

# Lifted up to Rescue

## Numbers 21 and Salvation Through Christ

Numbers 21:4-9 NIV

*Bible Lesson & Activities for Children*



THE **SUNDAY SCHOOL** STORE

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# Snake on a Stick: An Unusual Cure

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In this lesson, we consider how God rescues us and is with us. The snake bites and bronze serpent cure of Numbers 21 might seem a little odd, but the passage points to a greater savior. Just as looking at the snake on a pole helped the Israelites live, we look to Jesus on the cross for life. This message discusses various cures for things and how Jesus is ultimately our cure and answer for all that we need, most importantly rescue from sins!

The story of the snake in the wilderness can be a strange one for young children to consider. However, it has a wonderful message reminding us of God's mercy and faithfulness. While it's hard to imagine the devastation of killer snake bite punishments, the "antidote" is a foreshadowing of Christ. The Israelites didn't need to fear death when the bronze snake was near. We don't need to fear death because we know Jesus is always close to us and promises to give us eternal life. He is the cure for sin and death, and will be with us always!

**Passage:** Numbers 21:4-9 (Also reference John 3:14-21)

**Target Audience:** Kindergarten-6th grade

**Materials Needed:** Medicines or other ailment "cure" items; snake pictures or toys; construction paper or cardstock; markers or crayons; decorative supplies; Popsicle sticks; pipe cleaners; scissors; glue or tape; Bibles.

## More Resources Online

- Watch the [video demonstration of the object lesson](#).
- Watch the [video example for the craft projects](#).
- Watch the [video Bible story "John's Letter about Love"](#) from Saddleback Kids Club
- Watch the [video Bible story "Nicodemus"](#) from Crossroads Kids
- For more free illustrations, visit [Christian Clip Arts](#) and [Ministry-To-Children](#)

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## Object Lesson (5 minutes)

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*Greet children and discuss how to treat or cure various needs...*

Hello, Children of God!

Have you ever helped someone who was in need? Do you like being able to assist others, like a doctor? Why don't we do a little "doctoring" activity now? I'll tell you about a sickness or need, and you can "prescribe" what you think would be good to help it. Describe various medical needs (examples given), and prompt students to come up with solutions. Hold up items that might be used to treat them, after the kids make suggestions.

Let's say that I have a cough. What might I use? Maybe cough drops or cough syrup. What about if I have a cold? I might need tissues or nasal spray. If I have a headache, I could use some Tylenol or ice packs. Or what if I get a cut? In that case, I could use a band-aid. Or if I have an itch, maybe some ointment.

What would you do if I got a snake bite? That might be a little trickier, unless you live in the desert and have snake bite survival training...hopefully I could get to a hospital in time to receive a cure or antivenom. It's a little scary to think about for most people. And hopefully you've never been bitten by a snake. But the people in our Bible passage today did experience that. After Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt, they were wandering around in the wilderness for a while. They got upset and started complaining to God. That was the first mistake, really. The Lord had provided for them, freed them, and fed them, but they weren't satisfied and started whining. They wanted better food and lifestyles. They asked Moses why he brought them out to die in the wilderness. God decided to punish the people, and sent fiery serpents to bite them. That got their attention pretty quickly, and they came back to Moses apologizing and begging for help. So Moses prayed, and God gave him a plan. God told Moses to make a snake and hold it up on the pole. When people looked at the snake, they would live. So Moses created a serpent out of

bronze and put it on a pole. Sure enough, when the snake was held up, the people looked upon it and lived! They didn't need to fear death from the snakes anymore, because they had a cure.

Now, this might seem like a strange story to consider, but there is an important element within it. That snake on a stick was actually pointing to something else, to some ONE else: Jesus! The snake was held up as a cure. When people looked at it, they didn't die of their snake bites but lived. Jesus Christ came as our cure. He came as the antidote to sin and death. In fact, Jesus Himself described how, just as the snake was lifted up in the wilderness, He would be lifted up, too. Jesus was lifted up on a cross so that we could live. We look to Him for life, salvation, and strength. Jesus went on to describe how He was sent so that we will not perish, but have eternal life. We don't need to fear death because we have the cure! Jesus is our cure. He rescues us and gives us the hope of a life with Him. We know that even death is not the end for Christians. He gives us the hope of everlasting life after death. We can count on Him and trust Him to save us and to be with us now and always!

**Prayer: (Invite the children to repeat each line)**

Dear God,

Thank you for giving us Jesus.

He is the cure for sin and death.

Help us always to remember

To look to Him for life and salvation.

Thank you for your love.

We love you, God!

In Jesus name, Amen!

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# Game & Activities Suggestions

## (10 minutes)

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This passage examines an intriguing story of snake bite survival to see how Jesus is the “cure” and final answer to all things. Start with an activity that uses these themes and gets kids thinking:

- Snake pole snack: serve students a themed snack of pretzel sticks and gummy worms. Students have the option of placing their “snake” (worm) on the “pole” (pretzel) as Moses did in the story.
- Snake bite freeze tag: Have one student act as the “snake” and tag others. Another student will be “Moses”, and try to cure the tagged students with a special stick. Provide a time limit to see whether the “snake” or the “Moses” tag more people. Optional extra touch: periodically shout “Jesus” and have all tagged students go free for a while.
- Snake Bite Freeze Dance: Have all students dance in ridiculous patterns, acting as though “dying” from snake bites. Hold up a stick or a toy snake as a signal, and at the held up signal, all dying dancers should freeze and hold still to be “saved.” To make the activity competitive, have students step aside as “out” if they move when they should be frozen.
- Snake, Rattle, and Roll: This game is somewhat like “red light/green light.” Have students line up on a common starting line, with the goal of reaching the other side of the room. If “snake” is called, students can walk with a “slithering” motion until the next command is called. If “rattle” is the command, students should freeze and make loud noises. With “roll”, students can literally roll on the ground or spin in circles to move towards the goal.
- What’s the Cure Relay: have students line up in teams on one end of a play area. On the other side, place various items that could be used to cure sickness or hurt. Provide kids one at a time with an ailment, and have them run to find the “cure” for that, bringing it back to the team. See who can complete the cures with accuracy and speed.

Share with students that today’s story is an odd description of an Old Testament punishment, but ultimately a reminder to us that Jesus saves us and cures sin and death.

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## Main Bible Teaching (15 minutes)

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This lesson contains two passages, one from the Old Testament and one from the New, which reflects back on the first. If desired, parts can be acted out (especially with the serpents), or the passages can simply be read. Older students can read out loud, and teachers can read and discuss with younger ones.

**Numbers 21:4-5 NIV** *They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; (5) they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"*

If taken out of context, it will be helpful here to give students some background for this passage. God had called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. Although they had gotten out of Egypt, they were not able to enter the Promised Land right away, and had to wander in the wilderness. God provided manna to sustain them, but it wasn't good enough. The people got tired of the wilderness and tired of the food, and they complained to both God and Moses. They were impatient and upset, and whined that they had been delivered only to die.

**Ask:** What are things you've complained about? Why do you think it's not a good idea to complain?

**Numbers 21:6-7 NIV** *Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. (7) The people came to Moses and said, "We*

*sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.*

This is a strange and challenging part of the lesson. It’s hard to process God sending such a harsh punishment, but discipline is often a consequence of sin. The snakes did kill people, but also effectively communicated that they were doing wrong. The Israelites who had complained recognized that the serpents were there because of what they had said and done. They begged Moses to go to God on their behalf and explain their remorse, hoping that God would be merciful. Fortunately, Moses did, and of course God was merciful.

**Ask:** What do you do when you make a mistake and need to ask for forgiveness?

**Numbers 21:8–9 NIV** *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.” (9) So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.*

God had a plan to save the people. He instructed Moses to create a snake and wrap it on a pole. The snake on a stick was the antidote. People who had been bitten could look on it and live. They had the cure! Death couldn’t frighten them anymore knowing that they could look at the bronze snake and be saved. But God had an even greater plan of salvation. He already knew that He would send someone to save not just a group of people, but the whole world...

**Ask:** How are we saved from destruction and sin?

**John 3:14–17 NIV** *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, (15) that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” (16) For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that*

*whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

Explain the slight shift in gears here. The next passage is from John chapter 3 and includes one of the most well-known verses of all of Scripture. But it helps to have the context. Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, who wanted to know more about salvation. Jesus was explaining to him who He was and what He came to do. He referenced the serpent in the wilderness to remind Nicodemus that the snake was ultimately pointing to Him. Jesus was sent in order to be lifted up, like the snake, and to give eternal life to all people. His death allows us all to live and be forgiven. Jesus explained the simple choice we have when it comes to life with Him.

**John 3:18-21 NIV** *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (19) This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. (20) Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. (21) But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.*

We can reject Christ and what He has to offer, if we want to. We can refuse the light and embrace darkness, but that would be rather foolish when we have the opportunity to have life and freedom. Jesus has come so that we could have life in and through Him. HE is the ultimate cure, not for a snake bite, but for sin and death. Jesus is the way to life now and for eternity!

Snake bites sound strange, but there is important foreshadowing in this story. In part, it shows us how much grace and mercy God has, that He made a way of escape for the grumbling Israelites. Ultimately, though, the passage points to Christ and the way He makes for all of us. God has mercy and grace on us by giving His son, through whom we can all have hope and salvation. We don't fear death when we have Him. Thanks be to God!

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## Craft Activities (15 minutes)

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The story of the wilderness snake encounter in Numbers 21 can seem strange, but it has important meaning as it points to Christ and the salvation He offers through His death on the cross. These crafts recall that beautiful promise while also having fun with the serpent theme. A “Rattle Snake” includes a creative noisemaker element. A “Snake on a Stick Mural” includes the Old Testament story with its New Testament foreshadowing. Let’s get crafty!

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## Craft one: "Rattlesnake"

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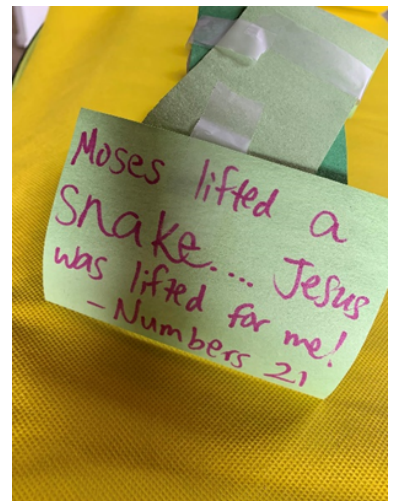
You will need:

- Construction paper or cardstock
- Markers or crayons
- Scissors
- Glue, tape, or staples
- Decorations (stickers, google eyes, etc.)
- Beans, beads, or dried rice
- Small cup



Procedure:

1. Cut long strips of paper or cardstock (about two inches wide). Choose whether to use multiple colors or one main color.
2. Glue, tape, or staple the strips together, if using dual tones.
3. Make "accordion folds" in the paper back and forth, leaving longer pieces at the beginning and end.
4. As desired, add decorations like colors, eyes, tongue, etc.
5. Add a verse or caption on the end with another small piece of paper.
6. Optional: to make the "rattle" element, place dried rice, beans, or beads in a small cup. Cover and secure to the end of the serpent to create a noisemaker!



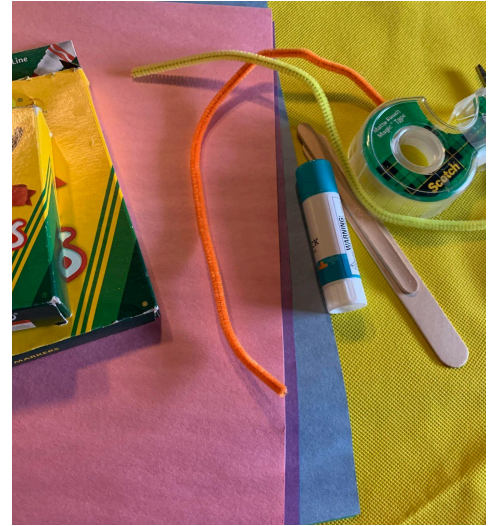
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## Craft Two: “Snake on a Stick” Mural

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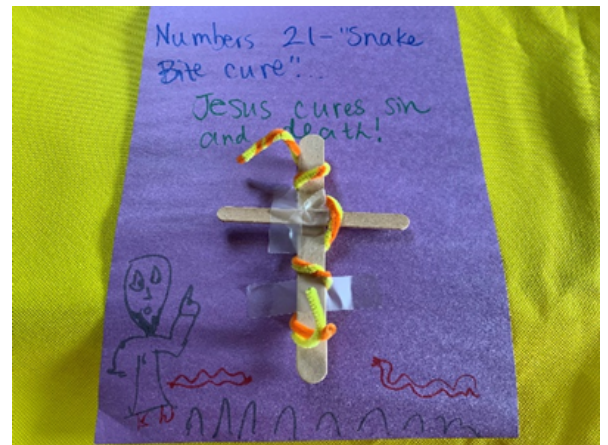
You will need:

- Construction paper or cardstock
- Popsicle sticks (or dowel/other stick)
- Pipe cleaners
- Crayons/markers
- Glue and/or tape



Procedure:

1. Glue the popsicle sticks together to form a cross shape.
2. Use pipe cleaners (braid together for extra color) to form a “snake” and wrap around the stick cross.
3. Glue or tape the snake on a stick into the center of a paper or cardstock.
4. Write verses or captions around the center piece to describe what it is.
5. Draw/add extra decorations or pictures as desired. Option: use a hanger to display.



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## John 3:14-15 NIV

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*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”*





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## Word Search Puzzle

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Moses - Serpent - Wilderness - Love - Son - Condemn

Judgment - Darkness - Edom - Israel - Lord - Bronze

L	P	N	A	O	W	A	T	M	R	N	L
U	V	C	Z	H	R	P	C	I	D	V	D
W	E	X	O	H	Z	H	O	W	A	F	Z
J	K	P	X	G	I	Z	N	K	R	M	K
B	H	I	Q	P	S	Z	D	I	K	O	J
R	P	C	A	F	R	E	E	S	N	S	U
E	H	T	J	D	A	Z	M	P	E	E	D
L	W	I	L	D	E	R	N	E	S	S	G
B	O	L	Q	L	L	O	R	D	S	N	M
B	J	V	G	S	E	R	P	E	N	T	E
F	T	H	E	D	O	M	H	E	G	O	N
U	F	O	B	R	O	N	Z	E	X	F	T

## Word Search Answers

L	P	N	A	O	W	A	T	M	R	N	L
U	V	C	Z	H	R	P	C	I	D	V	D
W	E	X	O	H	Z	H	O	W	A	F	Z
J	K	P	X	G	I	Z	N	K	R	M	K
B	H	I	Q	P	S	Z	D	I	K	O	J
R	P	C	A	F	R	E	E	S	N	S	U
E	H	T	J	D	A	Z	M	P	E	E	D
L	W	I	L	D	E	R	N	E	S	S	G
B	O	L	Q	L	L	O	R	D	S	N	M
B	J	V	G	S	E	R	P	E	N	T	E
F	T	H	E	D	O	M	H	E	G	O	N
U	F	O	B	R	O	N	Z	E	X	F	T