

Lesson 10 8th July, 2018

Divine Provision in the Wilderness

Lesson Scope: Numbers 21

References in brackets refer to the lesson scope unless otherwise noted

Lesson Focus

Chapter 20 tells how Israel had requested permission to travel through Edom—a shortcut of possibly one hundred fifty miles. Edom responded by refusing them passage and gathering an army to stop them (20:20). Chapter 21 tells how Israel, at God's direction, began their journey around Edom.

The trials of the journey soon caused the people to complain about the lack of water and variety of food. Because of their complaining, God sent poisonous serpents among the people, causing many to die. The people responded in repentance, and God mercifully healed those who looked in faith at the brass serpent, which Moses lifted on a pole.

In contrast to Israel's previous responses of complaining and chiding their leaders, we have an inspiring example of the congregation singing as, in faith, their leaders dug a well at God's direction. As the people faithfully followed God's leading, He provided the needed resources for them to journey steadily toward the Promised Land.

The Lord provides all that His people need to progress victoriously. In times of failure and conflict, He calls them to faith and commitment that appropriate His provisions.

We find it easy to see how ungrateful the children of Israel were at times, but let us remind ourselves that few, if any, people on earth are more blessed and accountable than we are. With all the spiritual and material blessings we have, we should never complain, never murmur, never speak against our leaders or brethren. How am I doing? Does my fountain ever give out both sweet water and bitter? Purpose in your heart to draw with joy from the wells of salvation and let God's provisions flow through you to others.

Lesson Aim: To see how the Lord provides for man's spiritual well-being.

Theme Verses: [John 3:14-15](#). And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Lesson Text

The Dying Healed

[Numbers 21:4-9](#) And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. ⁵ 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. ⁶ And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much 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 thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. 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 Thirsty Satisfied

[Numbers 21:16-18](#) And from thence *they went* to Beer: that *is* the well whereof the LORD spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. ¹⁷ Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it: ¹⁸ The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by *the direction of* the lawgiver, with their staves. And from the wilderness *they went* to Mattanah.

The Enemies Conquered

[Numbers 21:21-25](#) And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, ²² Let me pass through thy land: we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink *of* the waters of the well: *but* we will go along by the king's *high way*, until we be past thy borders. ²³ And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border:

but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel. ²⁴ And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon *was* strong. ²⁵ And Israel took all these cities: and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof.

Numbers 21:31-35 Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites. ³² And Moses sent to spy out Jaazer, and they took the villages thereof, and drove out the Amorites that *were* there. ³³ And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan: and Og the king of Bashan went out against them, he, and all his people, to the battle at Edrei. ³⁴ And the LORD said unto Moses, Fear him not: for I have delivered him into thy hand, and all his people, and his land; and thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon. ³⁵ So they smote him, and his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him alive: and they possessed his land.

Questions for Study

The Dying Healed

1. Why so soon after a glorious victory (21:3) did Israel turn against God and Moses?
2. How could men loathe angels' food (Psalm 78:25)?
3. What did the plague of fiery serpents do for Israel?
4. How might we despise the "bread from heaven"?

The Thirsty Satisfied

5. What was the value of the people singing while the nobles dug the well?
6. What are practical ways in which we work together to receive special blessings from God?

The Enemies Conquered

7. How was Israel's request to the Amorites like their request to Edom (20:17)? Why was Israel's response different?

Analyzing the Passage

The extra hardship of the journey around Edom seemed more than Israel could bear. Much discouraged (21:4) has the thought of " to cut down

as grass or grain, to grieve or to mourn." No doubt Edom's rough answer to Israel's gentle request added vexation to their minds.

In Deuteronomy 2, God gave Israel specific commandment to not fight with Edom. Edom, Moab, and Ammon were relatives of Israel, so Israel could not force their way through Edom.

By saying their soul loatheth (is disgusted, weary of) this light (insubstantial) bread, the congregation was despising God's provision. The serpents were a reminder of man's desperate need for God's provision.

The serpent on the pole had the form of a serpent without the poison; similarly, Christ on the cross was in the flesh, without sin, lifted up to save mankind from eternal death (John 3:14-16).

The Hebrew word for looketh (21:8) gives the thought of "consider, discern, gaze, take heed." See Hebrews 3:1 and 12:3.

It is noteworthy that the serpent on a pole is still seen as a symbol of healing today.

At Beer (well), Israel experienced the joy that comes when God's people work together in harmony to draw from the well of His blessings.

Israel's conflicts with Sihon and Og were the first battles for the possession of the Promised Land.

Principles and Applications

The Dying Healed

1. In every circumstance, God has a way for His people (21:4). God opens some doors and shuts others. In His infinite wisdom, He knows what is best for us. God's way calls for self-denial and cross bearing, yet that is where we find the greatest rest and fulfillment. We need to respond properly to the hardships of life and the practical expressions of self-denial God's Word and the church ask of us.

2. The Lord delights in blessing His people and is not the cause of hardship (21:5). By faith we need to believe that God is good. The hardships of life are not to discourage us, but are often blessings in disguise. We may not understand the purpose of our trials, but we accept that God's plan is the best. David said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Psalm 119:67).

3. God chastens His children so that they can see their need and return to Him (21:6-7). God mercifully allows us to face hardships and the painful consequences of our wrong choices so that we consider our

ways. Also, as we observe the difficulties of others who have taken their own way, it should be a warning to us. God's purposes are always to bring men to Himself.

4. God provides the only remedy for sin (21:7-9). The world has many self-help programs, but all of them fail to meet man's deepest need. God does not want to reform us; He wants to give us a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26). Only through conversion and the Holy Spirit's presence in our hearts can we live above sin.

5. Man's steadfast gaze of faith on God's provision brings salvation (21:9). It was by faith that the dying Israelite looked to the serpent on the pole to be healed. By faith the sinner turns his back on the wisdom of the world and comes to Christ for healing.

The Thirsty Satisfied

6. God is the source of living water (21:16). Jesus said, "He that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). All other fountains the world may offer can never satisfy. Only God's children can be truly blessed.

7. By cooperating with God, we experience the rich blessings and joy of redemption (21:18). If we want to access the provisions available for victory and growth, we must follow God's direction. We must expose ourselves to the Word of God and sound teaching. We need fellowship with those who are enjoying a vibrant Christian life.

The Enemies Conquered

8. Obedience accesses the power to overcome (21:34). God told Israel not to fear. When they obeyed that command, they could reach out for the provisions God had promised them. We cannot disobey God in one area and expect His help in another. If we fail to be faithful in the small things of life, how can we hope to overcome the larger problems we face? Remember those who do God's will shall know the doctrine (John 7:17).

9. God provides for complete victory (21:35). Israel did not seek for a compromise to gain peace. Because they believed the promise of God, they could have complete victory. God has made it possible to be "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37). If we claim the divine provisions available to us, we too can experience lasting victory over Satan and self.

Important Teachings

1. In every circumstance, God has a way for His people (21:4).
2. The Lord delights in blessing His people and is not the cause of hardship (21:5).
3. God chastens His children so that they can see their need and return to Him (21:6-7).
4. God provides the only remedy for sin (21:7-9).
5. Man's steadfast gaze of faith on God's provision brings salvation (21:9).
6. God is the source of living water (21:16).
7. By cooperating with God, we experience the rich blessings and joy of redemption (21:18).
8. Obedience accesses the power to overcome (21:34).
9. God provides for complete victory (21:35).

Answers to Questions

1. Why so soon after a glorious victory (21.3) did Israel turn against God and Moses?

The problem they faced in 21:1 they could fight. The difficulty they were now facing required patient suffering. Perhaps they were so overwhelmed with their present difficulties that they forgot to look back to the many examples of God's provisions. They were as human as we are.

2. How could men loathe angels' food (Psalm 78:25)?

A lack of thankfulness opens men's hearts to joy-destroying bitterness that sees the miracles of God as common. Psalm 78:22 speaks of a lack of faith. Remember Isaiah 53:3: "We hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

3. What did the plague of fiery serpents do for Israel?

It moved them to true repentance. The serpents helped Israel reestablish proper values.

4. How might we despise the "bread from heaven"?

When we fail to maintain repentant spirits, we despise God's provisions. If we allow ourselves to despise God's children, we are despising God. If we make light of holy things in jokes or foolish talk, we are despising God's gifts. When we fail to cultivate thankfulness, we begin to despise God. If we fail to read His Word or obey it, we are despising it.

5. What was the value of the people singing while nobles dug the well?

When they sang, they were focusing on the solution rather than on the problem. It is harder to complain when we are singing! Their singing was a blessing to their leaders.

6. What are practical ways in which we work together to receive special blessings from God?

We come together for worship (Matthew 18:20). We sing together. We pray together. We mourn together. We rejoice together. We sincerely ask God to bless each other. We work together in material projects. We share in brotherhood assistance. We operate Christian day schools together.

7. How was Israel's request to the Amorites like their request to Edom (20:17)? Why was Israel's response different?

They kindly and respectfully asked to pass through the lands. The Amorites were not kinsmen of Israel. Also, God had declared the Amorites' iniquity full (Genesis 15:16).

8. List principles for experiencing complete victory.

Fear must be replaced with faith (21:34). Our ears must be keen to hear God's direction. We must be men of the Book. We cling to the provisions God gives and do not depend on our own strength. We give all our strength to the work that God gives us to do. We must not be satisfied to let any Amorite tendency live in our hearts.

Summarizing the Lesson

O for a faith that will not shrink tho' pressed by many a foe,
That will not tremble on the brink of any earthly woe;
That will not murmur nor complain beneath the chast'ning rod,
But in the hour of grief or pain can lean upon its God;
A faith that keeps the narrow way till life's last spark is fled,
And with a pure and heav'nly ray lights up a dying bed.
Lord, give me such a faith as this, and then, whate'er may come,
I'll taste e'en here the hallowed bliss of an eternal home.

—*William H. Bathurst*

Research Guide: Read Psalm 78 for a beautiful picture of God's provision for His children.