

Look Again!

- **Numbers 21:5-8** ⁵ *And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.* ⁶ *And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.* ⁷ *Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.* ⁸ **And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.**
- **John 3:14-16** ¹⁴ *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:* ¹⁵ *That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* ¹⁶ *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*
- **2 Kings 18:1-4** ¹ *Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign.* ² *Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah.* ³ *And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did.* ⁴ **He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.**
- During the wilderness wanderings, the Israelites got discouraged (“impatient”) because of the way, and began to sin by murmuring against the Lord and longing for Egypt. **Sin always begins with a longing for the world!**
- God sent fiery serpents among them and many of them died. Then He told Moses to make a brass serpent and **lift it up**; only those who looked on it lived.
- Just before the most familiar verse in the Bible (John 3:16), Jesus alludes to this event ... and with good reason!
 - The brass serpent was necessary because of sin; Calvary was necessary because of sin.
 - The brass serpent was a hideous thing to have to look upon; He was despised and rejected of men.
 - The brass serpent was made like a serpent, but not taken from the wilderness, and without venom. Jesus was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, but was the second Adam from Heaven, and without sin.
- **Romans 8:3** *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:*
 - The bite of the serpent was painful and mortal. So is the penalty of sin – it ends in death!

- There was no limit as to the stage of poisoning; however far gone one was, the remedy still had power. The power of the cross can save “from the guttermost to the uttermost!”
- There was only one serpent for a whole camp. There is no other name whereby we must be saved.
- The solution to the serpent problem was not in trying to kill the serpents, making medicine, pretending they were not there, passing anti-serpent laws, or even climbing the pole – the only answer was in looking at the uplifted serpent. There is only one plan of salvation!
- The verb “lifted up” has a dual meaning – to be crucified and to be glorified. Jesus pointed out that the crucifixion would actually be the means of His glorification.
John 12:23-24 ²³ *And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.* ²⁴ *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*
- In a classic painting of this scene, the artist represented all sorts of people clustering around the pole, and as they looked the horrible snakes dropped off their arms, and they lived. There was such a crowd around the pole that a mother could not get near it. She carried a little baby, which a serpent had bitten. You could see the blue marks of the venom. As she could get no nearer, the mother held her child aloft, and turned its little head that it might gaze with its infant eye upon the brazen serpent and live.
- **This is the task of evangelism – to turn people’s gaze to Jesus!**
- The best sort of pole to exhibit Christ upon is a high one, so He can be seen further away! **The only virtue in the pole is its height!** This is the reason for worship! This is the reason for holiness!
- This beautiful story should have been the end of the serpent, except for a short footnote in history. There is no mention of the brasen serpent in the OT for seven and a quarter centuries, until we find incense being burned to it in the time of Hezekiah. How long it has been going on, we do not know.
- Whoever first put that piece of brass away as an object of reverence we do not know; probably it passed into the possession of the High Priest’s family and was retained among the sacred vessels. The brasen serpent survived the wilderness journey, crossed the Jordan, was located at Shiloh with the ark, was kept safe through the troubled times of the Judges, escaped capture when the ark was taken by the Philistines, remained untouched during the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon, was secure when the kingdom was fractured by civil war in the time of Rehoboam, and endured the unrest and wars of the divided kingdom until the time of Hezekiah. **How long that piece of rubbish lasted!**
- Hezekiah was the twelfth king of the southern kingdom of Judah. He was by nature a reformer; his first act as a godly king was to purge, repair and reopen the Temple which had been neglected and polluted by idol worship during the reign of his father Ahaz.

- His reformation was so thorough that he did not even spare the high places, centers of contaminated worship on hilltops patterned after the Canaanites and allowed by Solomon for his pagan wives. **Many other kings had made reforms, but always had neglected this.**
 - Asa - 1 Kings 15:14 - But the high places were not removed
 - Jehoshaphat - 1 Kings 22:43 - nevertheless the high places were not taken away
 - Jehoash - 2 Kings 12:3 - But the high places were not taken away
 - Amaziah - 2 Kings 14:4 - Howbeit the high places were not taken away
 - Azariah - 2 Kings 15:4 - Save that the high places were not removed
 - Jotham - 2 Kings 15:35 - Howbeit the high places were not removed
- But Hezekiah was an **iconoclast** (“image destroyer”), one who destroys religious images and opposes people worshipping them.
- He did the same thing that the Taliban religious militia are doing right this moment (March 4, 2001) in Afghanistan, in destroying among other things, two huge statues (120’ and 175’) of Buddha, hewn from the side of a mountain and dating back to the 3rd and 5th centuries. Despite global outrage and desperate pleas from cultural, political and religious officials worldwide to save these priceless historical treasures, this hard-line Islamic group is determined to “eliminate idolatry” in Afghanistan by destroying every statue in the country, in accordance with their strict brand of Islamic law, which bans all graven images.
- Like the Taliban, Hezekiah’s most decisive act was the destruction of something considered priceless by many - **the brass serpent of Moses** which had become an idolatrous object! It is one thing to treasure memories, but quite another to burn incense to them – and this is what was happening in Judah. Hezekiah called the serpent “**NEHUSHTAN**” – “**A PIECE OF BRASS**” – for that was all it was!
- This was not a case of destroying something known to be pagan, but of destroying something once used by God that was now **SO FAMILIAR** to the people that it had become just an idol!
- But wasn’t Hezekiah being too frank? Might he not have toned it down a little? Wasn’t this a bit too harsh? The people protested, “But our fathers worshipped this way!” “But many people say this is acceptable!” **FOR MANY YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE RAISED IN THE CHURCH, THE LEVEL OF THEIR PARENTS’ OR THEIR FRIENDS’ DEDICATION IS THEIR WORST ENEMY!**
- Hezekiah did not merely bury the brazen serpent, or remove it to a secluded spot, or even pass a strict law forbidding its worship. He **BROKE IT IN PIECES** so it could not be worshipped again. And there is much idol-breaking needed among Christians! **I WISH I COULD “BUST UP” YOUR DUSTY OLD IMAGES OF JESUS AND SOMEHOW LET YOU SEE HIM IN A NEW WAY TODAY!**
- Calvary is not powerful when you merely commemorate the SYMBOL. Calvary is only powerful when you bypass the SYMBOL and call on the SAVIOUR. Mere church attendance is just serpent worship!
- **And tragically, it is much easier to get a SINNER to see their desperate need of Jesus the first time than it is to get a CHRISTIAN to see their desperate need of Jesus the second time!**
- **WE NEED TO LOOK AGAIN!**