

# JESUS AND THE BRAZEN SERPENT

(John 3:14,15)

**INTRODUCTION:** The text is a part of what Jesus said to Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee, and hence would be familiar with the O.T. incident to which Jesus referred. The extent of Christ's endorsement of the O.T. becomes apparent when we consider on how many occasions Jesus revealed Himself through the incidents recorded in the O.T. (Example: Matthew 12:40)

What is meant by the expression, "*so must the Son of man be lifted up*"? It does not refer to His being exalted in the sight of men by the preaching of the gospel. Neither does it refer to His being exalted in heaven. (Acts 2:33; 5:31; Phil. 2:9-11) Jesus referred to His being lifted up 3 times and He made it clear that this expression refers to His death on a rugged cross, (text; Jn. 8:28; 12:32,33)

Nicodemus did not realize the deep spiritual significance of the brazen serpent in Jewish history until our Lord revealed it unto him. It is the purpose of this lesson to show the resemblance between Christ and the brazen serpent. Such a study should cause us to appreciate more the cross of Christ. (Gal. 6:14)

## I. THE ACCOUNT OF MOSES LIFTING UP THE BRAZEN SERPENT (NUMBERS 21:4-9)

- A. The Israelites were a caravan of murmurers and cry-babies (Ex. 14:10-14; 16:2,3; Num. 11:1; 14:1-3; I Cor. 10:9-13; Phil. 2:14,15)
  1. They were "*much discouraged because of the way*" (text)
  2. The Pulpit Commentary states, "The Arabah is a stony, sandy, almost barren plain shut in by mountain walls on either side and subject to sand-storms. It was not only, however, the heat and drought and ruggedness of the route which depressed them, but the fact that they were marching directly away from Canaan, and knew not how they were ever to reach it." (Vol. II, pg. 272)
  3. When people become discontent, angry, impatient, ungrateful, etc., they are very likely to say and do sinful things!
  4. Do we complain often? Listen to yourself!
  5. They spoke contemptuously of the manna calling it "vile bread" (see footnote in ASV)
  6. If we had to eat the same kind of food for every meal, would we complain, or be grateful for something to eat? (Give examples)
- B. God sent the serpents among the Israelites because they spoke against Him (text)
  1. Isn't it awful that those created in the image of God will speak blasphemous words about their Creator? (Example: On the T.V. show, "Highway To Heaven", I heard a young boy say, when he heard his friend had died of cancer, "When I get to heaven, I will punch God in the nose.")
  2. They should have been angry with themselves and not God and Moses for they decided to turn away from the land "flowing with milk and honey" (Num. 13 and 14; Heb. 3:19)
  3. God told Moses that those guilty of blaspheming Him were to be put to death (Lev. 24:16)
  4. It must have been very frightening to see poisonous snakes crawling around and seeing people scream in agony as they were bitten (Tell how I was almost bitten by a rattlesnake)
- C. The people acknowledge their sins (text)

1. They recognized the grave nature of the condition they were in and sought Divine assistance (text)
2. Moses prayed for them and God heard his prayer (text)
- D. God provided the remedy
  1. All the people would have died if it had not been for Divine intervention
    - a. No man possessed a cure for this snake bite
    - b. What great grace, mercy and love God showed to them!
  2. God only provided one way!
- E. The condition of healing was made known (text)
  1. The Israelites had a work to perform before they could be healed
  2. To man's way of thinking, this was not a rational way (Isa. 55:8,9)
    - a. (Go over reasons man might have used to excuse his looking on a snake)
    - b. No one raised the question of WHY God with all His power couldn't heal without a brass snake
  3. The serpent was placed on a standard so that all could see. This shows God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35)
  4. Those who obeyed were healed (text)
  5. There was no healing power in the serpent of brass, but God healed them when they obeyed Him

## **II. NOTICE THE RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF THE ISRAELITES AND THE REMEDY GIVEN, AND THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF THE WORLD AND THE REMEDY GIVEN**

- A. All have sinned, and if this sin is not removed, it will result in spiritual death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; Ez. 18:20)
  1. Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1,2)
  2. The thought of sin should be just as repulsive to us as the thought of venom being injected into the body by a rattlesnake. Is it? (Rom. 12:9)
- B. The Israelites acknowledged their sin and we need to do the same (Luke 18:13,14)
- C. They sought Divine assistance and we need to do the same!
- D. They realized their condition was serious; ours is even MORE so, because sin effects the life of the soul, but many do not realize their condition
- E. All of us would die spiritually if God had not intervened (Pro. 14:12; Jer. 10:23; Rom. 6:23; I Cor. 1:21; Heb. 10:4; 9:22)
- F. God has provided the remedy (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8)
  1. He has provided only ONE way (Jn. 14:6) (II Tim. 2:10; I Jn. 5:11; Acts 4:12)
  2. All can come unto Christ and be saved (Mt . 11:28-30; Rom. 2:11; text)
- G. The conditions of healing have been revealed in the Bible and we must make people aware of them (Example: The condition of healing must have spread quickly through the Israelite camp)
  1. Man has a part to play in his salvation (Ph. 2:12; Acts 2:40)
    - a. We need to hear the gospel, believe in Christ, repent of our sins, confess our faith, and be baptized for the remission of sins (I Cor. 1:21; Rom. 1:16; text; Jn. 8:24; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9,10 ; Mk. 16:16)
    - b. (Go over excuses that some make for not being baptized)
  2. Man does not believe that these conditions are reasonable (I Cor. 1:18)

**CONCLUSION:** Later generations of Jews worshipped the brazen serpent. (II Kgs. 18:4) We must not worship the cross. Those Israelites, who had faith enough to look upon the brazen serpent, as God commanded them, lived. Those who have enough faith in the Lord to cause you to obey Him will be saved from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death in hell. (Heb. 5:9) Those who fail to look died. Likewise, those of us who fail to look unto Jesus will die in our sins and be lost. Will you come and accept the remedy which God has provided? How foolish for one to have the remedy, but then fail to take it.

~ Don Hastings ~