

**OUTER AIM (various options and angles here are usable)**

When Israel broke its bond with God by its sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, the Lord brought them back with His tough love. OR: God cured snakebite in a most miraculous way.

**INNER AIM**

Though God deals severely with sinfulness, He also deals generously with repentant sinners; and the brass serpent on the pole represents Christ on the cross.

**BACKGROUND**

*(Rupprecht Bible History References, Vol. 1, pp. 220-221)*

Forty years of nomadic wandering had passed; a new generation had grown up that had seen neither Egypt nor Canaan, but only nomadic campgrounds. These children had opportunity to start over in a life that their parents had messed up for themselves. Nonetheless, this new generation proved to have the same spiritual DNA as their parents and grandparents had. (A personality is not easily altered, and only God can do a complete overhaul.)

Ch. 20, vs. 14-21

This can be treated without much explanation, for the events are simple enough. Israel was at Kadesh, at the south end of Canaan. Moses asked permission for safe passage (not an invasion) through the homeland of their "cousins." Though Moses repeatedly pledged to be most careful not to impact on Edom's countryside and resources, the king of Edom stubbornly denied them access or passage. When conditions began to take on the look of a military confrontation, Moses/Israel backed off, realizing it would mean another detour and delay before arriving safely in Canaan.

vs. 22-29

At Mt. Hor the Lord replaced Aaron with Eleazar as chief priest. A one-month delay followed to mourn over their loss of such a great man.

Ch. 21, vs. 1-4

In a border clash, the defending Canaanites gained a small victory. It seems that Israel was continually testing the Lord, and He was training them to realize that they needed to depend on Him rather than on their own resources.

vs. 4

From Mt. Hor they went southward toward the tip of the Gulf of Akaba (also called “Red Sea”) in order to back away from the land of Edom. If the king of Edom had let them pass through his country, Israel could have approached Canaan more readily; but since he had refused to do so, that resulted in some detours and delays, which evidently became rather frustrating. Although the Lord was thus sparing them a bloody conflict with their kin, they did not perceive the advantage.

vs. 5

The new generation had learned to complain as they parents had often done (ten times in all!). Unable to see their blessings, they attacked Moses as the cause of their unhappy condition.

vs.6

This turn of events was a swift departure from the usual M.O. (complaint registered, Moses interceding, the LORD relenting, partial penalties, then going forward again). These were *fiery serpents* either because their venom produced a burning sensation or because the snakes had a vivid coloration. God sent them on purpose; they were aggressive and lethal.

vs.7

The people realized the connection between their complaining and the plague. We give them the benefit of any doubt as to the sincerity of their confession of sin. They acknowledged their sinful thoughts, words, and deeds against both the LORD and Moses. Their public apology to Moses, however, did not come until *many of the people of Israel died*. Moses serves as a type of the Messiah in that he prayed for them--and his prayer was answered.

vs. 8

It remained to be seen, however, how deep their feelings ran. God’s remedy for snakebite would seem as foolishness to anyone whose heart was not bonded to the LORD as Savior. If this was not a medically approved cure nor a recognized treatment for snakebite, so be it! The LORD had sent the snakes and the LORD had a cure for the punishment they deserved. God’s directions were simple enough: using one’s eyes is not a difficult task, for there is no labor involved. But we appreciate how it would separate the repentant believer from impenitent unbeliever. For who would surrender to this unreasonable device unless his heart had first been brought to kneel before the LORD? It’s very improbability as a cure was enough to make the unbeliever turn his heart and eyes away in disdain--to his own death, of course.

vs.9

Moses did as directed: It may have taken a good part of a day to smelt pot-metal, gouge a rough- hewn channel in the sandy soil, pour the molten metal into the trough, let it cool, then shape and bend the metal so it would drape over a cross-arm on a pole. One can picture the congregation standing by, either patiently or impatiently, during the whole procedure, even as some of them throbbed with painful swelling, fever, then heart/diaphragm/muscle failure...and death. So we ask: Why devise a cure that took hours to perform? Why not an instantaneous miracle? Perhaps because sinners need to learn to wait on the LORD. It reminds us of Gal. 4:4 in that God also delayed sending His Son until “the fullness of the time had come” for His sin-cure to be presented to the world. But in God’s good time and in His own good way, **it worked**. Of course, it worked! Our God always makes all things work together for the good of His children.

## STUDENT PRAYER

Create in me a new heart, Lord, that gladly I obey Thy Word and naught but what Thou wilt desire; with such new life my soul inspire. Amen.

## PRESENTATION

Read aloud the more provocative verses thoughtfully, avoiding monotonal presentation. This episode was a “hands-on” lesson that God is not a lecturer, and that true religion is not like listening to a lecture and then being quizzed.

The case of the Israelites was simple:

- a) they were rebellious in heart, sinfully insulting to God; so
- b) God taught them a hard lesson about being mean-tempered and unloving to Him.
- c) He also is willing to lay aside His punishing anger, and He prepares His cure;
- d) To receive His cure we need a repentant attitude; then to take God at His word. What an object lesson for learning to depend on God for solving the horrible fix of sinfulness! Decide in advance whether to use John 3:14-16 as introduction, as conclusion, or as both.

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## **Additional Teaching Approach**

### **Introduction:**

Bring some pictures of snakes (such as from World Book Encyclopedia). Discuss with the children how some are harmless and some can kill you with their poison. Let the children express their delight or fear of snakes. In today's lesson we are going to learn how God used snakes to teach His people two very important lessons.

1. Sin brings death.
2. In God's mercy and love He gives life when people come with repentance and faith.

### **Presentation:**

Fill a dish pan or cake pan with sand (or dirt). Color Popsicle sticks to represent the people. Use chenille wire (pipe cleaners), cut into pieces, to be the snakes. Also make a cross out of Popsicle sticks.

### **The Story:**

See student's leaflet for narration of the story.

### **Review:**

Why were the people of Israel getting discouraged? (It was such a long walk to the Promised Land, they couldn't take the short cut.)

What did the people start to do? (By their grumbling and complaining they were really showing rebellion against God who was directing and leading their lives.)

Why was this a sin? (They weren't trusting God or thanking Him for their blessings.)

What can happen if we go on sinning and we aren't sorry for our sin? (We can lose our faith and eternal life.)

How did God show the people that their sin was very serious? (He sent poisonous snakes to bite them.)

What would happen to the people who were bitten by snakes? (They would die.)

### **Sin brings death. It is very serious.**

Did the snakes help the people understand how bad their sin was? (Yes)

How do we know? (They told Moses they were sorry for their sin and asked Moses to pray for them.)

Was there anything the people could do to save themselves from the snake bites? (No)

Who was the only one who could save them? (God)

Why did God want to save them? (Because He loved them.)

What was God's plan to save the people from the poisonous snakes? (Put a snake on a pole.)

What would happen when the people looked at the snake on the pole? (They would be saved and live.)

Did God forgive their sins? (Yes)

What was God's plan to save them from their sins? (Jesus would die on the cross to take their sins away.)

### **Application:**

Do we ever sin by grumbling and complaining? (Most kids will complain at times about the food they are served, or about having to clean up their rooms or do other chores.)

Why is this a sin? (Disobeying parents is really disobeying God – 4<sup>th</sup> commandment.)

Is this sin serious? (“The wages (payment for) of sin is death.”)

What do we deserve because of our sins? (Hell)

Is there anything we can do to save ourselves from sin and hell? (No)

What was God’s plan to save us from our sins? (He would send His Son, Jesus, to live a perfect life for us and to pay the punishment for our sins on the cross. John 3:14-16 may be discussed here. Make sure the children understand verse 14, “so the Son of Man must be lifted up” means Jesus was lifted up on the cross to pay for our sins. Emphasize God’s love that He would send His Son to suffer and die for us sinners.)

Why did God send His Son to die for us? (Because He loves us.)

**We trust only in God to wash away our sins and forgive us.**

What joy becomes ours because Jesus took away our sins? (The joy of eternal life with God in heaven.)

### **Closing Prayer:**

Dear Father in heaven, we admit that we sin against you every day when we complain and don’t obey our parents and teachers. We are sorry for our sins and ask that You forgive us for Jesus’ sake. We know that You will save us because You love us. We pray that You will help us to always trust that Jesus paid for all our sins on the cross. Help us to trust in your promise of eternal life. We thank you for your love and mercy. Amen.

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### **APPLICATION**

1. How marvelous that Jesus (the vehicle for the Cure for sin) was placed into the form of a man (the vehicle of the curse); and that all who look to Him in their desperate need are given life! And Jesus his elevated position on the “accursed tree” counterbalances the degraded position of those below Him. How strange the symbolism: bitten by snakes and dying, the victim receives God’s salvation in the form of a snake! What are we to make of it? Why not a symbol more divine-looking (like an angel, or a halo)? Because we should expect God to choose the improbable, the unlikely, and with it He does the impossible.
2. God does His work in the most amazing ways! He sent His own Son (not an angel or a sinner) to put Himself in the shoes of humankind, to bare his heel to the serpent of Eden, to absorb the venom of Satan’s attack (suffer and die), then crush Satan’s head by rising from the grave. The worldling reels in astonishment at such a doctrine (it’s too illogical, too irrational to attract anyone with good sense); yet there is no Cure but in the cross of Christ.
3. And when in the reign of Caesar Augustus the time was ripe for God’s plan and the embodiment of His Craftsmanship was finished, Jesus did not appear all that special. “He came unto His own (people and race), but His own received Him not.” Thus the Cross and our preaching of the Cross (whether by Moses or by us) will be foolishness to them that are perishing (from Satan’s poison); but unto those who look in faith to the Cross of Christ, well, to them it is “the wisdom of God and the power of God” (cf. 1 Cor. chs. 1 and 2).
4. So *faith* is basically an attitude toward God--the attitude that takes God at His word (no matter how illogical) and reaps the blessing that God channels through such unquestioning trust. *Unbelief* is basically the attitude that if it “doesn’t make sense,” then whatever the Bible (God) says is unacceptable.
5. One part of our soul looks askance and stands aloof from the way God acts and speaks--so His ways are “supernatural”. Each Israelite had the struggle. “Shall I take a peek at that brass serpent? Shall I abandon my reservations, my doubts, my scientific good sense; shall I fight this thing on my own and die on my own terms? Or shall I take a peek and see what happens? I certainly have better things to do than stare at that stupid cross-draped dumb-looking piece of fakery that others find so compelling....etc., etc.” The other part of our soul looks squarely at Jesus and reaches out to the Lord God who acts and speaks so wonderfully to us, after all. One learns to appreciate what Jesus saw in Nathanael: “Look, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.” Nathanael wasn’t trying to outsmart Satan and God too.
6. Of course, it’s the kind of looking that’s done in FAITH, for looking in disdain would be of no help, as

Jesus so clearly presents the crux of it: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (Jn.3:14-16)

## **PASSAGES**

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

### **Lower**

John 3: 14-16 “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

John 12:32 - And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.

I Peter 2:24 - who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.

### **Middle** any of the above and...

I Cor. 1:18 - For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are saved it is the power of God. v.25 - Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Lamentations. 3:22-33 - Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I hope in Him.”

### **Upper** any of the above and...

1 Cor. 10:5-11 (Use your Bible here for the text.)

## **HYMN CHOICES**

“My Faith Looks Up To Thee” (TLH #394)

“I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus” (TLH #428 1-4))

“Upon the Cross Extended” (TLH #171, choice of verses)

“How Firm A Foundation, Ye Saints Of The Lord” (TLH #427 3,5)