

## Look up and Live

### Numbers 21:4-9

I'd like to start by thanking David for this invite to give the Friday night devotional at ViZion church. I want to share some reflections I gleaned from the book of Numbers but before we read the passage let's open in prayer.

Moses wrote the book of Numbers and it's thought to have been written between 1450-1410 B.C. He wrote about the time when the second generation of Israelites was coming to the end of their arduous journey wandering in the desert after the exodus, heading towards the promised land.

Just for background in the verses 1-3 we read that the Israelites had experienced a great victory over the Canaanites having made a vow to the Lord.

Yet here, in verse 4 they are becoming discouraged and weary.

Edom has blocked passage through its land, so they are having to back track into the wilderness again.

Their victorious battle high quickly passes, and they are soon complaining **again** about having left Egypt. There's no doubt this was a difficult and frustrating journey for them so discouragement might be expected but complaining is another matter.

Now who of us has never complained about anything? We're all guilty of it from time to time. But, complaining is a form of ingratitude and indignation and it's an attitude that God despises, so there are 3 Cs I want us to consider as we look at these verses.

Tonight I'm going to talk about complaining, confession and cure.

#### **We'll begin by looking at... complaining**

**1. They were Bitten because they **complained**.** - verses 5-6 verse 5 reads *And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for [there is] no bread, neither [is there any] water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.*

Notice three aspects of their complaining.

1. They complained by attacking God and Moses personally.
2. They complained about wandering away from Egypt to die in the wilderness.
3. They complained about the provision of Manna, which they considered worthless, and the need for water.

Psalms 78:40 says *How often did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert.*

This wasn't the first time for their murmuring and complaining, in fact it was the 8<sup>th</sup>. This time God had enough! God was and is patient, loving and long suffering but He will not be mocked.

### **What does this mean for the Christian today?**

The more we complain, the more depressed, angry, and bitter we become. All of us, at some point in our life suffer disappointment and hurts.

- Job losses,
- broken relationships,
- unruly children,
- sickness,
- bereavement,
- disabilities,

and a host of other things can cause us to suffer from stress and worry. If we don't deal with that stress and worry the right way, by bringing these things to the Lord in prayer and trusting Him, then stress & worry can lead to bitter complaining. Bitter complaining creates a wall, a barrier, between us and the Lord.

We read in **verse 6** *And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.*

Have you ever been bitten by a snake? I was in South Africa visiting my sister for my 40th birthday and part of my visit was to climb a Mountain called Bloupunt in the town

of Montagu. I was warned to lookout for snakes especially Puff Adder, Cape Cobra and the Rinkhals, I was lucky not to meet any on the trail!

Maybe some of my friends at Vizion church that have encountered snakes on the WHW Trail (I'm kidding) Well maybe a "Slow Worm".

So, God's anger was stirred against them because of their ingratitude and complaining so He sent deadly serpents into the camp, the venom felt hot and fiery as it travelled through the body, and many died.

There were consequences for their complaining and those consequences were deadly.

So, what did they do about it?

They confessed! They came to Moses, admitting they had sinned and **confessed** that they had spoken against him and God.

This brings us on to point 2 - Confession

**2. They confessed** because they sinned by complaining - verse 7 - *Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.*

*1 John 1:9 says If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*

You might be thinking 'well I confessed my sin the moment I first believed' and that's quite right that you have 'positional' forgiveness with the Lord - our salvation is assured but there is a need for ongoing 'relational' forgiveness. If we want to remain in close fellowship with the Lord, we need be humble, recognise our daily sins and confess them to the Lord so that our relationship with God is unbroken.

Now, **part 2** of the verse says, *And Moses prayed for the people.* The people ask Moses to intercede in prayer to the Lord that He would take away the serpents.

The people called on Moses to intercede for them. Today we can call on Jesus directly to mediate for us as *1 Timothy 2: 5 says For [there is] one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;*

We also have the Holy Spirit, who participates in our prayers, He is the One who convicts, encourages, and helps us to pray. There are times when we are so discouraged or disappointed that we don't know how to pray about a situation or what words to use but don't be like the Israelites in the desert complaining, instead go into that quiet place and ask the Holy Spirit to intercede for you. We are promised His help in

*Romans 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what [is] the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to [the will of] God.*

Confession leads to restoration so lastly; we're going to look at 'the cure'.

**3 - They were given the cure for their confession. - verses 8-9** *Numbers 21:8 And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. 9. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.*

The Israelites were healed of a slow and painful death caused by the snake bite by looking up to the snake on the pole. However, it wasn't the snake that healed them but their **obedience** to God and the **belief** the He would **heal** and **restore** them.

In *John 3:14-15* Jesus says this to Nicodemus "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*"

The Israelites looked to the serpent set on a pole; - we look to the cross.

The death of Jesus Christ was the payment for sin, the **cure**, that's why His final 3 words in *John 19:30* were *'It is finished'* - the debt has been paid.

We as Christians have been saved from the sickness of sin through our belief that Jesus was and is who He claims to be. We live a life of obedience because of our humble gratitude for the price that was paid to redeem us.

You have a choice today to either live in bitterness that brings a broken relationship with God, or you can confess your sin and walk in close relationship with God.

So, the next time you find yourself complaining about life's hardships think on these things, remember what the Lord has done for you and turn your complaining into rejoicing. I'm paraphrasing a little bit here but consider the words of Isaiah in 61:3 and say to the Lord *thank you, thank you that you make beauty from ashes, that you give me the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness.*

I hope you will take time to ponder this chapter and even the book of Numbers, it has so many benefits for us to learn through the wanderings in the Israelites.