

Jesus: The Bronze Serpent in the Wilderness

Primary Text: Numbers 21:4–9 **Key New Testament Connection:** John 3:14–15

Introduction

Throughout the Old Testament, God embedded powerful pictures and symbols that point forward to Christ. One of the most striking is the story of the bronze serpent in the wilderness. In this moment of Israel’s rebellion, God provided an unusual means of salvation: a bronze snake lifted up on a pole. Anyone bitten by a deadly serpent could look at it and live. Centuries later, Jesus Himself explained the meaning of this event.

In **John 3:14–15**, Jesus said: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” (NIV) The bronze serpent was not random—it was a prophetic picture of the cross.

We will see **three powerful truths about Christ from the bronze serpent in the wilderness.**

I. Humanity’s Deadly Condition: The Bite of Sin

Scripture

Numbers 21:4–6

“They spoke against God and against Moses... Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.”

Context

Israel had been miraculously delivered from Egypt, fed with manna, and led by the presence of God. Yet they grew impatient and began complaining against God. Their rebellion brought judgment in the form of fiery serpents.

The Spiritual Picture

The serpent bite represents **sin entering the human condition.**

Scripture consistently connects the serpent with sin and deception beginning in Genesis 3. Just as the Israelites were helpless against the venom, humanity is helpless against the poison of sin.

Cross References

- Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death...”

Emphasis

Sin is not merely a mistake—it is **a deadly infection in the soul.**

Just as the Israelites could not cure the venom, **we cannot cure our sin ourselves.**

Humanity is spiritually dying from the bite of sin.

II. God's Unexpected Remedy: The Bronze Serpent

Numbers 21:8–9

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.’”

God instructed Moses to make a **bronze serpent** and raise it high on a pole.

This seems strange at first. Why a serpent?

Because **the symbol of the curse became the instrument of healing.**

The Foreshadowing of Christ

Jesus directly connects this event to His crucifixion.

In John 3:14–15 He says:

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.”

The bronze serpent was a prophetic shadow of the cross.

How the Serpent Points to Christ

1. It was lifted up publicly The serpent was raised where everyone could see it.

Likewise, Christ was lifted up on the cross before the world.

- John 12:32 “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

2. It represented the curse

The serpent symbolized the judgment that had fallen on the people.

Similarly, Jesus took the curse of sin upon Himself.

- Galatians 3:13 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”

3. It was made of bronze

Bronze in Scripture often symbolizes **judgment.**

Christ bore the judgment of sin on the cross.

- Isaiah 53:5 “He was pierced for our transgressions... and by his wounds we are healed.”

Emphasis

The cross is not merely a tragic event.
It is **God's remedy for the poison of sin.**

III. The Simple Requirement: Look and Live

Scripture

Numbers 21:9

“When anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.”

Notice something remarkable.

God did not require the Israelites to:

- Perform rituals
- Offer sacrifices
- Climb the pole
- Earn their healing

They simply had to **look**.

Faith in Action

Looking at the serpent was an **act of faith**.
They trusted that God's promise was true.

The Gospel Connection

Jesus used this exact illustration to describe salvation.

- John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

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Just as Israel looked at the serpent, we must **look to Christ in faith**.

Emphasis

Salvation is not complicated.
It is not earned.
It is received by **faith in the One who was lifted up**.

IV. The Urgency of the Moment

The snakebite was **immediately deadly**.

If someone delayed looking at the serpent, the venom would kill them.

The same urgency exists today.

- Hebrews 9:27 “People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

The cure is available, but it must be received.

Conclusion

The bronze serpent in the wilderness points us directly to Jesus.

| The Bronze Serpent | Jesus Christ |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| People were bitten by serpents | Humanity is poisoned by sin |
| A serpent was lifted up | Jesus was lifted up on the cross |
| Anyone who looked lived | Anyone who believes is saved |
| Healing came by faith | Salvation comes by faith |

The message is simple:

Look and live.

Right now, there are people who are living with the poison of sin in their hearts.

Maybe you've tried to ignore it. Maybe you've tried to fix yourself. Maybe you've tried religion.

But the cure is not self-improvement.

The cure is **Jesus Christ lifted up on the cross**.

Just like those Israelites in the wilderness, all you must do is **look in faith**.

Look to the One who took your sin.

Look to the One who carried your curse.

Look to the One who died so you could live.

Tonight, you can be forgiven. Tonight, you can be healed. Tonight, you can have eternal life.

Jesus said in **John 3:15**:

“Everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

If you need that life tonight, come.

Look to Christ... and live.