

Episode 7: The Snake and the Cross—The Gospel Before the Gospel

***16****“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.[[1]](#footnote-1) (John 3:16)*

1. **Jesus and Nicodemus**
   1. Read John 3:1-21
   2. Nicodemus didn’t get it, so Jesus made it more complicated.
2. **The Story of the Serpent: Numbers 21:4-9** 
   1. **The Context of Victory**
      1. **Pre:** **Victory Over the king of Arad** (Num. 21:1–4): The Canaanite king of Arad attacks the Israelites and takes some of them as prisoners. But the Israelites counter-attack, and God gives them total victory.
      2. **Post: Victory Over King Sihon** (Num. 21:21–32): King Sihon of the Amorites refuses the Israelites’ peaceful request for passage and attacks them, but he suffers total destruction.
      3. **Post: Victory Over King Og** (Num. 21:33–35): This giant warrior king of Bashan (Deut. 3:11) is killed by the Israelites, along with his sons and his entire army.[[2]](#footnote-2)
   2. **The Complaining Continues…**Once again the people complained against God.
   3. **God’s punishment:** So, (v.6)*“ Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.”*
   4. **The People’s Repentance:** (v. 7) *And 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.”*
   5. **Moses Prayed for the People** (v.7)
   6. **God’s Bizarre Answer** (v.8)
      1. ***8****And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live”.[[3]](#footnote-3)*
3. **Understanding the Bronze Serpent** 
   1. The command to fashion and look upon the bronze snake was a ritual test of faith.
      1. The Snake was a physical / visible sign pointing to an invisible / supernatural reality.
      2. The Bronze Serpent was a symbol/ sign of the sin, contempt, rebellion, pain, suffering, and judgment of God on the people.
      3. God’s demand was a ritual: *if they want to live they are going to do as I say and turn their eyes from the snakes at their feet and look up at that image*.” (turn away ***from*** Sin ***to*** God’s answer)
   2. This was a ***test***.
   3. The children of Israel had to realize and accept that they were desperately in need of God to save them.
4. **The Snake and the Cross**
   1. John 3:14-15: *14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*
   2. *Just as the Snake lifted up on a pole was salvation to the people dying in the wilderness, so the Son of Man lifted up on the cross is salvation to people dying in sin.*
   3. Redemption begins with Repentance. 
      1. Repentance is not just saying “I’m sorry.”
      2. Repentance is trusting your life to God’s way.
5. **Lifting the Serpent—Lifting the Cross** 
   1. v. 14“*the Son of Man must be lifted up.”*
   2. The mission of the church is to lift up Christ just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness.
   3. Christ’s promise-- John 12: 32 ***32****And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”*

1. **Why didn’t Nicodemus Understand?** 
   1. This is not common sense. That’s why Nicodemus didn’t get it at first.
   2. The Bible says *“ 18  the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*

1. *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Jn 3:16). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Willmington, H. L. (1999). [*The Outline Bible*](https://ref.ly/logosres/outlnbbl?ref=Bible.Nu21.1-4&off=119&ctx=+the+promised+land.%0a~A.+Over+the+king+of+) (Nu 21:1–35). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Nu 21:8). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)