

# THE BRAZEN SERPENT

**BIBLE TEXT** : Numbers 21:1-9; John 3:14-16

LESSON 108 Junior Course

**MEMORY VERSE:** "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22).

## **BIBLE TEXT in King James Version**

### **Numbers 21:1-9 (KJV)**

<sup>1</sup> And *when* king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took *some* of them prisoners.

<sup>2</sup> And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.

<sup>3</sup> And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set

## **BIBLE REFERENCES:**

### **NOTES:**

#### **Defeat and Victory**

The Children of Israel found that they could not conquer their enemies and take the land of Canaan in their own strength. Through experience they learned that God fought their battles for them: "And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands" (I Samuel 17:47). "Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not your's, but God's" (II Chronicles 20:15).

When some of the Children of Israel were taken captive by King Arad, the Canaanite, they realized that they were weak and needed help. They called upon God to deliver them. They made vows and consecrations as they prayed. They told God that they would completely destroy the cities of their enemy, and keep nothing for themselves, if He would grant them favor over the Canaanites. God heard their prayers and gave victory over the enemy. The Children of Israel destroyed them entirely, as they had vowed, so the place was named Hormah — destruction.

God's children today (all Christians) must realize that they cannot conquer their enemies without the Lord. Some people have tried in their own strength to live above sin, but they failed and were taken prisoners of Satan. When they prayed and made consecrations, God gave them the victory over their enemy. The Christian's key for victory is to depend upon the Lord. "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).

#### **Murmuring**

Soon after God had helped them, the Children of Israel became discouraged. They had to go around the land of Edom instead of through it. For that reason they became discouraged. They had asked to take a short route but the Edomites refused that request (Numbers 20:17-20). God did not allow them to fight against the Edomites, because they were brethren (Numbers 20:14). For the Children of Israel to be discouraged after God had so wonderfully delivered the enemy into their hand was bad enough, but they did even worse — they murmured.

If they had counted their blessings and the many favors God had given them, they would neither have complained nor become discouraged. One should never be ungrateful for God's blessings nor let them become commonplace. Soon after God had destroyed their enemy, the Children of Israel denied that God had prepared food and furnished water and protection for them. They despised that which God had provided for them. Manna, their bread, has been called angels' food (Psalm 78:25) ; but they disliked and belittled it. They even said that they had no bread.

In other lessons we have learned that Jesus is the true Manna. "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). Some people today despise and deny the Word of God, and Jesus whom the Lord provided for our redemption. As the Children of Israel were

it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.<sup>9</sup> 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 3:14-16 (KJV)**

<sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:  
<sup>15</sup> That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.  
<sup>16</sup> 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.

destroyed, so will they be destroyed who do not look to Jesus for their salvation. "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer" (I Corinthians 10:10).

The Children of Israel murmured not only against their leader, Moses, but also against God. One does not complain against his faithful leader or minister without complaining against God.

### **Punishment**

The Children of Israel were severely punished for their sin of murmuring against God. They were bitten by serpents, and many of the people died. The serpents did not come by chance, but they were sent by God. The people knew why they were bitten, and they admitted their sin and asked Moses to pray for them. Moses was a real child of God: instead of saying that they deserved to die, he prayed for the people who had sinned against him and his God. Are you quick to forgive those who mistreat you? Jesus said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

### **Looking and Living**

God told Moses that the remedy would *be* a likeness of the serpents which had caused the sickness and death. According to God's command Moses made a brass serpent and placed it on a tall pole so it could be seen throughout the whole camp. The instructions to the sick and dying were to look at the brass serpent. What a simple remedy! But everyone who looked at it lived.

In Ezekiel 18:4 we read: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Because of their sin the Children of Israel were dying, until they looked at the remedy that God provided. Those who obeyed did not die, but they had suffered. The words of judgment against sin were not only to the Children of Israel but against all sin at all times, including the days in which we live. Does that mean that when a man *sins* today, he dies? He does not immediately die physically, as did the Children of Israel, but he dies spiritually, which is much worse. Since no one would want to die spiritually, one must keep away from sin (being disobedient and breaking God's law). "Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4),

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), so the punishment of death (spiritual death) is handed out to all people. This would be a sad and hopeless picture but for the mercy of God. Just as He provided a remedy for the sin of the Children of Israel, so God has provided one for the sins of people today. "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" (John 3:16). God's Son, Jesus Christ, is our remedy. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). No man need die spiritually; if he will look to God's remedy for sin, he will receive eternal life instead of death.

### **In the Likeness of Man**

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14). Just as the brass serpent was made in the likeness or image of the serpents which brought pain and destruction, so Jesus was made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7) — in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3) — and yet Jesus was without sin. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21).

The brass serpent was placed upon a pole so that all who would, could look and live. Throughout the whole camp, dying people could and did look at God's remedy. They did not need to go to any certain place, but right from their sickbeds they could obey and look. They did not die but were recovered from their painful, dying condition. Jesus was lifted up on the cross where He shed His Blood and gave His life for sinners. As the Children of Israel confessed their sins and looked to God's remedy, so also any person can do today. Confess your sins to Jesus and you will be saved and have eternal life. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). You do not need to make a long prayer. The publican prayed only a few words: "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). A sinner can pray anywhere; he does not even have to be in a church, but he must look to Jesus. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22).

### **The Remedy for Sin**

The purpose of Jesus' coming was that He might be the remedy for the sins of the people. He gave His life that others might live. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

No doubt some of the Children of Israel died because they refused to look at the brazen serpent, just as some people today refuse to take advantage of God's remedy for sin. Perhaps some of the Children of Israel tried other things as a remedy, but they died; and some people today try other means than God's way; but "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Perhaps some of the Children of Israel said there was no power in the brazen serpent, that it was an unlikely cure. It is true that the healing could not come through nature or the work of art but by God's power and their obedience to Him. The plan of salvation is not understood by all people. "For the preaching of the cross *is* to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (I Corinthians 1:18). Some people deny the Bible, but just as obedience to God brought healing to the Children of Israel so obedience today will bring the same results spiritually.

Moses did not carry the brazen serpent to each dying individual and compel him to look at it, but it was put in such a place that each one could see if he would. So the Gospel of Jesus Christ is within reach of everyone. "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). Man is not compelled to serve God but is given his choice to look or not to look — life or death. What is your choice?

### **QUESTIONS**

- 1 Against whom did the Children of Israel complain?
- 2 Why were serpents sent among them?
- 3 What harm did the serpents do?
- 4 What was the remedy?
- 5 What is the remedy for sin?
- 6 What did the Children of Israel have to do in order to be healed?
- 7 To whom does one look in order to be healed today?
- 8 What happened to the Children of Israel who failed to look?
- 9 What will happen today?