

21:9 Salvation

"So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent, and live" (v. 9). What happened in the wilderness was a salvation of a physical nature for the benefit of one people, Israel. The Lord Jesus will likewise be lifted up on the cross to provide eternal life for every believer. From the event in the wilderness to the crucifixion, we find certain parallels:

First, the problem begins with sin. The people sinned. They rejected God's sustenance and grumbled against Him and against the mediator Moses. The same type of sin is recurring today and perhaps more abundantly.

Second, God offers the solution to cure sin so that they would live. He took the serpent as a symbol of sin and death and turned it into a symbol of life when it was lifted up. The cross is a symbol of shame and death. Paul says, *"Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. That the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"* (Galatians 3:13, 14). Paul said, *"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (6:14). God converted the cross, instrument of a curse, into a blessing.

Third, God has always required accountability from sinful man. And, has required man to live by faith—not faith alone, but obedient faith. That is, Abraham's type of faith.

Fourth, in every event, in every story, the Scriptures are prophetically pointing to the Savior of the world. This event happened fifteen hundred years before the meeting with Nicodemus, and the Lord says it will happen this way when He is lifted up.

Fifth, a repentant sinner exalts Christ and gives Him due honor when he obeys His gospel. Likewise, a Christian honors Him and lifts Him up when he loves Him with all his heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37).

Conclusion:

Some seven centuries later, it is written of King Hezekiah, *"And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made"* (2 Kings 18:4). Why did he do this? The serpent had achieved its purpose. However, the people of Israel relapsed into idol worship and began to use it as an object of idol worship, calling it *"Nehushtan"* because of the influence of Canaanite paganism. Hezekiah did the right thing; *"And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord"* (18:3).

-- JL Maldonado
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The Gospel Plan of Salvation

- **Hear** the gospel (good news) of Christ (Romans 10:14; 10:17)
- **Believe** that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Mark 16:16; John 8:24)
- **Repent** of sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38)
- **Confess** before men that Christ is the Son of God (Matthew 10:38; Romans 10:10)
- **Be baptized** (immersed) in water for the forgiveness of sins (Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 22:16)
- **Abide in Christ** and Christ will Abide in You - (John 15:14; Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:10; 3:18)

Do Not Be Deceived
Into Following
Another Gospel
There Is No Other

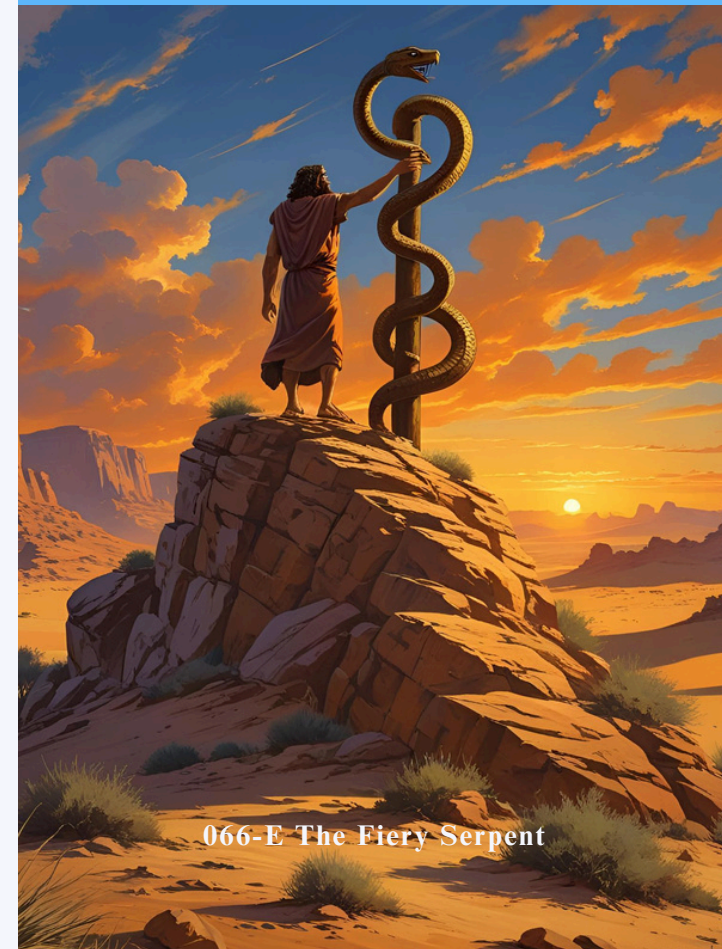
Obey God's Plan of Salvation

Presented By:

The Fiery Serpent

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent... even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

John 3:14-17



066-E The Fiery Serpent

Introduction

In John 3:14-21, the Lord Jesus uses an incident that happened to the people of Israel in the wilderness to show the whole world that He is the remedy for the painful suffering caused by sin. The Lord says, **"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"** (3:14, 15).

After God grants them another victory over the Canaanite and their king Arad (Numbers 21:1-3), the people become disobedient to the Lord, once more (21:4). They again murmur against God and Moses saying, **"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in this wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food"** (21:5). They were referring to the manna, the "light bread" they despised (11:6). **"Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died"** (v. 6). This was their punishment. The people then confessed their sin and came to Moses saying, **"We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord that he take away the serpents from us."** And Moses prayed for the people (v. 7). God then instructs Moses, **"Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live"** (vs. 8, 9).

This was God's way of saving them, but it was conditional. The one infected by the poison had to look to the serpent on the pole to live. The Lord Jesus, hanging on the cross and dying for our sins typifies the bronze serpent on the pole. The world, like the Israelites, has been bitten and poisoned by sin. The remedy is Jesus Christ. Anyone who desires salvation must manifest obedient faith in Christ Jesus. He Himself was an example of obedience. The Hebrew writer says, **"Though he was a son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him"** (5:8, 9).

Thrice in the book of John the Lord mentions being *"lifted up."* The first mention is here in 3:14. The second says, **"When you lift up the Son of Man"** (8:28). The third, in 12:32, says, **"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth..."** Each time, the reference is to His crucifixion. Also, the reference to being lifted up indicates being exalted, just as Isaiah's prophecy says, **"He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted"** (52:13).

21:4-5 Sin

The people sinned against God and against Moses. Actually, it was a series of sins committed against God. First, having to go around the land of Edom, the people became discouraged, perhaps because of the long journey (v. 4). Then, they spoke against God and against Moses, saying, **"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in this wilderness"** (v. 5)? Their faith was weak. God had promised to take them to the Promised Land, which is why He brought them out of Egypt. But they didn't believe God and had doubts of His promise. The Hebrew writer says they had **"an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God"** (3:12).

They treated God's blessings with contempt. They complained and scorned, saying, **"For There is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food"** (v. 5). Some translate "worthless food" as "worthless bread" or "miserable bread." The bread they loathed so much was the manna that came down from heaven (11:6-9). They showed profound contempt for this provision of God that kept them alive.

Today, as before, people continue to sin in the very same way. How many despise that which God sends from heaven? He blesses us with rain and fruitful seasons. How many despise His word by changing His plan of salvation and too, His plan for worship? How many seek a church of their preference and despise the church that Christ established? In the very same way, people today continue to sin against God!

21:6 The Punishment

As punishment for their sin, God sent fiery serpents. Verse 6 says, **"Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died."** On many other occasions, God had been patient and merciful with the people. But this time, the punishment was sure and severe; they paid for their sin with death. Paul says that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Why snakes? The Bible doesn't say. Perhaps to teach that sin is like that deadly snakebite. Sin is deadly poison for the soul. The text says they were *"fiery serpents."* Some comment that the bite was a fire-like burn, giving the sensation of the skin burning from the inside. The pain caused by sin is similar, and more so when it is rebellion against God. Would anyone dare blame God for this punishment? Not when the people refused God's favor and provisions. They doubted His promises and spoke evil of Him and Moses. Even so, God offers them the cure. The remedy is in the following verses.

21:7 Repentance

The people confessed their sin and repented of having spoken against God and against Moses, saying, **"We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against you. Pray to the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us."** And Moses prayed for the people (v. 7).

How similar this incident is to the plan of salvation! The Lord, when speaking to Nicodemus about the new birth, used this example to teach that when the world gets infected with sin, the only remedy that can save is He who is to be lifted up on the cross. One must acknowledge that we have sinned, repent of our sins, and obey Jesus who was crucified for the forgiveness of our sins. No one should make excuses for sin; rather, they should acknowledge that they have sinned and repent of it, for they have offended God. The Israelites who sinned repented, but they were still not healed. To be saved, they had to obey the plan God had prepared for them through Moses. Now, as an analogy, the Lord appeared alive to the eleven disciples after being resurrected and said to them, **"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"** (Mark 16:14-16). This is the Divine plan that saves.

21:8 The Remedy

God does what man cannot. In this case, only He could provide the remedy, and He did so the moment He heard Moses' prayer. He told him, **"Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live"** (v. 8). The remedy was simple: look and live! The solution was not to remove or eliminate the serpents, but to provide the antidote. As humans, we would expect God to simply remove the serpents and be done with it. But we learn that God always requires faith to save and to bless. All it took was one serpent on a pole for all the people, and whoever answered the call would be saved.

The Lord says, **"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"** (John 3:14, 15). The picture is perfect. It refers to Christ lifted up on that cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Our sins were not "cast" or "imputed" upon Him. Christ did not die a sinner. He was the perfect sacrifice who offered Himself for our sins. God treated Him as if He were a sinner, yet He was not a sinner (Hebrews 7:27; 9:24-28).