

Lesson 59: THE BRONZE SERPENT
Numbers 21:4-9

DISCUSSION:

[Visual aid would be good to have, such as pictures of this story, and maybe also pictures of snakes or a toy snake to demonstrate it moving along the ground.]

There are many kinds of snakes. Can you name me some?

Are snakes harmful, or harmless? Some are harmful, even deadly, while others are perfectly harmless. We're going to talk today about a story from the Word in which there are some very poisonous snakes, but also a snake that could heal.

Many, many things in nature represent something about the Lord. Would you think that a snake could ever represent the Lord? It seems strange, but in our story today, a certain snake did represent the Lord. Let's go over the story, and then talk about it.

The Israelites had been wandering in the wilderness. The journey was hard, but the Lord was always taking care of them, giving them food and water, and giving them strength against their enemies.

But often the Israelites would get tired and discouraged, and would start to complain. At times like these, they would forget to notice all the ways that the Lord had been helping them, and instead would wish that things were different. They would forget that life had been much worse for them when they were slaves back in Egypt, before the Lord had set them free.

On one particular day, the Israelites began to complain to Moses. "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, only to die in the wilderness?" they grumbled. "There is no food and water here, except for the manna, and we are sick of manna!"

As they were complaining like this, poisonous snakes appeared. They crawled in among the people, biting everyone in reach. The poison was very strong, and many people died.

The Israelites became afraid, and knew that the coming of the poisonous snakes had something to do with their complaining. They believed that the Lord was punishing them for complaining, and begged Moses to pray for the Lord to forgive them, and to take away the deadly snakes.

Moses prayed for the people. The Lord answered him and said, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole. Everyone who has been bitten needs only to look at it, and they will be healed. They will live."

Lesson 59 – Oak Arbor New Church Sunday School, page 2

So Moses made a serpent out of bronze and put it up on a pole. Any person who had been bitten needed only to look at it, and they were healed. It was a miracle.

Now we know today that the Lord never punishes anyone. But the poisonous snakes did come because the people were complaining. How do you think that happened? When people get grumpy and ungrateful, are they bringing angels or evil spirits closer to them? And do evil spirits bring trouble? Yes! Evil spirits love to bring whatever pain and trouble they can to people, and in this case they brought these deadly snakes. But the Lord is always working to protect us from evil spirits, if we want Him to.

Everything in nature represents something about the Lord or the spiritual world or something about people. What might snakes represent? What's different about snakes than many other animals? Because they don't have legs, they are very low to the ground, aren't they? You might say they are more in touch with the earth than most animals, because their whole bodies are on the ground all the time and they often lick the earth with their tongues as they move along.

Snakes represent something called our senses. What are our senses? Sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch help us learn about the world around us, don't they? They put us very in touch with the world, with this life on earth. That's important, isn't it? Our senses are good tools for living in this world.

Other parts of us, parts of our minds, can help us learn about heaven, the Lord, and about things like love, kindness, and friendship. These parts of our minds are higher than our senses, because things about the Lord and love and friendship are more important than the things that we can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch in the world around us.

So our senses are good, like harmless snakes, but they are low things compared to the parts of us that can love and care about other people and heavenly things. So when might our senses bring trouble, like poisonous snakes? Our senses bring trouble if they are used for bad reasons, or we think they are more important than friendship and love and the Lord.

Eating ice cream is fun, isn't it? But what if someone thinks that the good taste of ice cream is more important than being a good friend? What if that person always takes all the ice cream for him- or herself, not letting anyone else have some? Then his or her senses are bringing trouble. Soon that person won't have any friends.

So if we make our senses more important than higher things, they really bring bad trouble to our lives, like poisonous snakes. How can the Lord help?

The Lord did a very big, amazing thing to help us keep away from this kind of trouble. He came down onto earth, born as a baby, and lived in the world like we do. He got in very close touch with our world so He could be closer to us than ever.

Lesson 59 – Oak Arbor New Church Sunday School, page 3

In this way, the Lord can be represented by a serpent, but a beautiful, shining bronze serpent that heals people. He came down from heaven very close to the earth, like a snake is very close to the earth. And if we turn toward Him and believe in Him, just like the Israelites turned toward the bronze serpent and looked at it, He can heal all our worldly troubles.

PROJECT: PAPER SNAKE

Supplies:

Glue

bronze or gold colored paper

[Do not use tissue paper, as it is too thin and the glue soaks through.]

Procedure:

So today, for fun, we'll make a paper snake out of bronze colored paper to remember this story of the bronze serpent that could heal, and most importantly, that this serpent was showing one picture of how the Lord can help us.