

The *Bronze Serpent* and the *Cross*

The Messiah and the Pharisee

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named **Nicodemus**, a *ruler* of the Jews;
this man came to **Jesus** by **night** and said to **Him**,
“**Rabbi**, we know that **You** have **come from God** as a **teacher**;
for **no one** can do these **signs** that **You do** unless **God is *with him***”...

Jesus answered and said to him,...
“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**.

For **God so loved the world**, that **He gave** His **only begotten Son**,
that whoever *believes* in **Him** shall **not perish**, but have **eternal life**.
(John 3:1, 14-16)

The Bronze Serpent

Then they (**Israel**) set out from **Mount Hor** by the way of the
Red Sea, to go around the land of **Edom**; and the **people** became
impatient because of the **journey**.

The **people spoke against God and Moses**,
“*Why* have you brought us up **out of Egypt** to **die** in the **wilderness**?
For there is **no food** and **water**, and we loathe this **miserable food**.”

The LORD sent **fiery serpents** among the **people**
and they **bit the people**, so that **many** of the people of **Israel died**.

So the people came to **Moses** and said,
“**We have sinned**, because we have **spoken against the LORD** and **you**;
intercede with **the LORD**, that **He** may **remove the serpents** from us.”
And **Moses interceded** for the **people**.

Then **the LORD** said to **Moses**,
“Make a **fiery serpent**, and **set it** on a **standard**;
and it shall come about, that everyone who is **bitten**,
when he looks at it, **he shall live**.”

And **Moses** made a **bronze serpent** and **set it** on the **standard**;
and it came about, that if a **serpent** bit any man,
when he looked to the **bronze serpent**, **he lived**. (Numbers 21:4-9)

The *Bronze Serpent* and the *Cross*— Comparisons/Observations

1. When the **people** came to **Moses** pleading for him to **intercede** and **deliver them** from the **deadly serpent bites**, **God** told **Moses** to **raise** a **bronze serpent** on a **standard**. Whoever was then **bitten**, if he *obediently* **looked at** and **beheld** the **serpent**, would then **live**. This was the one *means* by which they could be **healed** and **saved**.

When **God** sent **His only begotten Son** to be **raised** on the **cross**, **He commanded** that all men, **Jews** and **Gentiles**, would **need** to **look to** and **behold Him** who was **raised** on the **cross** as the *means* by which they could be **saved** and **healed** from the “**sting**” of **death** (I Cor. 15:56).

For this is the **will** of **My Father**, that everyone who **beholds the Son** and **believes in Him** will have **eternal life**, and **I Myself** will **raise him up** on the **last day**.” (John 6:40)

...and **He Himself bore our sins** in **His body** on **the cross**, so that we might die to **sin** and live to **righteousness**; for by **His wounds** you **were healed**. (I Peter 2:24)

2. When **God** told **Moses** to **raise** a **bronzed serpent** on a **standard**, **He** symbolically “**staked**” to the **standard** the very **cause** of **death** among the **Israelites**.

When **Jesus bore our sins** in **His body** on the **cross**, **He** who “**knew no sin**” was **made “sin on our behalf,”** and suffered **death**. **God** had “**staked**” to the **cross** and **condemned** the very **cause** of **man’s corruption** and **death**, which is “**sin in the flesh**.”

...and **He Himself bore our sins** in **His body** on **the cross**,... (I Peter 2:24a)

For what **the Law** could **not do**, **weak** as it was through the **flesh**, **God did**: sending **His own Son** in the **likeness** of **sinful flesh** and as an **offering** for **sin**, **He condemned sin in the flesh**, (Romans 8:3)

He made Him who **knew no sin to be sin on our behalf**, so that **we** might become the **righteousness of God in Him**. (II Cor.5:21)

3. When **God** commanded **Moses** to **raise** a **bronze serpent** as the *means* by which they could be **healed** from the **fatal stings** of the **fiery serpents**, **He** used the very **image** that **caused death**, the **serpent**, to **overcome** and **conquer death**.

When **Jesus** was **raised** on the **cross**, it was to **suffer** and **pay the penalty of death** for the **sins** of **mankind**. **Three days** later **He** would **overcome death** through **His resurrection**. As a **result**, the **cross** which **caused death**, became that which all men would **look to** and **embrace** to **overcome** the **power** and **plague** of our **greatest enemy —death**.

Therefore, since the **children share** in *flesh and blood*,
He Himself (Messiah) likewise also **partook** of the **same**, that **through death**
He might **render powerless him** who had the **power** of **death**, that is, the **devil**
(that “**old serpent**),” and might **free** those who through **fear of death**
were subject to **slavery** all their lives. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

For the **word** of the **cross** is **foolishness** to those who are **perishing**,
but to **us** who are **being saved** it is the **power of God**. (I Corinthians 1:18)

But when this **perishable** will have **put on** the **imperishable**,
and this **mortal** will have **put on immortality**,
then will come about the saying that is written,

“**DEATH** IS SWALLOWED UP in **victory**. **O DEATH**, WHERE IS YOUR **VICTORY**?
O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR **STING**?”

The **sting of death** is **sin**, and the **power of sin** is the **law**;
but **thanks be to God**, who gives us the **victory**
through our **Lord Jesus the Messiah**. (I Corinthians 15:54-57)

4. When **Moses raised** the **serpent** on the **standard**, it was meant to be a **public display**
that would **draw** those in **Israel**, who were **suffering death**, to “**look upon it**” and be
healed. That which represented **judgment** and **death** (the **serpent**), was **publicly**
raised up to be “**looked upon**” in **faith** by those who sought **healing** and **life**.

When **Jesus** was **raised** on the **cross** for the **suffering of death**, it was a **public**
proclamation that the **price of redemption** had been **paid**, and that **our debt** of
sin had been **forgiven**. The **cross** would be “**looked upon**,” and **believed** by many
throughout the ages, not only the **means** by which **men** can be **saved**, but as the
public manifestation of **God’s supreme love** and **righteousness**.

But now...*the righteousness of God* has been **manifested**..

even the **righteousness of God** through **faith** in **Jesus the Messiah**
for all those who **believe**..

being **justified** as a **gift** by **His grace** through the **redemption**
which is in **Messiah Jesus**; whom **God displayed publicly**
as a **propitiation** in **His blood** through **faith**...(Romans 3:21-25a)

When **you** were **dead** in your **transgressions** and the **uncircumcision** of your **flesh**,
He made you **alive together with Him**,
having **forgiven us** all our **transgressions**,

having **canceled out** the **certificate of debt** consisting of **decrees against us**,
which was **hostile** to us; and **He** has taken it **out of the way**,
having (**publicly**) **nailed it** to the **cross**. (Colossians 2:13-14)

Messiah **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**”—(Galatians 3:13)

5. When the Israelites “**looked upon**” the **bronze serpent raised** on a **standard**, they were **looking at** the very **instrument** that **God used** in **judgment** against them for their **complaining** and **rebellion**. It was a **reminder** of the **gravity** of their **sin**, and the **judgment** that was **inflicted** upon them (Num. 21:4-9).

When **Jesus** was **raised** on the **cross**, it was to **suffer death** and **pay the penalty** for the **sins of all men**. In every generation, as we “**look to**” the **cross** in **faith**, we are **reminded** that **God rendered judgment** upon **His beloved Son**, who **voluntarily “bore our sins,”** and **substituted His life**, that we might receive **redemption**, the **forgiveness of sins**, and **eternal life**.

For **God so loved** the world, that **He gave His only begotten Son**,... (John 3:16a)

this **Man (Jesus)**, delivered over by the **predetermined plan** and **foreknowledge of God**, you **nailed to a cross** by the hands of **godless men** and put **Him to death**.

But **God raised Him up again**, putting an **end to the agony of death**, since it was **impossible for Him** to be held in its **power**. (Acts 2:23-24)

In **Him (Messiah)** we have **redemption** through **His blood**,
the **forgiveness of our trespasses**,
according to the **riches of His grace**. (Ephesians 1:7)

Closing Quote

“And here lies the **true interpretation** of what **Jesus** taught.
If the **uplifted serpent**, as **symbol**, brought **life** to the **believing look**
which was **fixed upon** the **giving, pardoning love of God**,
then, in the **truest sense**, shall the **uplifted Son of Man**
give **true life** to everyone that **believeth**,
looking up in Him to the **giving and forgiving love of God**,
which **His Son** came to **bring, declare**, and to **manifest**.

“For as **Moses lifted up** the **serpent** in the wilderness,
so must the **Son of Man** be **lifted up**, that whoever **believeth**
should **in Him** have **eternal life**.”
(Alfred Edersheim)