

ETERNAL
SALVATION
AS SEEN IN MOSES LIFTING UP THE
BRAZEN SERPENT
(6)

By Arlen L. Chirwood

During His earthly ministry Jesus drew from Jewish history on numerous occasions in order to teach great spiritual lessons. While speaking to Nicodemus, with the events of Calvary in view, He called attention to the account of Moses lifting up the brazen serpent in the wilderness and likened this event to His being lifted up on the Cross at a future time (John 3:14; cf. John 12:32, 33; Num. 21:5-9).

The account of the brazen serpent being placed on a pole was thus singled out by Christ as a type of His being placed on the Cross. God had brought certain events to pass under His sovereign direction and control of all things during Moses' day in order that He, at

a later time, might have these events to draw upon in teaching His people great spiritual truths concerning the events surrounding Calvary.

In the camp of Israel during Moses' day, the people had sinned in a twofold manner:

- a) *By speaking against both God and His appointed leader, Moses.*
- b) *By loathing the manna which God had provided for food to sustain them during their wilderness journey.*

They spoke against both God and Moses because of their being in the wilderness, facing death (due to their previous refusal to believe God and enter the land at Kadesh-Barnea); and they had grown tired of the food which God had provided, resulting in *their provoking and tempting God* by asking for "meat" in place of the manna (cf. Num. 20:5; Ps. 78:17, 18; I Cor. 10:9).

The Israelites tempted God by *trying Him to the limit*. This is the manner in which the compound Greek word translated "tempted" in I Cor. 10:9 should literally be understood (this is also the same word used in the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament in Ps. 78:18, referring to the same incident).

After God had been *tried to the limit*, judgment fell. He sent poisonous "fiery

serpents among the people ['fiery' — referring to a *burning, inflammatory bite*], and many Israelites died as a result of being bitten by these serpents.

The people of Israel, experiencing God's judgment after this fashion, then went to Moses and acknowledged their sin. Moses interceded on behalf of the people, and the Lord provided the antidote. Moses was instructed to make a *serpent of brass* and place it on a pole; and any Israelite who had been bitten by a serpent could look upon the brazen serpent and be healed.

The type brought over into the antitype, as Christ referred to both aspects of the matter, has to do with truths surrounding God's judgment upon sin, the finished work of Another, and the fact that man can do no more than simply receive that which has already been done.

(Note that the primary interpretation of the account of Moses lifting up the brazen serpent in Numbers chapter twenty-one would, of necessity, because of the context, have to do with the sins of a people who had already appropriated the blood of the paschal lambs in Egypt [Ex. 12].)

But Christ used this event in another respect — as a type of that previously seen through the death of these paschal lambs [one type reflecting back on a previous type, both pointing to the antitype].)

Moses was a type of Christ; and the brazen serpent was used in a metaphorical respect, pointing to Christ. Moses performed the work; he was the one who made the serpent and placed it on a pole. The Israelites who had been bitten by the serpents which God had sent into the camp had no part in any of this work.

After the work had been completed and the serpent affixed to a pole, the antidote for that resulting from sin was then available. Those who had been bitten by the serpents sent into the camp were told simply *to look and live*. That's *all* they were instructed to do. And it is recorded,

“...that if a serpent had bitten any man, *WHEN he beheld the serpent of brass, HE LIVED*” (Num. 21:7-9).

Carrying these same truths over into Christ's finished work at Calvary, man, under the sentence of death, is just as helpless as the Israelites who had been bitten by the serpents, necessitating Another to act on his behalf.

In the type, *serpents* were responsible for the condition of the Israelites, and a *serpent* was brought forth as the remedy.

In the antitype it is the same. A *man* was responsible for the condition, and a *Man* was brought forth as the remedy. The first man, the first Adam, was responsible for the condition; and the second

Man, the last Adam, provided the cure (*cf.* I Cor. 15:45-47).

And just as Moses performed *all of the work* on the Israelites' behalf in the type, with the people under the sentence of death being told simply *to look and live*, so it is in the antitype. Christ has performed *all of the work* on man's behalf, and the only thing which man can do, as in the type, is *look and live*.

The serpent being formed from *brass*, in accordance with God's instructions, is in perfect keeping with that seen throughout the type. “Brass” in Scripture speaks of *judgment* (*cf.* Ex. 27:1-8; 30:18-21; Rev. 1:15). God judged sin in the camp of Israel during the wilderness journey, and He also judged sin at Calvary; and sin was judged after such a fashion, in both instances, that *God was satisfied*.

The Israelites *looked*; and, by so doing, they, at the same time, through looking, exercised *faith*. They believed what God had said, and their acting on this belief (*looking*, as God had commanded) was *the act of faith* which God required (Acts 16:30, 31; *cf.* Heb. 11:6).

Nothing more was required then, and nothing more is required today. It was look and live then, and it is look and live today.

It was look toward the place sin had been judged in that day, believing that God meant exactly what He had said,

resulting in God's satisfaction; and it is look toward the place sin has been judged today, believing that God means exactly what He has said, resulting in God's satisfaction.“

What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

The answer is simple. You can't do anything. *It has all been done on your behalf*. Simply “believe [put your trust in, your reliance in]” the One Who paid it all at Calvary. Then, and only then, will God look upon sin as having been judged *in your life personally*, based on the finished work of His Son.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

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