

Numbers 21:4-9 ⁴ And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. 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.** ⁹ And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

John 3:14-19 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. ¹⁷ For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. ¹⁸ He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

2 Kings 18:1-6 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.** ⁵ He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. ⁶ For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses.

- During the wilderness wanderings, the Israelites were discouraged (“impatient”) because of the way.
- Their sin was speaking against the Lord and Moses, and longing for Egypt again.
- God sent fiery (color? pain of bite?) serpents among them as punishment, and many of them died.
- God told Moses to make a brass serpent and lift it up; those who looked on it lived.

- Preceding the most familiar verse of Scripture (John 3:16) is Jesus’ allusion to this event.
- The serpent was necessary because of sin; Calvary was necessary because of sin.
- The serpent was a hideous thing to have to look upon; He was despised and rejected of men.
- The 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 antiserpentine laws, or even climbing the pole – the only answer was in looking at the uplifted serpent. There is only one plan of salvation!
- The serpent was made of glistening brass. What a glory there is in our wonderful Lord Jesus!
- The verb “lifted up” has a dual meaning – to be crucified and to be glorified. John points out that the crucifixion was actually the means of Christ’s 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.*

- The serpent was elevated as an object of faith - anyone that was bitten could look and live! We lift up the power of the cross which is available to all, without exception, through faith. Look and live!
- 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 type 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 rent in twain 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 sovereign of the separate 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.
- He 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.
 - 1 Kings 15:14 ... But the high places were not removed ...
 - 1 Kings 22:43 ... nevertheless the high places were not taken away ...
 - 2 Kings 12:3 ... But the high places were not taken away ...
 - 2 Kings 14:4 ... Howbeit the high places were not taken away ...
 - 2 Kings 15:4 ... Save that the high places were not removed ...
 - 2 Kings 15:35 ... Howbeit the high places were not removed ...
- But Hezekiah was an **Iconoclast** ("image destroyer"), one who destroys religious images or opposes their veneration, or one who attacks established beliefs or institutions ("icons").
- After his great reformation, Hezekiah celebrated a Passover to which not only both tribes of Judah were summoned but also the remnant of the ten tribes of Israel.

2 Chronicles 30:26 *So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem.*
- Hezekiah's most decisive act was the destruction of the brass serpent of Moses which had become an idolatrous object. This was not a case of destroying something known to be pagan, but of destroying something once used by God that was now an idol to the people! **Much more difficult!**

LEAVE IT TO THE JEWS TO MAKE SOMETHING MIRACULOUS INTO A MUNDANE TRADITION!

- It is one thing to treasure memories and mementos, but quite another to burn incense to them.
- Hezekiah called the serpent "**NEHUSHTAN**" – "**A PIECE OF BRASS**" – for that was all it was!
- Was he too frank? Might he not have toned it down a little? Wasn't this a bit too harsh? Couldn't he have led them to truth by degrees? Wasn't this a hard name to give to one's object of worship?
- "But our fathers worshipped this way!" "But many wise and good men say this is acceptable!"
- But all this reasoning was nothing to Hezekiah compared to the truth!
- Whatever good the serpent had done in the past, it was clearly a curse to the people now. Even that which has been ordained by God to be a blessing can be so misused that it becomes a curse!
- Hezekiah broke the serpent in pieces; he did not merely bury it, or remove it to a secluded spot, or even pass a strict law forbidding its worship. He broke it so it could not be worshipped again.
- **Many see their error, some will even call it by its right name, but most will not break it!**

LEAVE IT TO CHRISTIANS TO MAKE SOMETHING MIRACULOUS INTO A MUNDANE TRADITION!!

- There is much idol-breaking needed among Christians! Buildings, music, even preaching can become idols. **Rigid adherence to a method instead of a message can also become an idol!**
- Our tendency is to "idolize" something or someone just because God once used it for our good.
- Our tendency is to not speak of doctrinal error because so many good people are involved and we don't want to offend. But even "good error" must be broken for "reformation" to be complete!
- Calvary is not powerful when you merely commemorate the SYMBOL. Calvary is only powerful when you bypass tradition and call on the SAVIOUR. Mere church attendance is serpent worship!
- The devil doesn't care that you SEE your error, or even that you will ADMIT it ("I know I need to get right with God") ... He can keep you in bondage unless you are willing to BREAK it.