

“As Moses Lifted Up The Serpent”

Introduction. Hebrews 10:1 says, “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.” The “shadow” and “image” allude to the concept of type and antitype. A “type” is a figure or representation of something to come — it is a token, sign, or symbol. It really demonstrates the beautiful intricacy between the Old and New Testaments.

A great illustration of this is in John 3:14-16. The narrative in Numbers 21:4-9 seems just one of many details in the wilderness wandering, but Jesus shows its importance. As Jesus talked with Nicodemus, the reference to an account in the books of Moses would have been familiar to him, for the Jewish scholars spent the larger part of each day in the study of scripture and often memorized not only the books of Moses but the entire Old Testament.

There are four similarities between these two events which will help us learn more of God’s scheme of redemption for us.

I. The Malady — Man’s Helplessness

- A. The physical bite (Numbers 21:6). They were bitten because of their murmuring. This as a constant problem with the Israelites (Numbers 14:22).
- B. The spiritual separation (Isaiah 1:5-6; 59:1-2; Romans 6:23; 7:17)
 - 1. Sin caused separation first in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve separated themselves by hiding from God (Genesis 3:8-10).
 - 2. God drove them out of the garden. He separated them from His presence (Genesis 3:22-24).

II. The Remedy — God’s Grace

- A. Moses lifted up the bronze serpent (Numbers 21:7-8). This was an emblem of judgment.
- B. The Jews lifted up Christ because they wanted to kill Him (John 5:16, 18; 7:1; 10:31-33; 18:31; 19:7). Christ allowed Himself to be lifted up because He knew it was the Father’s will (John 8:28). This was an emblem of salvation because He was ultimately exalted (Acts 4:11-12; Philippians 2:6-9)

III. The Requirement — Man’s Faith

- A. They had to believe and look (Numbers 21:9).
- B. We have to believe and be baptized (Mark 16:16; John 3:16; 6:29; Acts 2:38). Repentance and confession are also markers of salvation (Acts 17:30; Romans 10:10). It can be demonstrated in Abraham how faith (Romans 4:1-5) and works (James 2:21-24) combine with the aforementioned grace of God to produce the salvation of mankind.

IV. The Blessing — God’s Gift

- A. They lived (Numbers 21:9).
- B. We are saved (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 2:8-10; 2 Timothy 4:7; Revelation 2:10).

Conclusion. Isaiah 45:22 says, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” Is Christ lifted in vain for you (John 5:39-40)? Faith in Jesus as a way of deliverance from eternal destruction was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:23).

As the serpent was God’s command for the cure of every bitten Israelite, so is Christ for the salvation of every perishing sinner. Doubtless many bitten Israelites would speculate on the absurdity of expecting the bite of a living serpent to be cured by looking at a piece of dead metal in the shape of one — speculate until they died. Is not salvation by a crucified Redeemer subjected to similar treatment? Has the “offense of the cross” (Galatians 5:11) ceased? When Jesus was lifted up, He would draw all men to Himself (John 12:32). Have you been drawn?