

Numbers 21:1-9 (Missed Scripture Reading)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 June 2021

[0 : 00] Scripture, since he is a giver of Scripture, he is also a great interpreter of Scripture. Jesus is showing us that this is a type or a picture of him.

It is a picture of the salvation we find in the lifting up of the Son of God. And the lifting up is always a reference to the crucifixion or the cross. So we have the account recorded, much like the account of Melchizedek.

Some, it seems, obscure event that happened in the history of the nation of Israel in which God magnifies the work he's doing later on the cross of Calvary.

And I want you to see tonight the redemptive work of God. The redemptive work of God that we see recorded for us in Numbers 21, verses 1 through 9.

Both of these accounts are accounts of God's redemptive work. The first account we tend to overlook because it just seems that they might have fought a battle. The second account we can clearly see the picture of redemption.

[1 : 05] But what we see here is God redeeming place and people. I say he redeems place because where we find the victory in Numbers 21, verse 3, is that this place is called Hormah.

If you go back to Numbers 14, I want to set it in context before we really work out the text, okay? If you go to Numbers 14 and you find 38 years before this, the nation of Israel is in Kadesh Barnea.

And while they are in Kadesh Barnea, they are to go in and take possession of the Promised Land. Which, by the way, that would have been just a direct route to go in and assume occupation.

Kadesh Barnea is right there on the edge of the nation of Israel. It is really just a little bit west of Jerusalem and the region that would later be known as Judea.

This is a region that will be given to Judah during the dispersion of the territory under Joshua. And they could have just marched in and took over. But they decided, according to Deuteronomy chapter 1, that better than just walk in and take possession, we might as well send 12 delegates in to spy it out.

[2 : 15] And you remember, that time the 10 came back and gave a bad report saying, well, the land is good, but the people are massive, right? The cities are fortified. We'll never make it. Joshua and Caleb came back and said, the cities are fortified.

The people are big. But our God is bigger. And they failed to go in. And God said, turn around and go back through the wilderness. Now, stay with me. Because 38 years later, they were in Kadesh Barnea and they said, oh, we've messed up.

Let's go assume this land. Let's go win the battle. And Moses said, don't go. God's not going with you. But they went anyhow. Remember that? They said, well, we're going to go. Well, when they went, they met a king.

Actually, they met two kings. They met a king of the Amalekites and a king of the Canaanites. And the king drove them back as far as Hormah, which was 100 miles south of Kadesh Barnea.

What we find in Numbers 21 is God is going to redeem Hormah. It had been a place of defeat. It's going to be a place of victory. 38 years prior to that, they had been beaten and defeated.

[3 : 21] Now, they're going to redeem. He's going to redeem that place and turn it into a place of victory. He redeems the place. And he will, in the latter part of this verse as we read, he redeems the people.

So what does it take for the redemptive work of God among his people? To redeem the place and to redeem the people. Four things I want you to see that are very actively seen in the redemptive work of God.

Number one, there has to be the recognition of its need. There has to be the recognition of its need. Men and women do not seek redemption until they know they need it.

We'll say that again. No man seeks redemption or salvation or forgiveness, which all that's wrapped up in redemption, until they acknowledge and recognize the fact that they desperately need it.

It has to be seen as a necessary item. I was reading recently, and the author that I was reading the work said that Satan has two great spheres in which he works.

[4 : 36] First, one sphere is to make life so miserable and so difficult and so tumultuous that people think that God is not fair, and therefore they want nothing to do with him because life is so miserable. The other sphere in which Satan works is that life is so easy and pleasant that people think they don't need God because they have everything they need.

And both of those are equally dangerous. To live a life in such misery, to think that it's so unfair that God surely doesn't love me, and since God is so mean, I have no need for him.

Or the other one, to live life in such great luxury, in such great pleasure, that they say, well, I have everything I will ever need, and I will therefore never need God. God is unnecessary.

Those are equally dangerous. As Jesus himself said in the parable of the souls, that that one soul, that because of the riches and the pleasures and the enjoyment of this life, the seed of the gospel was choked out by the good things.

And we understand, men and women do not seek after redemption until they recognize the fact that they need it. The nation of Israel has mourned for Aaron for 30 days, and after mourning for Aaron, you remember Moses had sent a delegation and asked the king of Edom if they could go through the land of Edom, it would have been a more direct path.

[5 : 51] The king of Edom said, no, no way, it's not going to happen. You're not coming through my land. So they're going to be forced to travel the long way around. But before they can go, and before they're forced to travel the long way around, this Canaanite king of Aaron, quite possibly the same region that had defeated them before, had heard of the nation of Israel's progression.

And their reputation preceded them. We realize this from all of the Old Testament, because everywhere they went, people heard of their coming, right? And God had declared that, I will set the fear of you among the people that you go to encounter.

God said, I will go before you, and I will put a fear in their hearts of you. So this king of the Canaanites decided he was going to go ahead and kind of nip it in the bud before it started.

So he attacked them, and he took some of them captive. Now look at this. When they were taken captive, they realized there was a need. Not until some of the nation of Israel was taken captive did they realize, we need God's intervention.

Now go to the second account given to us here. The people are going through the land now. I know I'm bypassing projects, but we won't come back. I'm laying these two beside you, how God redeems place and people. The second account.

[7 : 05] They're going down through the land. They're going the long way around. It's not a pleasant land. And they begin to complain. That shouldn't surprise us, right? The people always complain. But this time it's different. Before this, they had always complained against Moses and Aaron.

Aaron has died. Look at who they complained against. They complained against God and Moses. Now in their complaints against Moses, they were always kind of complaining against God. But now they are literally complaining against God and Moses.

So every other time the people complained, the glory of the Lord would be revealed, and God would pronounce judgment. And I love what God does here, and I really love it in like a good, make me feel kind of way.

God doesn't pronounce his judgment now. He just sends fiery serpents among them, and a lot of them are bitten and die. There are historical records that speak of the land in which they traveled through in this area is just full of venomous snakes.

Lawrence of Arabia, who went through that area, I think it was in the 1920s, said that the snakes were so numerous there that they would have to hit the ground and hit every bush, and they would have to walk through this desert region.

[8 : 09] And it was just, he called it the most desolate place in all of the earth. He said it was the most miserable place that you could ever go through in all of the earth. There was no water. There was no vegetation. The only thing there were poisonous snakes.

Well, God decided to send some of these snakes to serve as his instruments of judgment upon his people for their complaining. And after people were bitten and died, they realized they needed God's redemption.

For the redemptive work of God to begin to take place, man must first recognize the need for it. And here, if God is omniscient and omnipotent, that is, all-controlling, God shows them their need through the attack of the Canaanite king and through the judgment of the fiery serpents.

So what does that tell us? We praise God for every circumstance in our life that reveals to us we need his redemption. Because without the revelation of our need for it, we would never cry out to him.

Those difficult circumstances and those difficult things in our life which we realize that now, in hindsight, drew us closer to God are the very instruments which God used to create a recognition or to create a need in our life in order that we would see we need to do something else.

[9 : 35] And that leads us to the second thing. Once there is a recognition of its need, the redemptive work of God, the second thing is there's a request rooted in humility. There's a request rooted in humility.

Once a number of the Israelites were taken captive by the king of Arad, the Canaanite king, rather than, as they did 38 years prior to this, the nation of Israel just very kind of pridefully said, well, we're going to go take this land.

And they took an assumption that they had the power and the might and the authority to do it. And Moses warned them against assuming that God was going with them. So they must have learned their lesson because now 38 years later, when this king and this land has attacked them and a number of them have been taken captive, notice what it says they did.

It says, and then so they cried out to God. It says in verse two, so Israel made a vow to the Lord and said, if you will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.

Now we have a hard time with that because we're saying, well, they're saying, God, if you'll give them to us, we'll destroy everything. Well, in the wording there, what they are saying is, God, if you will allow us to be victorious, we will devote everything to you.

[10 : 46] It will be a city of devotion to be utterly destroyed, much like Jericho was. Remember that was Achan Sim. It was to be a city of destruction, which it means it was to be something committed and dedicated fully to God.

So what are they doing? In their humility, they're saying, God, they led some of our people captive. We don't want the spoils from the victory. We'll give you all the spoils, oh God. We'll give everything over to you.

We don't want to prosper because we win a battle. We just want you to let us rise victorious. Now, again, we need to interpret this in light of the fact that God was using the nation of Israel as his instruments of judgment upon the Canaanite people.

It is not mean and vindictive and wicked of God for him to allow them to defeat them. Let's go back to Sunday morning. The priest of the most high God, Melchizedek, was from Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is located very near this area. There had been, at least in the past, a testimony of the most high God in this land.

[12 : 05] And the Canaanite people, if you read the historical accounts and you read the biblical accounts, one of the most wicked people you will ever encounter in history. And what the people are saying is, oh God, if you give us victory, we'll give you all the spoils.

That's humility. They didn't say, God, let us go beat them up and take their cattle. God, let us go win the battle and take their gold. There are sojourning people, right? These are people of king cities there.

And they're not saying, God, we want to go defeat him and take everything that belongs to him. They said, God, we'll give you everything. Just let us rise victorious. So there is that request that is rooted in humility. And what about the second account?

When the people are bent by the snake and people are dying, it says, and then they go to Moses and they cry out, we have sinned. There's confession. And they confess their sin and they cry out to Moses, not only in confession, but longing for intercession.

They said, go intercede for us. So their cry to Moses was, we were wrong and we need someone to intercede on our behalf. Again, it is a request rooted in humility.

[13 : 17] I'll give you just one little tidbit of information and it's a pretty cool fact. This is the last time the nation of Israel ever looks back with longing to go back to Egypt.

Because in their humility, they would never think Egypt was better than where they were at. And when they went, every other time, Moses would fall on his face and intercede on behalf of the people because the glory of God would show itself, right?

And God would pronounce judgment and Moses would intercede on behalf of the people and the people didn't necessarily say, oh, we messed up. The people weren't crying out. This time, the people realized their sin because of the consequences of it and the people initiated the intercession.

It's humility because they will never again go, I wish I was back in Egypt. Because the redemptive work of God not only comes as a recognition, but it also comes as a request rooted in humility.

It's not about me, oh God. I see my need and what I need is for you to work. The third truth we see in this redemptive work of God is that it is directly connected to a response of faith.

[14 : 33] A response of faith. A request or a prayer of humility that petitions God to do something but then does not respond in connection to that petition really was not one of humility.

The people, having a number of the Israelites taken captive, cried out to God, oh Lord God, if you would deliver this people into our hands, we would devote it utterly to destruction. We would give it to you.

But just because they made that request didn't mean it was over. Listen, they still had to go fight the battle. Right? I mean, they still had to put their swords on. They still had to take the shields.

They still had to go fight the battle of the kings who 38 years ago had defeated them and pushed them back 100 feet or 100 miles. They still had to go and oppose the people who had just taken a number of them captive.

See, responding in faith does not mean I'm going to sit here and watch God do it. Responding in faith is now I have cried out for God to do something and I'm going to live my life as if it is a settled fact.

[15 : 41] I'm going to, as Tony Evans would say, I'm going to act as if that which I do not see is already in existence. And I'm going to live in such a way as the thing that I have asked God to do is a present reality in my life and by faith I'm going to move forward.

They went and fought the battle after the cry. They didn't say God bring the captives back. They didn't say God bring them back and God, while you read it, destroyed the people. They said, if you are with us, God will give it all to you and then they went and fought.

Now the response of faith for the second account is a pretty amazing response of faith and we need to understand this because when Moses intercedes for the people because the people go to Moses and say, we have sinned, we have messed up, intercede for us.

So Moses goes and intercedes for the people and this is one of the great accounts of the gospel we have in the Old Testament and we need to see this. God tells him, says, make for yourself a fiery serpent and put it upon a staff or a rod, right?

So he goes and he makes the bronze serpent. We know the story, right? He makes the bronze serpent and he puts it upon a staff and he lifts it up and then he tells them, God tells them, whoever is bitten of one of the snakes and he looks up to the bronze serpent, he will live, he will be healed.

[16 : 55] Now notice, God did not remove that which was killing them. God didn't take the snakes away. God gave them an agent of salvation in the middle of that which was killing them.

Moses interceded and God didn't say, okay, I'll remove the snakes. No, what God said is, I will provide something in the middle of the snakes that if someone will respond in faith, they will live.

So the snakes were still present. People were still getting bit and the people that were getting bit were going to die if they didn't respond and look to the bronze serpent.

Almost said, look on, but I love the way New American Standard says, and I actually underlined it, those who looked to the serpent lived.

look to. Now, the picture is very clear. The wages of sin is death. The thing that is killing mankind is sin.

[18 : 06] Okay? People always ask, well, if God is good, then why does God allow sin to exist? Why doesn't God just remove sin? Well, God does not remove sin just like he did not remove the fiery serpents.

But God, in his goodness and in his grace and his mercy has provided something in the midst of sin that if man would look to that that's in the midst of sin, he will live.

And that is the cross of Calvary. Jesus says that if I be lifted up, I will draw men to myself and whoever looks to me will live.

Right? The picture is that God in his goodness and his mercy has provided a way for man to live in the middle of that which is killing him but what it takes is a response of faith.

They have to have the faith that would move them to look upon that which God has provided to save them.

[19 : 13] And that's a beautiful picture because the redemptive work of God is always connected to the response of faith. The sad reality is the sad reality is people were still getting bitten and people were still going to die.

I love what Warren Weirsey says that Moses took this and he put it in the midst of the camp. He did not put it inside the tabernacle and he did not even put it inside the courts of the tabernacle because the law cannot save you. Right? It was only that which was in the middle of the people that could save them.

Jesus was not crucified in the temple. He was crucified outside the city so that whoever could look. And I love the fact that it says that anybody who looks upon it will be saved. Right? Any man that is bitten who looks upon it will live.

So that's that open invitation. The sad reality is that there are some people who probably didn't. Because they said well I just wanted God to get rid of the snakes. I didn't want him to.

I mean that just seems too silly for me just to look upon it. Even though there were people there who were looking and living. Looking and living. Someone in their heart beyond a shadow of a doubt I know this. And the reason I know this is because we see this response all the time in the cross of Calvary.

[20 : 23] That's too easy. It can't work. I'll find another way. I'll work it out. I'll just work my whole life and try to avoid all these snakes.

Or I'll try to make an anti-menem. Or I'll do something. Right? God in his grace and mercy provides something that people could respond to. But man in his desperate condition I am certain there were a number of them who still died simply because they would not look.

Now the sad truth if we come all the way to the fulfillment of this. I believe it was during the days of Hezekiah. Hezekiah had to destroy this staff because the nation of Israel had turned this serpent and this staff into an idolatrous object to worship.

They were worshiping the staff instead of worshiping the God of the staff. Right? Ended up destroying it later on in Israelite history because it had become an idol. Listen, a cross is not an idol.

Right? A cross is not an idol. There were thousands, literally thousands of Jewish men who died on wooden crosses. A Roman cross is not an idol. He who hung on the cross is what saves us.

[21 : 42] So when we look to the cross, our reality is we're remembering he who was on that cross. Another great picture is why did God tell Moses to make a serpent put on a staff?

Because that which is killing them was to be held up above them to deliver them. Jesus became sin for us.

He bore our sin. That's our sin that's killing us on the cross. And there we see this response of faith. Fourth and finally, and very clearly we see it here, is in the redemptive work of God, there is the realization of his faithfulness.

The realization of his faithfulness. In the first account it says that then the Lord heard the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites and they utterly destroyed them and their cities. Thus the name of the place was called Hormah.

Hormah. A place where they were once destroyed now becomes a place for them to destroy. Right? Hormah means destruction. So it became a place of dedication. It became a place of redemption that God now has made us victorious and they realize that God is faithful.

[22 : 50] God needed to give them that battle here because by the way right after the fiery servants they're going to start meeting other kings, Sihon and Og. They'll defeat them as well. And then they begin to get on the eastern side of Jerusalem and they start defeating all that territory and this is where the two and a half tribes will end up living in the division of the land.

And so what God is showing them is I'm faithful here, I'm going to be faithful over there, I'm going to be faithful over there and I'm going to be faithful when you come into this land here. So it's a realization of his faithfulness. And then there at the second account that ninth verse and Moses made the bronze serpent and set it on a standard and it came about, here's the realization, that if a serpent bit any man when he looked to the bronze serpent, I love that final word, he lived.

How did they realize it? They responded in faith to what he commanded them to do and the moment they did it, they left. How do I know Jesus is the savior of the world?

Because when I looked upon him and called upon him, he became my savior. I lived. I lived. God. As Paul says, Paul says, he was the chief of sinners.

And if Jesus could save him, he could save anyone. Paul says, I'm alive. Therefore, I know any who look upon him will live as well.

[24 : 12] Numbers 21, verses 1 through 9, we see here this great picture of the redemptive work of God that is being played out through all of scripture. A picture that Jesus himself points back to.

It says, just as a serpent had to be lifted up in the wilderness, so too must the Son of Man be lifted up so that all who look to him will live. How good it is to see that God is redeeming people through his work for his glory.

Thank you, brother.