

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.



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

- "Color It" activity page

Session Starter (Option 1)

- cardstock
- wooden kebab stick
- tealight candle
- lighter



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- Small Group Timeline and Map Set
- world map



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- hot glue and hot glue gun
- clear contact paper sheets, 1 per kid
- paint
- paintbrushes

Journal and Prayer

- Journal Page
- "Saved by Faith" activity page



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)



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 taken a long trip? Where did you go? Did you enjoy the journey, or did you get bored on the way to the destination? Why?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Color It” 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: SPINNING SNAKE

Before the session, create a “snake” by drawing a quarter inch wide spiral on a piece of cardstock that ends with the center of the spiral as the “snake head.” Then cut out the spiral. Present a demonstration for the kids by gathering the following: “snake,” long wooden kebab stick, tealight candle, and a lighter.

Stick the wooden kebab into the wax of the tealight candle. Then gently rest the head of the snake to the blunt tip of the wooden kebab. Light the candle and invite kids to observe what happens to the “snake.” Be sure the snake is not touching the flame, but close enough to absorb the heat. The snake should spin around on top of the wooden stick.

SAY “Today, we will see how **THE ISRAELITES SINNED WHEN THEY COMPLAINED AGAINST GOD AND MOSES**. As a result of their sin, God sent poisonous snakes which bit the people. Let’s see how God saved the people by telling Moses to make a bronze snake mounted on a pole and commanding the people to look at the snake to be healed.”

OPTION 2: SNAKE TAG



Play a game of tag and choose one kid to be it. When it tags a kid, he will link arms with it. As it continues to tag more kids, they will link arms, forming a chain or “snake”. Continue playing until one kid remains. If time allows, play again choosing a different kid to be it. (Tip: If the weather permits, play this game outside.)

SAY “Today, we’ll learn about some snakes in our Bible story. God’s people complained as they made their way through the wilderness. As a consequence of their sin, God sent poisonous snakes that bit the people. Let’s get ready to learn how God provided a way for the people to be healed.”

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! Each time we meet, we learn about a story from God’s Word together. If you have a Bible with you, will you take it out? [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one.] Today, we will learn how **THE ISRAELITES SINNED WHEN THEY COMPLAINED AGAINST GOD AND MOSES.** [Display the Story Point Poster.]

As we read our story, we’ll be reminded that all people sin. Yet, God’s Word gives us good news! God made the way to forgive people’s sin by sending His Son, Jesus, to take the punishment our sin deserves. 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.’ ”

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.** God always wants what is best for us. No matter how difficult a situation may be, we can ask God to help us obey Him. When we trust in Jesus, God gives us the power to obey Him through His Spirit. The Holy Spirit changes people’s hearts from desiring their own way to desiring God’s way. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

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

SAY “ God always works for His people’s good. Yet, as we’ve seen, God’s people do not always obey Him. We’ve learned how the Israelites grumbled against God when they didn’t have the foods they had in Egypt. 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 feared the Lord. 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

Use movement: Invite kids to move their arms like snakes when you reach that part of the story.

Portray emotion: Emphasize the Israelites’ complaining with the tone of your voice.



2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ Time and time again, God had proven His faithfulness to His people. Even though they continued to sin against God, He did not leave them. He still guided them through the wilderness and spoke to them through His servant Moses. Yet, the people did not show their thankfulness to Him or obey His commands. Instead, **THE ISRAELITES SINNED WHEN THEY COMPLAINED AGAINST GOD AND MOSES.** What were some of the things they complained about in today’s story? [Allow responses.] Korah and other men complained that Moses shouldn’t lead them. Then the Israelites complained that they didn’t have enough water. They also became impatient about the journey and complained about the food God provided and how they had no water.

Israel showed that they did not trust God when they complained about Him and Moses. What did the people say about their complaining? Look at Numbers 21:7. [Choose a volunteer to read Numbers 21:7 aloud.] The people recognized that they sinned against both God and Moses. All sin deserves punishment because God is holy. What punishment did their sinful actions bring? Look at Numbers 21:6. [Choose a volunteer to read Numbers 21:6 aloud.] God sent snakes that bit the people, and many of them died.

The people cried out to Moses and asked him to pray that God would take away the snakes. What was God’s response? Look at Numbers 21:8-9. [Choose a volunteer to read Numbers 21:8-9 aloud.] God told Moses to make a bronze snake and mount it on a pole. Whenever a person looked at the snake, he or she 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 Israelites couldn’t save themselves from the snake bites. They could only be saved when they looked at the bronze snake lifted up on a pole. Our sin is like poisonous snake venom that has infected our hearts. We cannot save ourselves from the death sin brings. When we look to Jesus and ask Him to save us, He forgives our sin and rescues us from death. ”

(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?



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

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 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)

Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Romans 8:28 together.

SAY “ God is good and His plans are good! We can trust Him even when we don’t understand or when we face challenging times. ”

Direct kids to listen as you say the key passage aloud while changing a word or two of the key passage to an incorrect word. Challenge kids to identify the incorrect word and say the correct word instead. Repeat as time allows.

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 “ Dear God, thank You for being merciful even when we sin against You. Help us look to Jesus and turn away from our sin. Give us hearts that want to obey You. In Jesus’ name, 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 Kingdoms Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to John 3. Explain that when Jesus came to earth, He quoted from the Old Testament and showed people how the Bible is about Him. Remind kids that the Bible is one big story that points to Jesus and how He saves us from sin.

Consider comparing the Old Testament Kingdoms Map to a modern-day map to help kids understand where this story took place. (Locate the areas in and around the modern-day Jordan [L7].) Choose a volunteer to read aloud John 3:14-17 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verses aloud.

SAY “When Jesus spoke to a man named Nicodemus, He told him how the bronze snake in our story pointed to Him. 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 all people. When we trust in Jesus and believe He died and rose again, we will be saved.”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY “When something doesn’t go your way are you more likely to complain or be thankful? Why?”

Answers will vary. Discuss how it is easy to complain when things don’t go our way. Share how complaining is sinning against God because He is in control of all things. Tell kids that our complaints reveal how our hearts want to be in control and not surrender to God. Remind kids that God is always in control and uses all things for the good of those who love Him. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Num. 14:27-29.)

SAY “How did God show mercy to the Israelites even after they complained?”

Remind kids that God continued to care for His people. Discuss how He gave them water and food to eat. Tell kids that He provided a way to be saved from death through the bronze snake lifted on a pole. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Ps. 116:1-6.)

SAY “Why should Christians be known as a people who are thankful rather than complaining?”

Prompt kids to think about Jesus’ words in John 3:16-17 and how He came to save people and not condemn them. Remind kids that because people are sinners, everyone already deserves death for their sin. But if we trust in Jesus, we are saved! Discuss how our great salvation gives us joy and creates thankfulness in all circumstances because we know God’s love and have the hope of life with Him forever. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Eph. 5:20.)

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





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: STAINED GLASS CROSS

Before the session, use hot glue and small craft sticks to create a cross frame. Glue extra sticks inside the frame to make it look more like stained glass. Create a cross frame for each kid. Provide each kid with a piece of clear contact paper, sticky side up, and paint. Tell kids to place their cross on top of the contact paper, firmly pressing it down so it sticks to the paper. Then provide kids with paintbrushes and direct them to paint the contact paper within the frame of the cross. Once the paint dries, lead kids to use scissors to cut the excess paper from around their cross.

SAY “ The bronze snake on the pole was a shadow of Jesus’ death on the cross. Jesus never sinned. He never even complained. But He took the punishment for sin when He died on the cross. We can look to Jesus and be saved from our sin. ”

OPTION 2: BUILD BIBLE SKILLS



Provide each kid with a Bible. Form kids into teams. Help kids learn where specific books are in the Bible by challenging them to find the book when you call it out. After kids on one team find the book, ask them one of three questions: 1) Is it in the Old or New Testament? 2) Who wrote the book? 3) What division of the Bible is the book found in? (Law, Poetry/Wisdom, Gospels, etc.) Award a point for finding the book and another point if they answer a question correctly. The team with the most points wins.

SAY “ All of the Bible points us to Jesus. Even Jesus showed a man named Nicodemus how today’s story pointed to Him (John 3). We learned that Jesus compared the bronze snake being lifted up to how He also would be lifted up to die for the sins of the world. **THE ISRAELITES SINNED WHEN THEY COMPLAINED AGAINST GOD AND MOSES.** We sin against God too. We can be forgiven of our sin when we turn to Jesus and trust in Him. ”

2 JOURNAL AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page. As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas.

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God’s glory and my good?
- Are there promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

Review the gospel and encourage kids to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions. Then pray, thanking God for His forgiveness of sin through Jesus and how He is merciful toward sinners. As time allows, lead kids to complete “Saved by Faith” on the activity page.