

Look Up, Look Up

Numbers 21:4-9

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Numbers 21:4-9

They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom.

But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said,

"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

Numbers 21:4-9

Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.

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.

Numbers 21:4-9

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."**

**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,
he lived.**

Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

1. Avoiding Edom (v.4a)

They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom.



Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

1. Avoiding Edom (v.4a)

People have to turn south from Mt. Hor (Num 20: 20-21), avoiding Edom because the Edomites refused allow them to pass through their territory.

Why did the Edomites refuse them passage?

Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

1. Avoiding Edom (v.4a)

Possible explanations include:

- **they do not trust them to allow them into their territories**
- **Edomites are the descendent of Esau and there has always been enmity between Esau and Jacob and now their descendents. The other eastern neighbours of ancient Israel are the Amalek (descended from a son of Esau), Moab and Ammon (both descended from sons of Lot).**

Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

2. Complaints (v.4b-5)

*But the people grew impatient on the way;
they spoke against God and against Moses,
and said,*

*"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to
die in the desert? There is no bread! There is
no water! And we detest this miserable
food!"*

Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

2. Complaints (v.4b-5)

- The word *qāsar* means the lost heart or impatience.
- The people are becoming discouraged
- The complaints are similar to others (Ex. 14:11-12; 17:3, Num. 11:4-35; 14:2-4, 16:13-14, 20:4-5)

Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

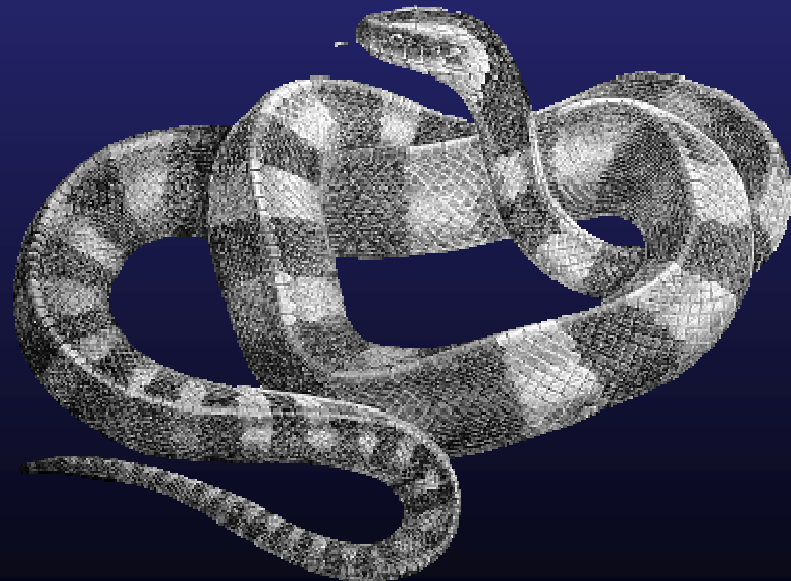
2. Complaints (v.4b-5)

- a. The objects of their complaints are Yahweh and Moses**
- b. The cause of their complaints are**
 - i. Lack of water**
 - ii. Lack of acceptable food. If the complaint is against the manna, it is a direct rejection of God's providence**
 - iii. Comparison. Wishing for the good old days**

Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

3. The Desert Snakes (v.6)

Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.



Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

3. The Desert Snakes (v.6)

- Unlike similar episodes of complaints in the past,
- there is no verbal response from Yahweh or Moses, just action.



Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

4. The People's Repentance (v.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.



Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

4. The People's Repentance (v.7)

- a. Confession**
- b. Request for intercession**
- c. Record of intercession**



Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

5. Yahweh's Response (v.8-9)

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."*

*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, he lived.*

Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

5. Yahweh's Response (v.8-9)

- **Both God's command (v.8) and its fulfillments (v.9) demands an obedience i.e. look up at the object.**
- **The words used for the two verses are different.**
- **It is not simply to take a glance but to gaze one's eyes upon the bronze snake.**

Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

5. Yahweh's Response (v.8-9)

This is not the beginning of a bronze snake cult nor does the bronze snake have magical powers. Unfortunately there is a tendency for people to turn everything into a magical cure.

Hence in 2 Kings 18:4

Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

5. Yahweh's Response (v.8-9)

He (King Hezekiah) removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)

2 Kings 18:4

Text Exposition (Num 21:4-9)

5. Yahweh's Response (v.8-9)

The association of desert snakes with bronze is an attempt to relate desert objects with the temple.



Lessons for us

1. Life is change
a. A flowing stream

Heraclitus

***"You cannot step twice into the same
river;
for fresh waters are continually
flowing on."***

Lessons for us

1. Life is change

b. We cannot resist change

- Economic Crisis
- Political changes
- Personal changes
- Changes in the family
- Ageing
- Rising crime rates
- Living a less lavish lifestyle

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Lessons for us

2. How to complain

It is okay to complain. Just do it right.

*"Therefore I will not keep silent;
I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit,
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul."*

Job 7:11



Lessons for us

2. How to complain

**Just be careful that you are
complaining about the situation and
not against God.**

Lessons for us

2. How to complain

- **In our relationship with God, in our prayers it is okay to complain as David and others did in the Psalms.**
- **We need to be open about our feelings.**
- **However we need to be clear about our reasons for complaining.**

Lessons for us

2. How to complain

a. The squeaky wheel gets the grease

Some people complain because they know the louder their complaints, the quicker they will get a response.

The service paradigm of “**the customer is always right**” has made complaining into a fine art.



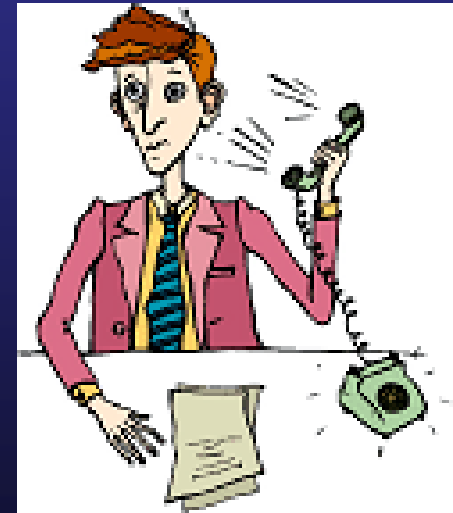
Lessons for us

2. How to complain

a. *The squeaky wheel gets the grease*

Complain as an action to stimulate the right action.

Then do it loudly.



Lessons for us

2. How to complain

b. Complain but don't enjoy it too much

Lamentations is written when the Israelites are in exile.

Lessons for us

2. How to complain

b. Complain but don't enjoy it too much

***Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
that both calamities and good things come?***

***Why should any living man complain
when punished for his sins?***

***Let us examine our ways and test them,
and let us return to the LORD.***

Lamentations 3:38-40

Lessons for us

2. How to complain

b. Complain but don't enjoy it too much

Complain if you have legitimate reasons to but do not indulge in self-pity

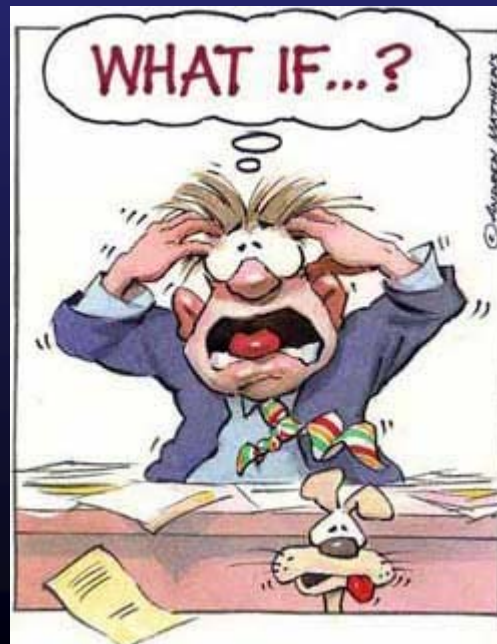


Lessons for us

2. How to complain

c. Don't play the "What if" game

Playing the "what if " games will give us lots of reasons to complain. It is always easy to know and judge everything with hindsight.



Lessons for us

2. How to complain

c. Don't play the "What if" game

*Playing the 'what if' game
never solves anything.*

*It just create more
discontent and create
reasons for complaints.*



Lessons for us

2. How to complain

d. Don't live in the Good Old Days

The Good Old Days:

- **Asian Currency Crunch**
- **Dot Com Bubble Burst**
- **The Great Depression**
- **No bills to pay (parents took care of them)**
- **No computer worries (actually, no computers at all)**
- **Eat, Sleep, Play, Cry (as a baby)**

Lessons for us

2. How to complain

d. Don't live in the Good Old Days

*Live in the present
and not the past.*

*Let the past
remain in the past.*



Lessons for us

How to complain?

You complain by looking up!



Lessons for us

3. Look up, look up

a. You must be down to look up

Moses was instructed to raise the bronze snake high on a pole. The people have to look up to see it.

- In order for us to look up, we must be down. Sometimes we may be lying on the ground.
- Suffering is part of human life, whether we like it or not.
- However suffering may be redemptive and helps us to know God.

Lessons for us

3. Look up, look up

a. You must be down to look up

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Rom 5:3-5

Lessons for us

3. Look up, look up

a. You must be down to look up

**So the circumstances of our lives
knock us down.**

So what do we do?

We complain.

Maybe we should look up.

Lessons for us

3. Look up, look up

b. It's all about grace

The apostle John explains the significance of the bronze snake,

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

John 3:14-15

Lessons for us

3. Look up, look up

b. It's all about grace

They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."

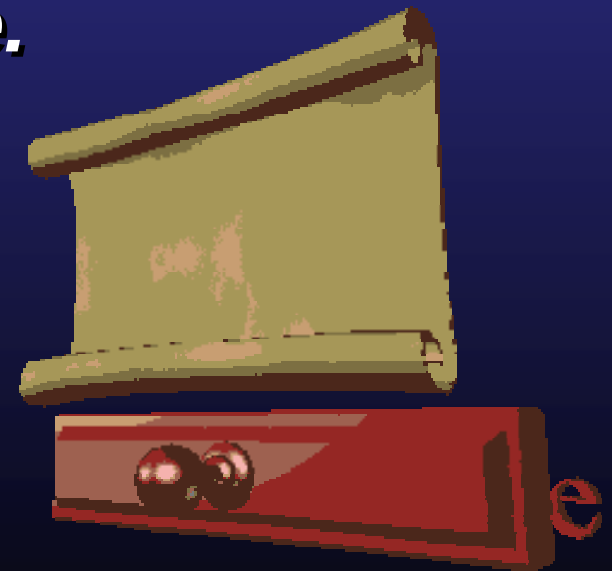
John 8: 27-29

Lessons for us

3. Look up, look up

b. It's all about grace

***We do not have to do anything.
Everything has been done for us.
This is grace.***



Lessons for us

3. Look up, look up

c. Let go and let God

- **But like the ancient Israelites, we have to look up.**
- **We have to look at the source of our salvation.**
- **The ancient Israelites receive bodily healing. As we know, they eventually all die.**

Lessons for us

3. Look up, look up

c. Let go and let God

For us, we only have to look up to Jesus on the cross.

Lessons for us

Complain if you have to but do not sin against God in your complaining

- Remember what God has done for you in the past
- Remember God loves you and will care for you in the past, present and future
- Remember God will look after you
- Trust



Conclusion

**Just before you complain,
remember what Jesus says:**

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

Matt 6:25-34

Conclusion

**Just before you complain,
remember what Jesus says:**

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Matt 6:25-34

Conclusion

**Just before you complain,
remember what Jesus says:**

For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Conclusion

Look Up, Look Up



Soli Deo Gloria