

Come Follow me
An Elo Viz production
Week 20
Numbers 11-14,20-24

I am very excited to share some thoughts with you about this week's topic. There is a lot to discuss with these 8 chapters. However, chapter 21 is my favorite. It contains a story that changed my life. But first let's set the scene. The Israelites have been traveling in the wilderness for a very long time. Kids that left Egypt are now grown adults with kids and grandkids. As the study manual points out, it shouldn't have taken them this long to get to the promised land. But before they could enter they had to become the kind of people that God could prosper in this majestic land. And they had a lot of changing to do. In some cases it wasn't possible for them to make the necessary changes in this life and those people had to pass on before they could enter. In this chapter we see one of the very last trails that they would face before they truly started to turn to, and rely on God. But first we start at the bottom of the pride cycle. Numbers chapter 21 verse 4: "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."

Yes, the way was hard. They were traveling in the wilderness for 40 years essentially in circles until they learned all their lessons. This is the way it is supposed to be. Perhaps you can see this pattern in your life. But hopefully you don't do what the children of Israel do next. Verse 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."

Yikes... That is not a good thing to say to the prophet and to the God that just saved your life and provided everything for you. But, hey... I get it, year after year eating the same thing every day. I'm sure they tried every different way to prepare mana and there was no other way to make it interesting to eat. But still... Maybe let's show a little gratitude for what God gives you to sustain you everyday!

In any case, God needs to teach them another lesson in humility and gratitude. Verse 6 "And the Lord sent [fiery serpents](#) among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died."

Now, some scholars believe that these were not serpents that were on fire, but rather the fire is what they felt when they were bit by the serpents. And it worked rather quickly, We don't know how long it took for them to humble themselves but in the very next verse we read this:

"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. 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](#). 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 symbolisms in this account are incredible, and a little confusing. There are 3 ideas that I would like to share with you about this experience. The first is a comparison of another story with snakes and food.

As you recall Adam and Eve were living peacefully in a beautiful garden and God provided everything for them. Every tree in the garden they could eat from, All but 1, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They were forbidden to eat of that tree because if they did they would die. This is where the comparison gets real, as you know Adam and Eve rejected the food that God provided them and as a consequence a serpent came and caused them death, spiritual death but death nonetheless. They then needed to look to God in order to “Live” and they offered sacrifices to God after they were cast out. Comparing that to the story we were just discussing; the Children of Israel also rejected the food that God provided them and as a consequence serpents came and caused them death. They also had to look to a symbol of God to live.

In addition we may find times in our lives when we reject the sustaining support from God and we see perhaps not serpents but trials and hardships that cause us to turn to God for healing and safety. Now, when I say “perhaps not serpents” I do mean a form of a serpent. In every form of a serpent we read about in holy writ we are referring to the son of darkness and lie, the adversary. Since the Garden of Eden he has taken that form that God cursed him to be. Which makes this story just that much more interesting. Why would God command Moses to make a serpent to put on the pole that would heal them if they looked. We know that this is a symbol of Christ hanging on the cross because it was Jesus himself that said it was a symbol of himself. In John 3 Nicodemous comes to Jesus in secret and they have a deep conversation about being born again. Then Jesus says this to Nicodemous: “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. For [God](#) so [loved](#) the [world](#), that he [gave](#) his [only](#) begotten [Son](#), that whosoever [believeth](#) in him should not perish, but have [everlasting life](#). For God [sent](#) not his Son into the world to [condemn](#) the world; but that the world through him might be [saved](#).”

The comparisons are clear, the object of God's command to Moses was certainly supposed to be obvious that this was a parable of Christ who would hang on the cross and suffer for all the sins of the world... all except for one; why is it a serpent?

I have 2 thoughts about this: the first is an idea that helped me change my life and the second is more docterinal.

When we have trials and challenges in our life we sometimes tend to shift our focus onto other things as a discretion from the issues that we are facing. This reaction is a natural response in all human beings. This might come from those that preach “be positive” and focus on only the good things. We hope that with time this problem will just pass and we will be ok when it does. What if this story gives us another point of advice. What if God is saying to us “In order for you to be healed you must first look at the thing that caused you pain”. Face it, deal with it. When we sin we don't want anyone to know about it. We want to quietly repent and move on with our lives. We don't want the emmbaracment of anyone knowing our weaknesses and failures. What if God's way is different... What if God intends for us to put our weaknesses up for everyone to see that we may receive the help, strength and support from others that may have gone through the same thing. Perhaps that is why God used the serpent, the very thing that was hurting and killing them as a symbol for them to look at so that they might live. This is just an idea for you to consider.

Now for something more docterinal; What I truly believe the reason that God had Moses make a serpent to put up on the pole for the people to look at was a symbol that Christ would be

lifted up on the cross and though the symbol of the serpent is not of Christ it is a symbol of evil and sin. And all evil and sin comes from the devil which is the image of the serpent. This parable means that Christ as he suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane and as he hung on the cross he took upon himself every evil and sinful thing, every deed and temptation that the devil dished out to any one in the human family, he took it all. So the image of the serpent on the pole points us to Jesus Christ and his infinite atonement. No matter what sin or evil we have done, no matter what temptation we fall into because of the adversary's cunning tactics, it is all covered and packaged together with the devils works which were all conquered and paid for by God's own Son, Jesus the Christ as he suffered and died on that cross.

Such a simple act, an easy request to look and live. At least it seems that way. But this is what God has always asked us to do. It IS simple..."Look to God, and Live" this message is to everyone no matter who you are and what you've done. Here is an example:

There was a Young man we read about in the Book of Mormon whom the devil had a great grip on his heart. He was a bully to the innocent, he was offensive, he was violent and he sought to destroy the lives of everyone around him. Then one day as he was on his way to persecute the saints of the church God sent an angel to stop him. This is in Mosiah chapter 27, the Angel shook the ground around them and delivered a powerful message to these youngmen. Alma the younger as you know fell into a coma for several days. Being wracked with the tournament of his actions. And then we read about the point of this whole story. God reaches down into the depths of Hell and Grasps this young man from his tourcher and pain! Alma 36 vs 17 says:

"while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world. Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death. And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! Yea, I say unto you, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy."

In one way or another we are all like Alma the Younger. When our lives are consumed with pain and regret, with sorrow and grief. And our solution is the same as Alma the younger and the children of Isreals, it is the same with every human being that has ever lived on this earth. Look to God and live! That is his invitation to everyone no matter where they are or what they are going through. Come unto Christ and he will heal you, He will give you peace and comfort, joy and safety. He is the way, the truth and the light. Thought so ever believeth on him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Of this I testify in the name of our savior Jesus Christ, amen.