



GOD SAVES

Jesus came to earth for the purpose of saving all people who turn to Him.

MATTHEW 1:18-25; NUMBERS 21:6-9

The Israelites continued to wander around the desert. God led them around the land of Edom and the Canaanite country. However, the Canaanite king, Arad, attacked them and captured some of the Israelites. The people prayed for help. The Lord listened and helped them defeat the Canaanites. But immediately after this victory, the people raised a great complaint against God. God punished them by a plague of poisonous snakes.

People are always turning away from God. In the New Testament, Paul says it this way: “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23). God, who is perfectly holy, rightly punishes sin. However, the humans of the world can know God’s grace and forgiveness.

In Numbers 21, God’s grace came through a bronze snake on a pole. To all the humans of the world, God’s grace comes through Jesus whose birth story is in today’s lesson. The final picture of God’s grace and forgiveness comes through Jesus who, like the bronze snake, was lifted up on a cross to give salvation to all who look to Christ in faith.

MATTHEW 1:18-25; NUMBERS 21:6-9

18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was **engaged** **A** to marry Joseph, but before they married, she learned she was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. **19** Because Mary's **husband**, **B** Joseph, was a good man, he did not want to disgrace her in public, so he planned to **divorce her secretly**. **C** **20** While Joseph thought about these things, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will give birth to a son, and you will name him **Jesus**, **D** because he will save his people from their sins." **22** All this happened to bring about what the Lord had said through the **prophet**: **E** **23** "The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and they will name him **Immanuel**," **F** which means "God is with us." **24** When Joseph woke up, he did what the Lord's angel had told him to do. Joseph took Mary as his wife, **25** but he did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to the son. And Joseph named him Jesus.

6 So the LORD sent them poisonous snakes; they bit the people, and many of the Israelites died. **7** The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we grumbled at you and the LORD. Pray that the LORD will take away these snakes." So Moses prayed for the people. **8** The LORD said to Moses, "Make a bronze snake, and put it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, that person will live." **9** So Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Then when a snake bit anyone, that person looked at the **bronze snake and lived**. **G**

- a. Engagement was a contract usually starting about a year before the wedding.
- b. Engaged couples were called husband and wife even though they were not married yet.
- c. Because of the marriage contract, engagements could only be broken by divorce.
- d. The Greek name, Jesus, is the same as the Hebrew name, Yeshua (Joshua). In both languages the name Jesus means "the Lord shall save."
- e. See Isaiah 7:14.
- f. Some translations use the name Immanuel or Emanuel. Both mean "God with us."
- g. Jesus explained to Nicodemus He would be lifted up on a cross so people can have faith in Him and live. (See John 3:14-16.) Jesus compared the bronze snake story to His own crucifixion.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Why do we need saving? From what?
2. Why did the angel tell Joseph to name the baby “Jesus”?
3. What did the Old Testament prophet say people would call the baby? What did this name mean?
4. Why did Joseph decide to go ahead and marry Mary?
5. In the Old Testament, why did God send poisonous snakes to kill the Israelites?
6. What was God’s plan to save the people if the snakes bit them?
7. What did the people need to do so they would not die after the snakes bit them?
8. How does the story of the bronze snake relate to salvation through Jesus?

BIBLE SKILL: *Finding names that mean the same thing.*

Jesus had several other names in both the Old Testament and New Testament. Look up these verses to find some of those names. Write the name of Jesus you find in the verses.

Luke 1:35 _____ Matthew 1:23 _____

1 John 4:15 _____ John 4:25 _____

Matthew 25:31 _____ Isaiah 7:14 _____

John 1:41 _____ John 1:29 _____

John 3:14 _____

IN MY CONTEXT

- God gives salvation through His Son.
- Believers show their faith in God by obeying Him.
- There is only one way people can have salvation. They must turn to Jesus in faith.

What does “salvation” mean? Discuss with your group how God provided salvation to the Israelites. Discuss how God provides salvation through His Son today.

How do you show your obedience to God? What things have you done in this past week that show your obedience to God?

Why is faith in Jesus the only way to be saved? Share with someone in your group your story of salvation. Who can you tell about salvation in Jesus this week?

MEMORY VERSE

“She will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” – Matthew 1:21

DAY ONE

Read Matthew 1:18-19, looking for the choices Joseph had to make.

Mary's family promised to give her to Joseph to be his wife. They were engaged. In New Testament times, engagement was different than it is today. Engagement was a contract. The contract was usually made about a year before the wedding. If the man wanted to end the engagement, he had to sign a paper to say the two were no longer engaged. It was a kind of divorce statement. He had to give the reason he wanted to end the engagement.

Before they were married, Joseph found out Mary was pregnant. He thought Mary was unfaithful to him. He had two choices: 1) he could sign a divorce statement telling the reason for the divorce; 2) he could go ahead with the wedding even though he knew the baby was not his baby.

Joseph did not want to embarrass Mary in public. He decided to have a private divorce. He would not tell anyone his reasons for the divorce. His problem was he did not know all the facts. The angel explained everything to him later. But even at this point in the story we see that Joseph was a kind and thoughtful man. He wanted to protect Mary as much as he could.

When have you had to make a hard decision?

How did learning all the facts make your decision easier?

DAY TWO

Read Matthew 1:20-23, underlining the meaning of the name Jesus.

Matthew says Joseph thought about the decision he was making. He probably worried about it a lot. He even dreamed about his decision. One night an angel came to him in a dream. The angel explained about the baby Mary was carrying. The angel encouraged Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary for his wife. Then came the big surprise. The baby did not have a human father. He was from the Holy Spirit.

The angel told Joseph the name he should choose for the baby. The name was "Jesus." Jesus is an important name because it means "God saves." The prophecies in the Old Testament said these things would

happen. Isaiah 7:14 says that a virgin would become pregnant and her child would be Immanuel—God with us. What was happening to Mary was the fulfillment of that prophesy.

There is only one reason Jesus came to earth. He came to earth to offer salvation to people who accept Him. His reason for coming was to be Savior. Matthew described the final and only way God provides salvation. Salvation is through His Son, Jesus. He provides salvation to people who believe and obey Him.

Do you believe Jesus is the only way to be saved? Why or why not?

How can you explain to other people about salvation through Jesus?

DAY THREE

Read Matthew 1:24-25, finding the connection between faith and action.

Joseph did the two things the angel told him to do. First, he married Mary. Second, he named the child Jesus. These actions show Joseph's faith in God. There is no doubt that Mary was a virgin when she became pregnant. The Bible clearly states she was a virgin. Joseph waited until after Jesus was born to have sexual relations with his wife, Mary. Both Mary and Joseph are examples of obedience and faith in God.

Believers today show their faith in God by obeying Him. They show their faith through their actions. There is a story about a little town that had a stream running through it. Horses and buggies could cross the stream by going through the shallow water. During rainy season the stream was so deep people needed to use boats to go across.

Finally, some younger men in town built a little bridge. Several older men said they really liked the bridge. One day people noticed the older men were still using little boats when the water was deep. They asked the men why. One older man said they loved the bridge. They believed it was a good bridge but they were sure the boats could hold them and get them across the water. They said they had faith the bridge was good, but their actions did not show their faith.

How do you show your faith in God?

DAY FOUR

Read Numbers 21:6-7, drawing a circle around the first step toward salvation.

Not long after their victory over the Canaanites, the Israelites started to grumble and complain again against God and Moses. This was the seventh time during their journey that they complained against God and Moses. This time their grumbling was even more serious. They complained about the food God gave them. The manna God sent to them was a holy gift to them. It was heavenly bread. But they called it “terrible food.” They said they hated the food God gave them. God’s judgment came hard against them. He sent poisonous snakes that bit them. Many Israelites died.

Most Bible teachers think the snakes were carpet vipers. There is no cure for their poison. The snake bite causes terrible, high fevers. People were in pain all over their bodies from the bites. The pain from the snake bites caused the people to repent. They admitted that grumbling and complaining was a sin against God. They begged Moses to pray God would take away the snakes. Moses showed mercy to His people. He prayed for them. It is important to see the first step for them to have salvation was to repent and turn back to God.

Why do you think God requires people to repent from their sins before they can be saved?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Jesus is God’s Son*

Christ was and is always the Son of God. He took on a human body. He was born of the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was perfect. He obeyed God’s will. Jesus was a real person. He opened the way for people to be saved from sin through His death on the cross. He rose from the dead. He went up to heaven. He is in heaven now. He brings people to God so their sins can be forgiven. He will return in power and glory. He will judge the world. He is always with believers to the end of the world.

DAY FIVE

Read Numbers 21:8-9, finding God's plan for salvation.

God told Moses to make an image of the snake and put it on a pole. When the snakes bit people Moses told them to look up at the snake image. God would heal them. Usually they would be disgusted to look at such a terrible image. They believed snakes were unclean. However, they knew they had to trust God and obey whatever He said to do. It is important to understand the Israelites did not worship the snake. They looked at the snake. Why? Because God told them to look at it. It is important to understand it was faith in God that healed them. The snake did not heal the people. Faith in the snake did not heal the bites.

In the same way, Jesus' died on the cross to pay for our sins. It is not the wooden cross that saves us today. It is faith in the One who died on the cross. In the New Testament, Jesus compared His own crucifixion on the cross to the snake on the pole. Read John 3:14-16. Jesus said He would be lifted up like Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness. We must believe in God's Son, Jesus, to save us. Salvation is available only through faith in Jesus.

Why does God provide only one way for people to be saved today?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Matthew 1:18-25 and Numbers 21:6-9. Meet with one or two members of your study group to find ways to live what you have learned.

Discuss with your group how God provides salvation. Who can you tell this week about why Jesus came to earth?

What obedient actions can you take this week that will show your faith in God? Discuss this with your small group.

Discuss with group members how to explain to others that there is only one way people can be saved. Who can you tell about Jesus this week?

GOD SAVES

Matthew 1:18-25; Numbers 21:6-9

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for the group to be bold and share the good news of Jesus with others.

Enlist a volunteer to sign the story of the bronze snake from Numbers 21:4-9. Verses 4-5 help introduce the story.

Practice your testimony to share during the session.

Write the outline on the board.

FOCUS ATTENTION

EXPLAIN: *Many times the Old Testament has prophecies or events that relate to the New Testament. Today we will see a prophecy quoted in the New Testament. We will also see a story in Numbers that will remind us of something that happened in the New Testament.*

First we will take time to focus on the birth of Jesus.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Savior (Matthew 1:18-23)

SIGN Matthew 1:18-19. **ASK:** *Why was Joseph thinking of divorcing Mary when they weren't married yet?* **EXPLAIN:** *In Bible times being engaged was a very formal agreement. It was like a legal agreement. If a couple decided to break off the engagement, they must go through a divorce process.*

SIGN Matthew 1:20-23. **DISCUSS** questions 1-3 from Explore the Text. **NOTE** that verse 23 is from Isaiah 7:14. **EXPLAIN:** *Several New Testament writers quoted Old Testament prophets. Jesus often talked about the Old Testament. It helps us understand that God always had a plan to save people from their sin. He prepared the way for a long time. Then He did what He said He would do and sent Jesus.*

2. The Arrival (Matthew 1:24-25)

SIGN Matthew 1:24-25. **DISCUSS** question 4 from Explore the Text. **ASK:** *Why was it important for Matthew to include verse 25? (It was important because people needed to know that Mary was pregnant because of the Holy Spirit. It was a miracle.)*

EXPLAIN: *Joseph had a plan to divorce Mary. But God made it clear to him that he should marry her. Joseph obeyed. This showed his faith in God. Invite members to discuss times they had a plan, but changed their actions to obey God instead.*

3. The Requirement (Numbers 21:6-9)

CALL ON the volunteer to sign the story from Numbers 21:4-9. **NOTE** that again the Israelites complained. When God punished them, they recognized their sin and asked Moses to pray for them.

DISCUSS questions 5-8 from Explore the Text. **INVITE** the group to find John 3:14-16 in their Bibles. **ASK:** *Who was Jesus talking about when He said “Son of Man”? (This is how Jesus often talked about Himself.) What does He mean by “lifted up”? (He would be lifted up on a cross. People must understand that He died on the cross to provide forgiveness for our sin.)*

ENCOURAGE the group to take time to think about their salvation experience. Christmas time can give us opportunities to tell others about how Jesus came to give salvation to all who turn to Him. **SHARE** your testimony with the group as an example. **INVITE** others to share their testimonies with the group. You could also divide into smaller groups of two or three and let them share their testimonies with each other.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points from In My Context in the Personal Study Guide. **DISCUSS** the questions. **ENCOURAGE** the group to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share.

CLOSE with prayer, asking God to give us opportunities to share His good news with others this week.