Unit 7, Session 2

The Promise of God’s Provision

Summary and Goal
In the last session we looked at God’s people failing to trust in His faithfulness to bring them into the land of Canaan. In this session, we will see that the next generation of Israelites, the children of the people who had rejected God’s provision of a land flowing with milk and honey, grumbled and complained about God’s provision for them in the wilderness. We will see once again that God is gracious and merciful, but He also takes rebellion against Him seriously. We will also see that just as God made a way for the Israelites to be saved through the judgment He poured out on them, He has made a way for us to be saved from the ultimate consequence of our rebellion, which is eternal separation from Him.

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

Session in a Sentence
God is just and will punish sin, but He is also gracious and will provide a way of salvation.

Christ Connection
Just as the Israelites looked upon the bronze serpent lifted high on the pole and were healed, so also we look with faith upon Jesus Christ lifted high on the cross and are saved from the punishment of our sin.

Missional Application
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.
GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

Group Time

Introduction

READ: Tell the story on page 20 in the Daily Discipleship Guide (DDG) about two friends deciding to make a water trip from San Diego to Japan. Emphasize how this story relates to the concept of faith.

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 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.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

What are some things people put their faith in hoping that everything turns out well for them in the end? (in themselves; in money and stuff; in the pursuit of happiness; in good deeds; in a god who overlooks our sin)

EXPLAIN: God has provided only one way for things to go well for us in the end. He has given us Jesus to save us from our sin. He alone must be the object of saving faith. Trusting in anything else only leads to death; it does not matter how sincere or strong that faith is. Faith is effective only when it is placed in the right object—in Jesus Christ, God’s only provision for sinners to be saved.

SUMMARIZE: In the last session we looked at God’s people failing to trust in His faithfulness to bring them into the land of Canaan. In this session, we will see that the next generation of Israelites grumbled and complained about God’s provision for them in the wilderness, and both God’s judgment and grace in response point us to Jesus Christ lifted high on the cross for our salvation.

For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit www.GospelProject.com/additional-resources.
**Point 1: God punishes sin and desires repentance from His people (Num. 21:4-7a).**

**SAY:** This event in the life of the Israelites took place almost forty years after their rebellion and refusal to go into the promised land. Most of the previous generation died in the wilderness, as God had said, and the next generation came of age seeing God lead them and provide for them every step of the way.

**READ** Numbers 21:4-7a (DDG p. 21).

> 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.

**EXPLAIN:** Using the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 21), help your group understand that because all sin offends a holy, righteous, just, and eternal God, all sin deserves a holy, righteous, just, and eternal punishment.

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.

**INSTRUCT:** Ask group members the use the scale in their DDG (p. 21) to consider how they typically think about their sins.

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**How do you tend to see your sins?**

- Innocent

- Damnable

**EXPLAIN** that because we often focus on our sins to the exclusion of the One we have sinned against (Ps. 113:4-6), we fail to remember that all of our sins—even the “small” ones that don’t seem to harm anyone—are acts of rebellion against our Creator. We fail to understand that what is deemed culturally appropriate changes from generation to generation, but God’s Word remains unchanged.
**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 21).

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

**Essential Doctrine “Sin and Death”:** The ultimate consequence for sin is death—physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death (Rom. 6:23). God was clear to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die (Gen. 2:17). The type of death that would result from the fall in the garden of Eden wasn’t only physical death but spiritual death as well, the separation of a person from God. Spiritual death continues in a permanent state when someone dies apart from the reconciling work of Christ, who defeated death through His own death on the cross and subsequent resurrection.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 21) to emphasize that we must repent of sin immediately because sin disrupts our fellowship with God.

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.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

What are some responses people have when they realize they have sinned against God? (deny it; feel sorry; try to fix it; confess it and repent)

**SAY:** True repentance begins with agreeing with God that we’ve sinned and that it is serious. We have to own our sin, to take responsibility for it, and we have to agree with God that what we have done deserves death.
**Point 2:** God provides an intercessor to appeal on behalf of His people (Num. 21:7b-8).

**READ** Numbers 21:7b-8 (DDG p. 22).

> 7b Intercede with the LORD so that he will take the snakes away from us.” And Moses interceded for the people. 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.”

**EXPLAIN:** Reference the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 22) as you highlight Moses’ roles as God’s **intermediary** and an **intercessor** for God’s people. Then connect these roles to Jesus’ work on our behalf.

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.

- In Numbers 21, Moses had yet another opportunity to **intercede** on behalf of God’s people (recall the golden calf incident and the rebellion with the spies). At times, Moses had done this apparently on his own, but here the people asked him to intercede for them. They knew they had sinned. They recognized God’s judgment. They understood that Moses was able to plead for grace and mercy on their behalf.

- In a similar and even greater way, God has revealed Himself and His plan of salvation through the perfect **intermediary** of His Son, Jesus. Through faith in Him, we have been delivered from the oppressive slavery of sin and death. However, we still sin on a daily basis. So Jesus, similar to Moses with the Israelites, continues to intercede for us with the Father (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:23-28). As our **intercessor**, every time we sin, Jesus declares that sin forgiven by His sacrifice, points to His righteousness that covers us, and reminds the Father of His promise of eternal life.

**INSTRUCT:** Ask groups of 3-4 to use the table in their DDG (p. 22) to record ways Jesus has shown Himself to be the greater Moses. After a couple of moments, call for some responses, and offer the following as needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MOSES</strong></th>
<th><strong>JESUS</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Intermediary for God</td>
<td>The Intermediary for God (Heb. 1:2-3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>An Intercessor for the People</td>
<td>The Intercessor for God’s People</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Prophet of God</td>
<td>The Prophet of God (Deut. 18:15-19)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Mediator</td>
<td>The One Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5-6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Deliverer from Slavery</td>
<td>The Deliverer from Sin and Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicated God’s Law</td>
<td>Brings Grace and Truth (John 1:17)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
**SAY:** As we’ve already seen, all sin deserves death—physical and spiritual separation from God. Most often, physical death is not an immediate consequence of sin, but sometimes it is, as it was in Numbers 21. Though God was still present with His people, their faithlessness had brought the painful consequence of death upon them.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 22) to show how God responded unexpectedly to the prayer of the people’s intercessor.

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.

**INTERACT:** Read the “Voices from the Church” quote (DDG p. 22) and ask group members the following question.

*What are some ways Jesus is the only answer to our weakness? (He laid down His life for us to save us from our sin and its deadly consequences; He intercedes for us in our continued weakness to sin that we would be forgiven and renewed in our relationship with God the Father; He has given believers the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin and to strengthen us for obedience and our gospel mission; the fullness of God is beyond our comprehension, but Jesus reveals His fullness to us)*

*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

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**Point 3:** God provides a way of salvation through faith for His people (Num. 21:9; John 3:14-15).

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Numbers 21:9 and John 3:14-15 (DDG p. 23).

*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.”*

**SAY:** Imagine you are in the Israelite camp. You have complained about your long travels and your daily portion of manna with the rest of the community. And then, a snake slinks up and sinks its venom-filled fangs into your leg. In that instant, you recognize that you have moved from life to death; it is just a matter of time until that transition is complete. But then you hear Moses cry out, “Look up at the bronze snake and be healed!” You wonder, *How will looking up at a bronze snake heal me?* And as little sense as that makes, it makes even less sense to look at an object of a snake, the very thing that is causing your death, as the remedy for your snakebite. In this moment, you have a choice: You can listen to your own reason, stubbornly try to find another way, and *die* or you can put your faith in God, heed the word of God through His prophet, look up at the bronze snake, and *live.*

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 23) to highlight the importance of faith in God, even when His words and ways may not make sense.

*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.*

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

*What are some reasons people refuse to put their faith in God? (they want to walk their own path through life; they are stubborn in their unbelief; they struggle to trust in Someone they can’t see; they have been hurt by God’s people; an all-powerful, all-good God doesn’t seem to make sense with the evil, pain, and death in the world)*
EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 23) to show how Jesus, like the bronze snake, was lifted up on the cross for our salvation—if we believe in Him.

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.

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 23).

Faith: Biblical faith is the resting, 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 gospel, followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one’s life.

Essential Doctrine “Faith”: Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one’s life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

PACK ITEM 3: MY GREAT HELP: Call attention to the Bunyan quote on this poster, where he recalled the depth of his sin and fear, which magnified the greatness of God’s grace in his life. Then ask group members the following question.

How would you encourage someone to put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin and for eternal life? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)
**EXPLAIN:** When we place our faith in the finished work of Jesus, who was lifted up on the cross for us, we not only believe in our need for salvation but we trust that the need has been fulfilled by Him. In light of all that Jesus has done, we take sin seriously, repent of sin immediately, and trust in the faithfulness of God completely. If we believe that sin is as serious as God says it is and that Jesus has done everything that the Bible says He has done, then the most loving thing we can do is intercede on behalf of and plead with people who do not yet believe in Jesus for eternal life.

**READ** the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 24), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

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?

**CLOSE IN PRAYER:** Father, You are good, and because of that, You will judge sin. Our sin against You makes us deserving of death. Yet according to Your grace, You provided salvation through Your Son, Jesus, who paid the penalty of our sin on the cross Himself. Help us by the power of the Spirit, as those pardoned of our own death sentences, to tell others about the mercy of atonement and intercession found in Christ that is available to sinners by faith. Amen.

**INSTRUCT:** As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 25-27), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 28) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 25-27) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 28) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 25-27) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 3 as a part of point 3 in the session: 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.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 1: “God’s demand for obedience is absolute. There is no such thing as ‘halfway’ obedience.”
- Day 4: “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.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 28) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to affirm the ways they have observed repentance displayed in one another’s lives.
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

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

“Also unlike previous rebellion accounts, the Israelites respond with repentant hearts, confessing their sinfulness in speaking seditiously against God and Moses. Though driven in part by the desperate circumstances of facing death by snake bite, they seem to have realized genuinely the seriousness of their indiscretion. Having experienced several times through their history in the wilderness that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man like Moses avails much, they appeal to their divinely appointed leader to intercede with God on their behalf. Unlike the way he reacted with unrighteous anger at Keribah Kadesh (20:10-11), Moses responded to their penitent pleas with an equally humble heart and prayed … on behalf of the people.”

“Tired and discouraged by their long detour around the country of Edom, the impatient Israelites grumbled against God and his servant Moses. They complained despite the recent victory God gave them. How many times have we complained to God in trying moments? At times we are tempted to think God does not care about us. Like the Israelites, we often forget his blessings when life gets difficult. When we do, we place ourselves in situations that give Satan the advantage. The children of Israel spoke out in anger against God and Moses (Numbers 21:5). As a result of their sin, many people died in the desert. The Lord wants us to keep our tongues from speaking evil. Negative speech often leads to negative results. The book of James tells us that the tongue can corrupt ‘your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself’ (James 3:6).”

**Point 2: God provides an intercessor to appeal on behalf of His people (Num. 21:7b-8).**

“By using poisonous snakes and a visual antivenom (21:8-9), the Lord shifts the emphasis of his discipline from immediate corporal punishment and rapid corporate remedy to the individual experience of faith as the means to access the divine cure for the result of sin. Those who are bitten suffer fiery pain, which impresses them that sin has consequences leading to death (cf. Rom. 6:23). If they spurn the bronze serpent as they have said ‘yuck!’ to the manna that God provided, they will simply go on dying. But they can escape death if they accept the remedy that the Lord has provided. The choice is theirs. In Moses’ bronze snake, the Lord simultaneously shows the Israelites their sin and his grace. ‘To see sin without grace is despair. To see grace without sin is arrogance. To see them in tandem is conversion.’ The remedy is too easy, too good to be true, and defies natural laws of cause and effect. It does not make sense in human terms. That is precisely the point: By doing something that is humanly irrational, the people will show faith in the Lord’s power and promise of healing, which is their only hope.”
“The Lord directed Moses to **make a snake image and mount it on a pole** as an antidote for those who had been bitten by these snakes. Those who looked at this snake image would be healed—by faith in God’s provision, not by faith in the graven serpent. Because it was God who graciously did the healing, it was neither idolatry nor magic. The bronze snake, however, was preserved in Israel for about 700 years, until it was destroyed by King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4). John’s Gospel cited Jesus’s use of this imagery as a metaphor for his crucifixion. Just as those in Moses’s time looked upon this snake and were healed, those who look in faith to the Christ who was lifted up on the cross will be healed of their sins. Those who looked upon him and believed in him would have eternal life (John 3:14-16).”

**Point 3:** God provides a way of salvation through faith for His people (Num. 21:9; John 3:14-15).

“**bronze serpent.** The Hebrew term translated ‘bronze’ can also mean ‘copper.’ The area through which the Israelites were traveling had copper mines, and archaeologists have found a 5-inch-long (13 cm) copper snake in a Midianite shrine at Timna, so it seems likely that copper is meant here. The redness of copper suggested atonement (see 19:1-10), so symbolically it was well chosen for this occasion. Jesus compares his own death on the cross to the uplifted serpent (John 3:14-15). By the time of King Hezekiah of Judah (c. 715 B.C.), this copper serpent had become an object of worship among the Israelites and had to be destroyed (2 Kings 18:4).”

“**The reference to the Son of Man being lifted up** is the first of three ‘lifted up’ sayings in John (8:28; 12:32). All three speak of the future ‘lifting up’ of the Son of Man in double meaning (possibly inspired by the language of Isaiah 52:13). The reference in this verse invokes Moses’s lifting up of a serpent in the wilderness so that everyone who had been bitten by a poisonous snake and looked at the serpent in faith was healed (Num. 21:8-9). The third and final ‘lifted up’ saying (John 12:32) emphasizes that the lifting up of the Son of Man refers to Jesus’s crucifixion (cp. 12:33 and the similar reference to Peter’s martyrdom in 21:19).”

**References**
4. Roy Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, in The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015) [Wordsearch].
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.