

“I Don’t Do Snakes” Numbers 21:4-9

INTRODUCTION

Discouragement is more than an emotion. It can become a spiritual turning point. In Numbers 21, Israel hit a difficult stretch of the journey when they were forced to detour around Edom. The long, exhausting route wore them down until their discouragement shifted from silent frustration to spoken unbelief. They rejected God’s provision, dismissed His miracles, and used their words to protest instead of pray. Their response revealed the real issue: their hearts were drifting from trust to resentment.

That drift opened the door for fiery serpents. Israel was bitten by what they had spiritually aligned themselves with. They didn’t just face a physical problem; they were experiencing the consequences of a spiritual posture. The journey was hard, but the consequence was worse. Yet, even in judgment, God provided a path to healing. When the people confessed their sin, God told Moses to lift a bronze serpent high on a pole. Whoever looked at it lived. The message was simple. You cannot save yourself; you cannot fix yourself, and you cannot look anywhere else. Life only comes by looking up.

Every believer will have seasons in their lives that are challenging, but difficulty doesn’t give us permission to drift. Complaining may feel harmless, but it can open the door to spiritual decline. When discouragement starts to bite – through old habits, old mindsets, or old temptations – healing still comes the same way: by fixing our eyes on the One lifted up. Jesus is the only remedy for the venom of sin, and looking to Him is how we move from death back into life.

GETTING STARTED

1. What is one everyday situation that makes you feel impatient (e.g., traffic, long lines, slow responses)?
2. Have you ever taken a “scenic” or inconvenient detour because your original route was blocked? How did it make you feel?

LET’S GET PERSONAL

1. Israel became discouraged when the journey became long and difficult. Can you recall a season of life when you felt emotionally or spiritually worn down? What contributed to that feeling?
2. Israel moved from praying to protesting. Have you ever caught yourself speaking against what God has provided because you were frustrated with your circumstances?
3. The Israelites confessed that they had sinned. What makes confession difficult for most believers? Why is it essential for spiritual health?

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

1. What practical steps can you take this week to guard your words when discouragement rises?
2. Pray and ask God to reveal any areas where you've been drifting or complaining and invite Him to restore your trust and refocus your heart on Him.
3. Want to dig deeper? Take a look at the following passages: Numbers 21:4-9; Genesis 36:9; 1 Corinthians 10:9; John 3:14-16; John 4:10; John 7:38; John 6:35; 2 Peter 1:3; Romans 1:18-21; Acts 4:12; John 14:6; Exodus 2:23-25; Philippians 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:22.

RENEW YOUR MIND

*'The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole;
anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." '*

Numbers 21:8