

THE PEOPLE COMPLAINED

NUMBERS 16; 20-21



KEY PASSAGE: Romans 8:28

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why should we obey God? We should obey God because He made us, He loves us, and His plans are good.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Like the Israelites, we sin when we complain and do not trust God. The Israelites faced death for their sin, but when they looked to the bronze snake they were healed. The consequence for our sin is also death, but when we look to Jesus and trust in Him, we will be saved.

STORY POINT: The Israelites sinned when they complained against God and Moses.



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

When we reflect on the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land, nothing seems to more greatly characterize the posture of their hearts than their complaints. Despite the signs, miracles, protection, and provision they experienced, they remained reluctant to trust the Lord. Today's passage highlights the Israelites' inclination to disobey and disbelieve God.

What led the Israelites to sin against God and Moses in today's reading? How does the passage of the bronze snake foreshadow Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice?

Korah's goal in the rebellion was to raise his own status by lowering the God-given calling of Moses. He believed that the people were holy enough and that God was near enough, deeming Moses' leadership unnecessary and unfruitful. Continuing to blame Moses, the people's same old complaints resurfaced: the Israelites expressed envy toward generations past and discontentment regarding their current state of wandering.

The people trusted in their own perceptions of their circumstances rather than persevering by faith in God's Word and in their leader's guidance. Their distrust and disobedience led them to be more characterized by complaints than by confidence in God.

Despite these complaints, God extended grace by miraculously intervening. He allowed Moses and Aaron to supply water to the Israelites from the rock. Yet time passed, and the people's impatience came back into play. They persisted in complaining toward both God and Moses, expressing discontentment toward the provision they thought they lacked. Because of this, the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many people died.

Moses interceded for the people, and God miraculously provided them rescue. By looking at the bronze snake mounted on a pole, the people would recover. This was a glimmer of the eternal salvation that would one day come through the Son of God lifted up on the cross to bear the consequences of sin. Though the Israelites did not deserve this rescue, God saved them by His grace. Likewise, the Son of Man lifted up on the cross provided a once-and-for-all sacrifice for those who look to Him for salvation. Pray for boys and girls to see God's gracious provision, that they would put their confidence in Christ for salvation.



PREPARE

THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session



WELCOME

10-15 MINUTES

Greet kids and open the session



LEARN

25-30 MINUTES

Teach kids the story of the gospel



LOVE

15-20 MINUTES

Lead kids to love the God of the gospel



LIVE

15-20 MINUTES

Lead kids to live out the mission of the gospel



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



WELCOME

Activity Page

- "Snake Word Ladder" activity page

Session Starter (Option 1)

- rubber snake or rope
- hula hoops, 2-4

Session Starter (Option 2)

- canisters of play dough, 1 per kid



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- Small Group Timeline and Map Set (optional)



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- black cardstock, 1 per kid
- painter's tape
- chalk
- tissues, 1 per kid

Reflection and Prayer

- Bible Story Coloring Page (optional)



LEARN

Introduce the Session

- countdown video
- Story Point Poster

Big Picture Question

- Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- "The People Complained" video
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Questions from Kids

- "Unit 6, Session 3" Questions from Kids video

Missions Moment

- "Missionaries with Manyika People Photo" printable

Key Passage Activity

- Key Passage Poster
- "All Things Work Together (Romans 8:28)" song
- worship song of your choice (optional)
- index cards



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY *“Have you ever needed to take medicine because you were sick? Did the medicine help you? How did you feel after taking the medicine?”*

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Snake Word Ladder” activity page.

SAY *“Today, we’ll see how the Israelites looked at a bronze snake to be healed. We can look to Jesus to be saved from our sin.”*

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: SERPENT SCRAMBLE

Before the session, gather a rubber snake (or a piece of rope) and several hula hoops. Place the hula hoops around the room, creating space in between them. Choose one kid to be It. Explain that It will hold the rubber snake and attempt to tag everyone. When kids are tagged, they must freeze in place. Tell kids that the hula hoops will act as healing stations. To be unfrozen, another kid must take their hand and run them to the nearest healing station. Allow kids to play a few minutes each round. Then choose new kids to be It for each additional round.

SAY *“Did the healing stations help you stay in the game longer? [Allow responses.] Once frozen, the healing stations were the only way to get back in the game. Today, we’ll learn that the Israelites needed to be healed from snake bites. Let’s get ready to learn how their sin led to a terrible consequence and how God provided a way for them to be saved.”*

OPTION 2: MOLD IT



Provide each kid with a canister of play dough. Direct kids to use their play dough to make a cross. If needed, demonstrate how to create a cross from the play dough. Then lead kids to roll out a long “snake.” Again, demonstrate how to roll a “snake,” if needed. Direct kids to wrap the snake around their cross. Once all kids have completed their “bronze serpents,” invite kids to lift them up for everyone to see.

SAY *“Today, we will see that **THE ISRAELITES SINNED WHEN THEY COMPLAINED AGAINST GOD AND MOSES.** As a consequence of their sin, the people were bitten by snakes. However, God showed the people mercy and made a way for them to be healed when they looked to a bronze snake on a pole.”*

Transition from **WELCOME** to **LEARN**





INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)



Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “Welcome, kids! My name is [your name], and I am so glad you are here! If you have a Bible with you, will you take it out? [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one.] Let’s practice turning to the book of Numbers together as we get ready to hear our story.



Today, we will learn how **THE ISRAELITES SINNED WHEN THEY COMPLAINED AGAINST GOD AND MOSES.** [Display the Story Point Poster.] The Bible teaches us that all people sin. Our story helps us remember that God has made the way for people to be saved from sin. Let’s pray and ask God to help our hearts trust this good news: ‘Dear God, please help us see how You long to save us from sin. Please help us turn from sin and look to Jesus who is able to save us from all our sin. Amen.’ ”

worship

* I Thank God
* I will Follow
* offering

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)



Display the Big Picture Question Poster.

SAY “Our big picture question is, **Why should we obey God?** What is the answer we learned? [Allow responses.] **We should obey God because He made us, He loves us, and His plans are good.**



Obeying God is what is best for us. God loves us and wants us to follow His ways because they lead us to what is good. Even though obeying God can be hard, those who place their faith in Jesus are given the Holy Spirit to help them obey. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the Giant Timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “The Israelites did not always obey God. We’ve learned how the Israelites grumbled against God when they didn’t have the food they wanted. Even though God provided for their needs, they grumbled for more. Last week, we learned how the people doubted God and refused to enter the Promised Land. They chose to fear the people in Canaan more than they trusted in God. Today, we’ll see how **THE ISRAELITES SINNED WHEN THEY COMPLAINED AGAINST GOD AND MOSES.** ”



LEARN the Bible Story



1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Numbers 16:1-3; 20:1-12; 21:4-9. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “The People Complained.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

THE PEOPLE COMPLAINED

“**The Israelites did not believe God’s promise to give them the land of Canaan. Because they chose not to enter the land, their consequence was to spend 40 years in the wilderness. During their years in the wilderness, the people would complain to Moses and to God many times.**

A man named Korah led 250 men of Israel to rebel against Moses. They were jealous of Moses and wanted to be priests like him. **But God reminded the people that He had chosen Moses to lead.**

Another time, the people complained because there was not enough water for the community. They blamed Moses and Aaron and again said that they wished they were still in Egypt. So **Moses and Aaron went to God.** They fell facedown, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. **The Lord spoke to Moses and said, “Take the staff and gather all the Israelites. Speak to the rock while everyone watches, and water will come out of the rock. All the people and animals will be able to drink.”**

As they continued their journey, **the people became very impatient.** They again complained to God and Moses. “Why have you led us from Egypt to die in the wilderness? We are tired of the same food every day, and we have no water!” **As a consequence for their complaining, the people were bitten by poisonous snakes. Many people died.**

The people realized they had sinned with their words. They said to Moses, “Please pray to the LORD so that He will take the snakes away.” **Moses interceded for the people.**

The Lord said to Moses, “Make an image of a snake and mount it on a pole.” Whenever someone who was bitten looked at the bronze snake, God healed him.

Christ Connection: Like the Israelites, we sin when we complain and do not trust God. The Israelites faced death for their sin, but when they looked to the bronze snake they were healed. The consequence for our sin is also death, but when we look to Jesus and trust in Him, we will be saved. ”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Active listening: Invite kids to hold a thumbs down when they hear how the Israelites complained.

Act it out: Act out the different complaints of the people as you tell the story.



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY



SAY “As the Israelites traveled through the wilderness, they continued to complain. THE ISRAELITES SINNED WHEN THEY COMPLAINED AGAINST GOD AND MOSES. What did the people complain about? [Allow responses.] Korah and other men were jealous and wanted to be priests like Moses, but God reminded them that He chose Moses to lead. Then the Israelites complained that they didn’t have enough water. They also became impatient about the journey. Why is it important to know that God’s plan is always on time? [Allow responses.] God’s Word promises that He is never late, and we can trust that His plan is always best.

God provided water for the Israelites, but the people continued to complain. What was the punishment for their disobedience? [Allow responses.] The Israelites were bitten by poisonous snakes. But God did not leave them to suffer. When the people understood their sin, God made a way for them to be healed. What did God tell Moses to do? [Allow responses.] God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Whenever people looked at the snake, they would be healed.

Like the Israelites, we sin when we complain and do not trust God. The Israelites faced death for their sin, but when they looked to the bronze snake they were healed. The consequence for our sin is also death, but when we look to Jesus and trust in Him, we will be saved.”

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

SAY “The snake on the pole provided physical healing for the Israelites, but they needed something greater: to be completely forgiven of their sin. Everyone has disobeyed God, but in His mercy and love, He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins. When we turn away from our sin and trust in Jesus, we will be saved and have complete forgiveness of sin.”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Create an environment where kids are welcome to ask questions about what it means to follow Jesus.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 6, Session 3” Questions from Kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. Why did God make snakes?
2. Jesus came to crush the head of the snake: sin and death. How does trusting in Jesus save us?

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

Display the “Missionaries with Manyika People Photo” as you tell kids about missions work in Africa. Tell kids that missionaries, Ryan and Aubrey Curry, can be seen in the photo with the Manyika people of Mozambique. Explain that until recently, there were very few Christians among the Manyika people.

SAY “Missionary Ryan Curry and a local pastor volunteered to take a trip to see if they could reach the Manyika people. The two men traveled on a dirt bike over a rough road, dodging holes



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

and debris. The men almost gave up after three hours of traveling, but the pastor suggested they go a little farther. Soon they saw a mud and thatch home where a woman greeted them. The woman believed some what the men told her about Jesus that day, but she wasn't yet willing to trust Jesus as her Savior. The missionary and pastor promised to come back, but it took months to return because the rainy season made the rough road impassable.

When the road was dry, the men traveled by car with their wives back to the area. Aubrey Curry and the pastor's wife were able to speak to the woman, and she trusted in Jesus. Others also chose to follow Jesus. The missionaries made the three-hour trip (one way) once a month. With each visit, more people chose to follow Jesus. ””

Pray that more Manyika people would hear about Jesus and believe in Him. Ask God to help the Manyika believers obey God and share the good news with their friends.

6 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Before the session, write each word of the key passage on individual index cards. Include a few cards with words that do not belong in the key passage. Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Romans 8:28 together.

SAY ”” The Israelites continued to complain, but God had a good plan for His people. Our key passage reminds us that God has a good plan for those who trust in Him. ””

Mix up the cards and allow the kids to spread them out on the floor. Encourage them to work as a team to piece together the key passage. Remind them there are a few words that do not belong in the key passage. When they finish, look over the verse and help them switch around any cards in the wrong place. Read the verse together as a class.

Lead kids to sing “All Things Work Together (Romans 8:28).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY ”” God, thank You for having the perfect plan to save us from sin and death. Help us share the good news of salvation through Jesus with all those we meet. Amen. ””

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the Old Testament Mediterranean Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Numbers 21. Explain that when Jesus came to earth, He quoted from the Old Testament and showed people how the Bible is about Him. Remind kids the Bible is one big story that points to Jesus and how He saves us from sin.

Consider pointing out the land of Canaan (G9) on the Old Testament Mediterranean Map. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Numbers 21:9 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verse aloud.

SAY 📖 *God provided for the Israelites, but their lack of faith led them to complain. Complaining is sin, and the Israelites faced the consequence of snake bites because of their sin. But God made a way for the Israelites to be healed, despite their disobedience.*

We also complain when we become impatient or things don't go our way. When we become impatient or afraid, we can trust that God's plan is good. We can place our trust in Him because He is faithful to keep His promises to His children. God proved His love to us when He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sin so we can be forgiven. 📖

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

| **SAY** 📖 *Why is complaining a sin? 📖*

Tell kids that complaining is a sin because it shows a lack of trust in God to take care of and provide for us. Share how God is in control of all things, including the circumstances of our lives. Complaining shows that we don't trust God to be in control.

| **SAY** 📖 *How can we turn away from complaining? 📖*

Discuss how we can recognize that our complaining is a sin and ask God to forgive us. Through faith in Jesus, God forgives us of our sins. Tell kids we can pray and ask God to help our hearts be thankful and recognize all the ways God takes care of us. Remind kids the Holy Spirit lives in Christians to help them obey and trust in God.

| **SAY** 📖 *Why is Jesus' salvation better than being healed from a snake bite? 📖*

Share how Jesus provides complete forgiveness from sin forever. Tell kids that while the people's healing was good and needed, it didn't fix the main problem: the people needed new hearts and to have their sin forgiven forever. Discuss how faith in Jesus saves people from sin and how He changes our hearts to want to obey God because we love Him. Tell kids that faith in Jesus gives us the hope of living with Him forever in the new heaven and earth.

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: COLORFUL CROSS

Before the session, use painter's tape to create a cross on a piece of black cardstock. Create a cardstock paper with a cross for each kid. Alternatively, you could allow kids to create the cross using the painter's tape on their own. Provide each kid with a piece of black cardstock with the cross shape. Then distribute chalk to the kids and a tissue.

Direct kids to use the chalk to color the black cardstock. Tell kids to use the tissue to rub the chalk to create a "blurred" effect. Then direct kids to remove the painter's tape to reveal their cross.

SAY "Today, we learned that **THE ISRAELITES SINNED WHEN THEY COMPLAINED AGAINST GOD AND MOSES** and were bitten by snakes as a consequence. But when the people looked at the bronze snake, they were saved from death. Jesus died on the cross so anyone who trusts in Him will be saved from death. When we trust in Jesus, we are saved from the punishment our sin deserves."

OPTION 2: JOHN 3:16



Provide each kid with a Bible. Remind kids that the whole Bible is about God and His Son, Jesus. Tell kids that they will practice looking up a book of the Bible, finding a chapter, finding a couple of verses within that chapter, and identifying certain words.

Guide kids to turn to the New Testament and find the fourth book: John. Tell kids that John is one of the four Gospels. Then lead kids to turn to chapter three. Next, guide kids to find verses 14-16. Consider writing the following words on a dry erase board for kids to find: Moses, snake or serpent, lifted up, eternal life, loved the world, gave, Son. Discuss how Jesus shared how the story of the bronze snake pointed to His own death in order to save people from sin.

SAY "When the Israelites looked at the snake lifted up on a pole, they were saved from death. When people look to Jesus—who was lifted up on a cross—and trust in Him, they are saved from the death sin brings. Jesus came to offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life to anyone who believes in Him."

2 REFLECTION AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper and pencil to each kid. Ask kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Who can I tell about this story?

Be sure to send the sheets home with the kids along with the activity pages so parents can continue to discuss the Bible story with their kids. If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page. Pray for your group.