The Promise of God’s Provision

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God is just and will punish sin, but He is also gracious and will provide a way of salvation.

MAIN PASSAGES: Numbers 21:4–9; John 3:14–15

Two friends decided they wanted to go from San Diego to Japan by water, a journey of roughly 5,600 miles. So they began their preparations. They mapped out the route, enlisted a support team, and trained for months to swim the Pacific Ocean. When the big day arrived, the friends waded into the water and took off for Japan. After a quarter-mile, one swimmer tore his rotator cuff and called for the support boat. The other swimmer continued on over a hundred miles before he gave up from fatigue, the cold, and the choppy waters and he too called for the boat to help him.

While one swimmer did far better than the other, neither came close to reaching their destination. They both failed, despite having prepared so extensively, because they put their faith for the journey in the wrong thing—their own weak human bodies. Perhaps if they had placed their faith in the boat in the first place, they could have made it.

What are some things people put their faith in hoping that everything turns out well for them in the end?
Group Time

**Point 1:** God punishes sin and desires repentance from His people (Num. 21:4-7a).

4 Then they set out from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea to bypass the land of Edom, but the people became impatient because of the journey. 5 The people spoke against God and Moses: “Why have you led us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread or water, and we detest this wretched food!” 6 Then the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and they bit them so that many Israelites died. 7a The people then came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you.

The Israelites sinned against God once again as they complained about the food God was providing. If we focus on the Israelites’ offense, we might not understand what follows. But when we recognize that the Israelites sinned against a holy God, we find it easier to see that God’s judgment was just. God showed the Israelites the magnitude of their offense against Him by sending killer snakes into the camp.

How do you tend to see your sins?

- [ ] Innocent
- [ ] Damnable

**Sin and Death:** The ultimate consequence for sin is death—physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death. Spiritual death, the _________________ of a person from God, continues in a _________________ state when someone dies apart from the reconciling work of _________________.

The snakes that God sent brought about His desired result—repentance. Like the Israelites, the first thing we should do to repent of sin is confess that we have sinned against God. We don’t try to hide anything, but we lay bare before Him what we have done and why, acknowledging our damaged hearts behind our sinful conduct.

What are some responses people have when they realize they have sinned against God?
Point 2: God provides an intercessor to appeal on behalf of His people (Num. 21:7b-8).

7b Intercede with the LORD so that he will take the snakes away from us.” And Moses interceded for the people. 8 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake image and mount it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will recover.”

Remembering His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God had raised up a deliverer, Moses, to lead His people. From the start, Moses was to be His intermediary and His people’s intercessor. Whether it was a promise of salvation, laws to follow, or a message of condemnation, God spoke to His people through Moses. But Moses also spoke to God on behalf of the people, asking for provision and the forgiveness of sin.

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At their request, Moses interceded on behalf of the people, and God responded, but in an unexpected way. God did not remove the snakes from the camp, as they had asked. Instead, God provided a way for the Israelites to be saved from the sure death that followed being bitten—a bronze snake lifted up on a pole. The very object of their punishment would be the object of their deliverance. Like the Israelites, our sin deserves death. But God, in His unending grace and mercy, raised up for us the intercessor who would also be the object of our deliverance.

Voices from the Church

“It is uncomfortable to see ourselves as needy and weak, but we are, and that is exactly why Christ is the only answer.”

–Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp

What are some ways Jesus is the only answer to our weakness?
Point 3: God provides a way of salvation through faith for His people (Num. 21:9; John 3:14-15).

9 So Moses made a bronze snake and mounted it on a pole. Whenever someone was bitten, and he looked at the bronze snake, he recovered.

14 “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

With His response to Moses’ intercession on behalf of the people, God wanted the Israelites to wrestle with faith, something they had struggled with and lost so many times before this. He wanted them to see that following His lead might not make sense at times, but He always proves faithful in the end. God is just and will not allow sin to go unpunished, but He desires to show mercy and grace to all those who believe Him. And the one true God is always worthy of our faith.

What are some reasons people refuse to put their faith in God?

Salvation from death was available for the Israelites, but it was not effective until they looked up in faith at the snake on the pole. Similarly, Jesus was lifted up on a cross to pay the punishment deserved because of our sin (Isa. 53:5-6), but until we look upon Him in faith, we remain dead and condemned in our trespasses and sins (John 3:18). Yet we look to Jesus not only to be spared death but also to experience life as God intends. We show we trust in Jesus’ salvation by living the way He has called us to live.

Faith: Biblical faith is the _______________, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation. More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the ________________, followed by a receiving of Christ as ________________ and ________________ of one’s life.

How would you encourage someone to put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin and for eternal life?
My Mission

Because we have been spared from punishment of sin through the intercession of Jesus, we plead with others to look upon the cross and receive salvation through Jesus Christ.

- What does your response/attitude toward your sin say about your faith in Jesus? How will you respond in faith?
- How can your group intercede for you, and you for others, as you imitate Christ?
- How will you proclaim the gospel of Jesus this week and call on others to look to the cross and live?

Notes
Day 1: Read Numbers 20:1-29

In Numbers 20, the people rose up against Moses and Aaron because they had no water to drink. In response, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before God. God spoke to them and commanded Moses to speak to a rock and He would make it yield water. But because of his anger toward the people, Moses rebuked the Israelites and struck the rock twice with his staff instead of speaking to it as God had commanded. Because of Moses’ failure to obey, God declared that he would not be allowed to enter into the promised land; he would die in the wilderness instead.

God’s demand for obedience is absolute. There is no such thing as “halfway” obedience. Even the most minuscule deviation from God’s commands is an act of disobedience. We are called to be holy just as God is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16). God’s holiness refers both to His uniqueness in being separate from creation and to His perfect purity. This is our standard as well. We are to be different from our culture. We are to obey perfectly. And even one act of unfaithfulness earns condemnation. But thankfully, we have been provided a way to be forgiven of our transgressions in Jesus, the One who perfectly obeyed and who takes our sin and credits us with His righteousness when we believe.

Voices from Church History

“When we walk with the Lord In the light of His Word, What a glory He sheds on our way! Let us do His good will; He abides with us still, And with all who will trust and obey. Trust and obey, For there’s no other way To be happy in Jesus, But to trust and obey.”

—John H. Sammis (1846-1919)

How have you obeyed God partly at times, believing that was good enough for Him?
Day 2: Read Numbers 21:1-6

At the beginning of Numbers 21, the Israelites revealed they had the ability to trust in God’s faithfulness, but they also revealed they were quick to forget that same faithfulness. When the Canaanites fought against the Israelites and took some of their people captive, God gave His people victory. When they bypassed Edom, however, the Israelites became impatient and quickly forgot what God had done for them. They began to complain about lacking food and water and detested what God had been providing. God responded to their sin by sending snakes into their camp to discipline them.

We aren’t much different from the Israelites. We too are quick to forget God’s faithfulness. We too need God’s gift of discipline at times to remind us that if God was willing to provide Jesus to die on the cross to address our greatest need, we can surely trust Him to provide for our daily needs as well (Luke 12:24).

What are some things God has done for you in the past that you can remember today to help you remain faithful in the face of need or temptation?

Day 3: Read Numbers 21:7-9

The people wanted God to take away the serpents from the camp, but God had a better plan. He wanted them to experience what it was like to be doomed to die but to be saved by placing faith in Him. He wanted them to experience new life from that day forward. All the people needed to do was look up at the bronze snake on a pole, trusting in God’s faithfulness, and they would be healed.

In a similar way, God has provided a way for us to be saved from our sin by lifting Jesus up on the cross. Our sin deserves God’s wrath, but instead, He placed that wrath on His Son in our place. For anyone to be saved, all it takes is turning away from sin and looking to Jesus in faith, believing and trusting that He has done what is required to remove God’s wrath from us. But for many, that is easier said than done. And for many who have trusted in Jesus, it remains difficult to continue to trust in the completed work of Jesus. That is why we are grateful that Jesus is an ever-present intercessor, always at the right hand of the Father, making appeals to Him on our behalf.

Whom has God placed in your life for you to be an intercessor, praying for them and telling them what Christ has done?
Day 4: Read Numbers 21:10-35

When we walk in obedience to God’s commands, He both walks with us and before us. Jesus has already given us victory over sin and death, so as we live, we are free to follow God no matter what may come our way. We are not promised lives of comfort and freedom from pain. In fact, being followers of Jesus in a broken world means that we will, not that we might, face persecution (Mark 10:29-30). But just as God told Moses that He had already given King Og into his hands, God already has won the victory over His enemies.

As we live each day, we go forward in confidence, living from the victory that Jesus has already won for us. Jesus has defeated sin and death, so in the face of any persecution we will face, we continue striving to live the way He has called us to—with faith and with joy.

How does knowing that God goes before you and with you give you confidence as you face opposition?

Day 5: Read John 3:1-21

The necessity of belief for salvation is repeated several times in John 3. For anyone to be saved from sin, he or she must believe, or trust, in who Jesus is and that He has done everything necessary for salvation from sin. If we place our faith in Jesus Christ, He will give us eternal life. But that is not where the blessings end.

Trusting in the finished work of Christ also means living from the victory He won on the cross. After we’ve placed our faith in Jesus, our salvation can never be taken away from us (Rom. 8:38-39). Neither persecution, death, nor even our own sin can separate us from the love of God. We can trust this to be true, even in the face of doubt, because even though it is through our faith that Jesus saves us, it is not our faith in Jesus that sustains our salvation. What sustains our salvation is the completed work of Jesus—His life, death, burial, and resurrection—and the unending power of God to preserve our salvation no matter what.

What doubts do you face in your walk with Christ? How does His completed work on the cross help you continue to believe?
Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God punishes sin and desires repentance from His people (Num. 21:4-7a).
- God provides an intercessor to appeal on behalf of His people (Num. 21:7b-8).
- God provides a way of salvation through faith for His people (Num. 21:9; John 3:14-15).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

What does it mean for Christians to live by faith in Jesus (Gal. 2:20)?

Why should the consequence of death for sin and the grace of forgiveness through faith in Christ spur you on to share the gospel?

Notes
UNIT 7
SESSION 1
1. Tony Evans, Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2009) [eBook].
SESSION 2
SESSION 3
SESSION 4
1. Amy Carmichael, Thou Givest … They Gather (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1958) [eBook].
UNIT 8
SESSION 1
1. Noël Piper, Treasuring God in our Traditions (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 64.
SESSION 2
SESSION 3
1. Betsie ten Boom, quoted in The Hiding Place, by Corrie ten Boom with Elizabeth and John Sherrill (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2006), 84.
EASTER SESSION
UNIT 9
SESSION 1
1. Andrew Murray, Abide in Christ, in The Essential Works of Andrew Murray, ed. Tracy M. Sumner (Barbour, 2008) [eBook].
SESSION 2
SESSION 3
SESSION 4
SESSION 5
In these sessions of The Gospel Project, we experience some of the most exciting narratives in Scripture. There are accounts here of sin and judgment, of moral decline and merciful intervention, and of rescuers who need rescue. Through it all, one thing is clear: God is with His people and He is faithful to His promise.

It’s important to keep that central theme in mind because many people read these stories about the conquest of the land and try to find examples for emulation. To be clear, we can learn a lot from these Old Testament heroes (see 1 Cor. 10), but we cannot implement their virtues apart from our connection to the Vine—Jesus Christ Himself, the One who bears fruit in us and through us.

As we walk through our present wilderness, struggling against sin and encountering sorrow, we know that the God who has gone before us is faithful. He is the One who prepares the way for us to be His ambassadors. He is the One who breaks the chains of our idolatry and lifts our gaze to His unchanging glory.