Jesus Christ in the Old Testament

(Part 12 – Jesus and the Brass Serpent)

(Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14-15)
4/19/2015



Numbers 21:4-9:
v.4 – "they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea"
"the people became impatient because of the journey" – Israel was extremely frustrated and grieved by having to make the long journey around the land of Edom.
v.5 – "The people spoke against God and Moses"
v.6 – "The LORD sent fiery serpents" – Venomous snakes with a hot, burning, lethal bite.

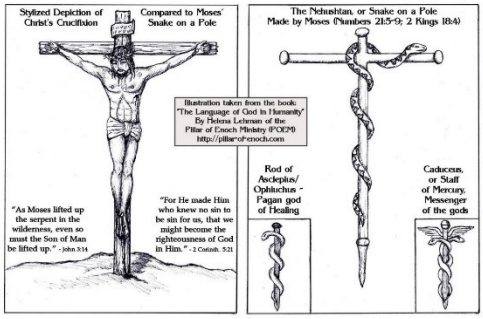


God sent vipers among the gripers!





John 3:14-15 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.
Note the parallels between the brazen serpent and the Lord Jesus Christ:



1) Just as the serpent was placed on a wooden pole, so Jesus would be placed on a wooden cross

2) Just as the serpent was made of brass, Jesus is described as appearing as brass. Prophecy: Daniel 10:6 Fulfillment: Revelation 1:15

3) Just as the serpent was lifted up on a pole between earth and Heaven for people to see, so the cross was lifted up on Golgotha - John 12:32-33

4) Just as the serpent was a symbol of a curse (Gen. 3:14), so the Lord Jesus became a curse for our sin when He died (Gal. 3:13) on the cross

The Serpent was Cursed	Christ was Cursed
Genesis 3:14	***Galatians 3:13***
The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field…	*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"*

5) Just as the serpent had to be looked to in order for people to live, so the Lord Jesus must be looked to for eternal life.
Isaiah 45:22 Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.

2 Kings 18:4 "He (King Hezekiah) removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan."

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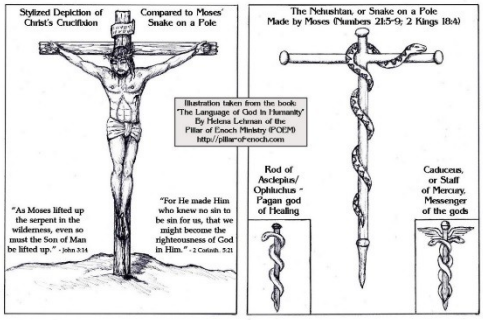

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Numbers 21:4-9:

v.4 – "They journeyed from mount Hor" – After the death of Aaron (Num.20:23-29) on Mount Hor (Mount Hor was "by the (western) coast of the Land of Edom (Petra).") the nation of Israel would be forced to travel south toward the Red Sea (Ezion Geber, modern Eilat). And circle all the way around the mountains of Edom (since the Edomites refused to allow Israel to pass through their land (Nu.20:14-22).

Photos of the Journey around Edom and Mt. Hor where Aaron died:









"Much discouraged because of the way" – Israel was extremely frustrated and grieved by having to make the long journey around the land of Edom.

v.5 – "The people spake against God, and against Moses" – It's always ultimately God and the leader who represents God who receive the brunt of people's disgruntled-ness.
Ex. People vent their frustration against God all the time and curse His holy name and the name of His Son, Jesus Christ. Immediately, when things don't go the way the people want they also strike out at the man of God.

The people's complaint:

- We hate you God for taking us out of Egypt and we hate you Moses for leading us here.
- We hate this barren dry, hot, rugged deserted wilderness (although God allowed their shoes and clothing to endure the rigors of 40 years);
- We hate the fact that we have no water (although the LORD continually provided it; Most often miraculously out of a Rock!);
- We hate this manna (although it was probably the most complete food ever eaten; with a balance of all nutrients necessary to sustain life).

We as depraved humans are prone to complain about everything!
We complain about…

- The Weather (too hot/too cold; too rainy/not enough rain; too much snow/not enough)
- Our Boss; our Spouse; our Children
- Our School; our Teacher
- Our Church; our Pastor

Complaining does not solve anything; does not help the matter.

We just like to vent our frustrations, when we should bring the matter to God (to mourn to God);

For the most part, we should be content with our lot in life and give thanks to God for all things.

Now a days we have this feeling of entitlement. With a welfare mentality, we assume we are owed certain privileges and handouts. As Job 11 says: "God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth" When asked: "how are you doing?" Our response should always be: "better than I deserve!"

v.6 – "The LORD sent fiery serpents" – Venomous snakes with a hot, burning, lethal bite. God is in sovereign control of all events. All of earth's creatures can do His bidding at His beck and call.





God sent vipers among the gripers! The Lord despises a complaining spirit.

Philippians 2:14 – "Do all things without murmurings and disputings"

"Murmurings" = to express dissatisfaction (to grumble)
Paul does not say to muffle the murmurings, but to abolish them.

God desires that His people offer praise rather than complaints.
Paul was content in wh atever state he was in (Phil. 4:11)

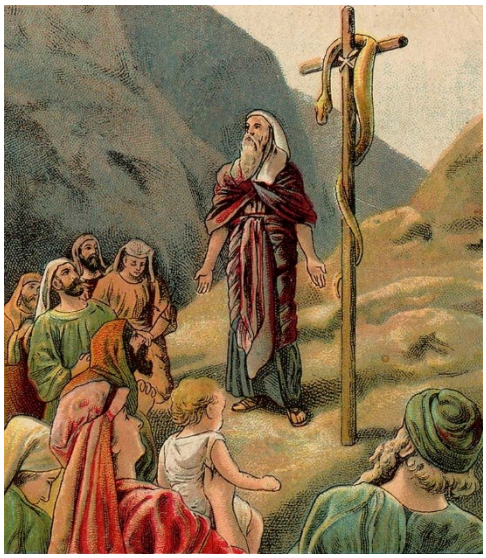
We are commanded: "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (I Thes. 5:18)

v.7- When things get really rough, many finally repent, acknowledge their wrong and ask for prayer for the removal of their affliction.

"take the serpents away" – was their request. However, God had another plan. Rather than removing the serpents, God would give a remedy to the serpent's bite. In similar fashion, rather than removing sin from the world, God has given us the remedy for sin's sting and consequences.

v.8 – "Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole" – A very, very unusual request. Unless there is more to it. Unless there is a deeper meaning behind the cursed serpent on a wooden pole.





"everyone that … looketh upon it, shall live" – how simple. Look and live! Set your eyes upon it. Stare at it. How apparently absurd and foolish such a request was. Look upon a cursed serpent on a pole! You have to be kidding! Yet this was God's requirement. If you didn't look, you didn't live!

"shall live" – shall revive. Shall have his life saved!

The brass serpent on the pole has throughout history become a symbol of healing and medicine. It is used in pharmacies, on ambulences, on various logos of American Medical Association,









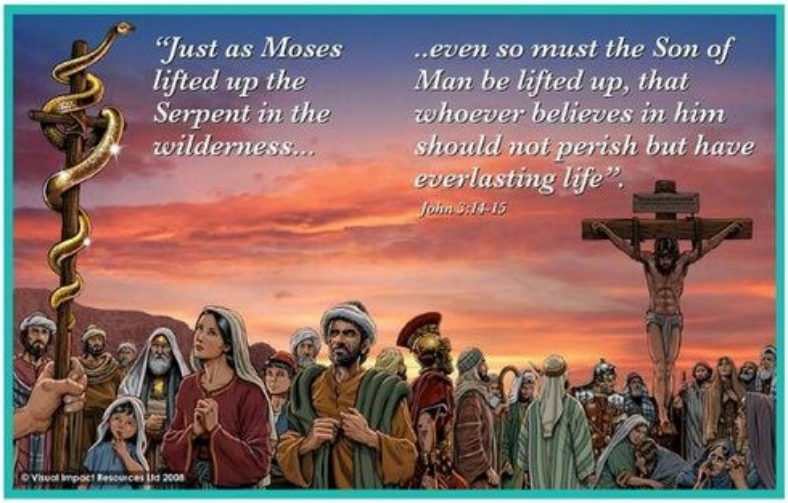



Although the concept started in the days of Moses and recorded in Numbers 21, the symbol became incorporated by the ancient pagan Greek religions. "The rod of Asclepius is a serpent-entwined rod wielded by the Greek god Asclepius, a deity associated with healing and medicine. The symbol has continued to be used in modern times, where it is associated with medicine and health care"
-Rod of Asclepius: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rod_of_Asclepius

v.9 – "Any man, when he beheld…he lived" – Each person had to look for themselves. No one could look for them. It was each man for himself. You had to make your way (no matter how sick you were) to the one brass serpent hanging on a wooden pole.

The fiery serpent raised up on a pole of brass was an illustration of Christ being raised up on the cross. (see: John 3:14-15). This event in Numbers serves a type of Christ. It was a Divine Solution to a problem that looked forward to a greater solution, to a greater problem!

John 3:14- And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever <u>believeth</u> in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

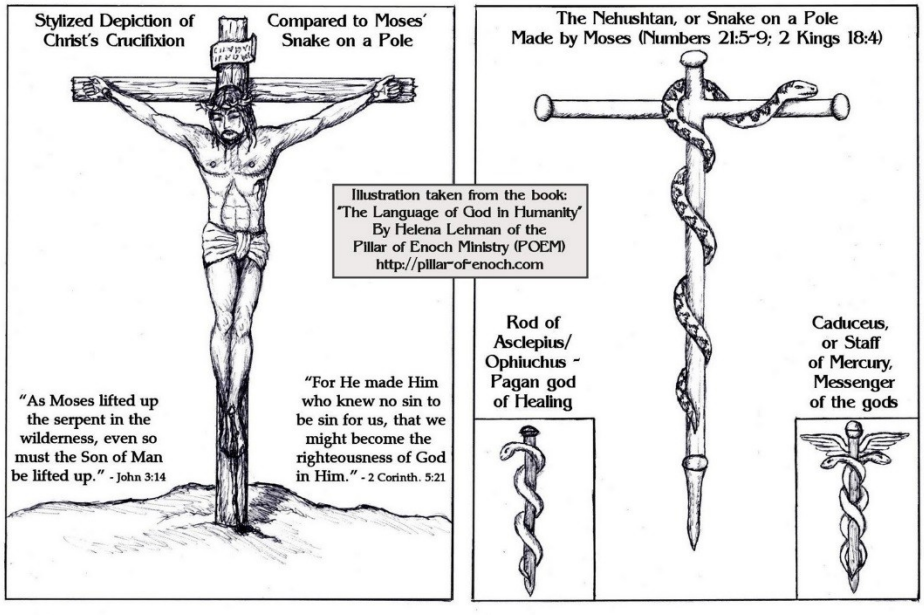


He came to be lifted up on the cross to save men from the curse of sin (Look to Jesus and live!) (v. 14-15)

What God did for Old Testament Israel was a picture of what He would provide for the world.

Note the parallels between the brazen serpent and the Lord Jesus Christ:

1) Just as the serpent was placed on a wooden pole, so Jesus would be placed on a wooden cross



There are actually four N.T. occurrences in John which speak of the necessity of the Son of God to be lifted up (meaning on a wooden cross).
John 3:14; John 8:28; 12:32, 34

John 12:32-34 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?

Christ being lifted up to die was no accident, but was the determined purpose and plan of God. Mk. 8:31; 10:45

2) Just as the serpent was made of brass, Jesus is described as appearing as brass.

Prophecy: Daniel 10:6 His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude.

Fulfillment: Revelation 1:15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

Brass is used in connection with the two brass pillars that were placed in the Temple.
1Ki 7:15 For he cast two pillars of brass, of eighteen cubits high apiece: and a line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about.
1Ki 7:21 And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin: and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz.
Jachin – "He establishes"
Boaz – "in Him is strength"

Brass was the metal used in connection with cleansing in the Temple Laver, so Jesus Christ (whose feet are as brass – Rev. 1:15) cleanses sinners

3) Just as the serpent was lifted up on a pole between earth and Heaven for people to see, so the cross was lifted up on Golgotha

John 12:32-33
And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. [33] This he said, signifying what death he should die.
To save the multitudes,
Jesus would give His life as a <u>SPECTACLE</u> lifted up on the earth (John 12:27-33)

v. 27
Christ's agitated spirit was due to His anticipation of the bitter "cup" of suffering and separation that He would drink for our salvation (Mt. 26:38-39, 42).

More went on at Calvary than meets the eye. On Christ was poured out the iniquity of the world (Is. 53:6).

v. 28
No matter what the cost, Jesus only concern was the Father's glory.

v. 31
The judgment of the world would now be paid for by Jesus Christ, and Satan (the prince of this world) as a result would be defeated.

Satan is defeated in the lives of everyone who comes to salvation in Jesus Christ. He and his influence would be "cast out" (expelled) from everyone who is saved by Christ's death.

He can no longer hold the power of death over God's children.

Hebrews 2:14-15
Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; [15] And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

v. 32
"Lifted up" - not elevated in the minds of men (as is a common interpretation) but elevated up on a cross.

John 3:14
And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

John 8:28
Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.

"All men" – "All men" – categorically

Meaning: All categories of people - both Jew and Gentile. People of all nations

Rev. 5:9
And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

The "all men" means all men "without distinction" (whether Jews or Greeks – v. 20).

The magnetism of the cross is experienced by multitudes worldwide. But to others the cross means "foolishness."

1 Cor. 1:18
For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

Cp. John 8:28
Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.

> **"Lifted up" –** speaks of the cross (Jn. 3:14, 12:32-33).
> When He was lifted up on Calvary the signs that occurred showed Him to be the Messiah (Mysterious darkness at mid-day [Mt. 27:45],
> the torn veil from top to bottom in the Temple [Mt. 27:51],
> and the earthquake [27:52] were unmistakable signs that something supernatural was happening when Christ died [Mt. 27:54]).

4) Just as the serpent was a symbol of a curse (Gen. 3:14), so the Lord Jesus became a curse for our sin when He died (Gal. 3:13) on the cross

The Serpent was Cursed	Christ was Cursed
Genesis 3:14-15	***Galatians 3:13***
And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: *15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*	*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:*

Jesus would drink the venomous poison, so that you and I could be spiritually whole!

Mt 26:39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me:

The cup that Jesus was to drink was <u>not</u> drunk in the Garden, but later that day (Jn. 18:11) at <u>Calvary</u>

Jesus didn't fear death. "Many godly people have been (wrongly) arrested, beaten, and slain because of their faith. But only Jesus experienced being made sin and a curse for mankind" (Wiersbe, p. 97) (II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13).

"This <u>cup</u>" - not speaking of the mere physical suffering Jesus would have to endure, but of the spiritual agony He would endure and drink for all of humanity.

Later that day from 12:00 - 3:00 p.m., "darkness" would mysteriously cover the earth (Mk. 15:33), as the Son of God would become a *"curse"* by hanging on the cross (Gal. 3:13), bearing the *"iniquity of us all"* (Is. 64:6), and as the Father would turn His back on His own Son (Mt. 27:46).
In that *"cup"* were all of the vile sins you committed, are committing, and would commit.
In that *"cup"* was death, as Christ would *"taste death for every man"* (Heb. 2:9).

The pure, spotless, undefiled, holy soul of Jesus was repulsed by the thought of becoming a sin offering and experiencing the equivalent of our hell on that cross.

5) Just as the serpent had to be looked to in order for people to live, so the Lord Jesus must be looked to for eternal life.

John 3:14-17 - And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

"The solution to the 'serpent problem' was not in killing the serpents, making medicine, pretending they were not there, passing anti-serpent laws, or climbing the pole. The answer was in looking by faith at the uplifted serpent" (Wiersbe, p. 296).

Note: "Only those who believed God's promise would act upon the direction and live." (Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 139)

Everyone in the world has been bitten by sin (Rom. 3:10, 23; 6:23), and the remedy is not a human-produced vaccine. The cure is a simple look of faith upon Jesus.

Such a solution may sound simplistic and absurd, just as God's solution to Israel did. But it's the only remedy that works. Look to Him today!

Note: There was only ONE option for those bitten by serpents. There is only ONE option for people bitten by sin. And that is, look to Jesus alone to save you!
Acts 4:12 - Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

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

"On January 6, 1850, a snowstorm almost crippled the city of Colchester, England, and a teenage boy was unable to get tot he church he usually attended. So he made his way to a nearby Primitive Methodist chapel, where an ill-prepared layman was substituting for an absent preacher. His text was Isaiah 45:22—"look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." For many months this young teenager had been miserable and under deep conviction; but though he had been reared in church (both his father and grandfather were preachers), he did not have the assurance of salvation.

"The unprepared substitute minister did not have much to say, so he kept repeating the text. 'A man need not go to college to learn to look,' he shouted. 'Anyone can look—a child can look!' About that time, he saw the visitor sitting to one side, and he pointed at him and said, 'Young man, you look very miserable. Young man, look to Jesus Christ!'

"The young man did look by faith, and that was how the great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon was converted." (Wiersbe, p. 296-297)

v. 15
Just as looking up to the brazen serpent brought deliverance from sure death, so looking up to Jesus Christ (by faith) brings deliverance from perishing and eternal life. The difference is that those who looked up among Israel had temporary life; whereas those who look to Jesus have eternal, never ending life

Conclusion:

2 Cor. 5:21 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.

How sad that what was originally a means of healing eventually became nothing more than a dead relic to be worshipped. 700 years prior to the days of Hezekiah the brass serpent was a means of healing. The people would later view it as a magical idol; A good luck charm; an object of veneration.

2 Kings 18:4 "He (King Hezekiah) 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."

Hezekiah would call the brass serpent "Nehushtan" which means "a mere piece of bronze"

How equally sad it is today, that many wear around their necks similar relics of the cross or a crucifix. For some the cross is an object of worship. Rather than understanding and believing the meaning of the cross and how God's wrath was appeased by Christ's death on the cross, many have turned from faith in Christ to faith in the magical powers of a silly crucifix!

The prophet Isaiah predicted someone stemming from Jesse (David's Father) as being like a flag pole to which people would look and live.
Isaiah 11:10 "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his (Messiah's) rest shall be glorious."