

SERPENT OF BRASS

(John 3:14,15)

Purpose: To teach God's remedy for "the poison of sin" is faith in Him.

There was once a time when a serpent made of brass made the difference between life and death to thousands of people! And this is the way it happened.

The people of Israel were leaving the land of Egypt. God had just set them free from a life of slavery and bondage...and now He was leading them to a new home in the beautiful land of Canaan.

Moses had been chosen by the Lord to lead His people and God promised to take care of all their needs along the way.

Actually Canaan wasn't far away, but if the people wanted to reach it there was one thing they would have to remember. God had set before them a promise – to bless them if they obeyed Him, to curse them if they disobeyed.

How important it was that they obey God and trust Him in this journey!

When the people came to Kadesh-Barnea, they pitched their camp in the desert of Zin. A new life of freedom and plenty was almost within their reach. Then the people of Israel did something that cost them forty long years of delay.

They refused to go on to the Promised Land! They even threatened to choose their own leader and go back to Egypt. Taking possession of Canaan looked like a harder job than they wanted to tackle, and they didn't believe God's promise to help them. So because of their rebellion and unbelief...

...God spoke to Moses and said, "These men who have seen my glory and my miracles and yet have not listened to my voice, shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers. Only their children will I bring into the land."

Turning their backs on God multiplied the troubles of the people of Israel. For one thing, they couldn't find water around Kadesh and both the people and animals were desperately thirsty.

Of course, they tried to pretend it was Moses' fault. They said, *"Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Now we don't even have water to drink. Why, we'd rather be dead than in this terrible place!"* Even then God was willing to help the Israelites.

And when Moses came to the Lord with the people's complaint God told him just what to do.

"Gather the people together and speak unto the rock before their eyes and it shall give forth water so the people and their cattle can drink."

So Moses gathered the people together at the great rock outside the camp.

God cause a sparkling stream of water to gush right out of the rock, enough to give all the people and their cattle all they wanted to drink! But water wasn't the only problem that faced Moses and the Israelites as they tried to move on in the desert of Zin.

Directly in their path ahead was the high, rocky stronghold of the Edomites, fierce warriors who swooped down on all who dared to come near.

Moses' messengers went to the king of Edom saying: *"Let us pass through your land, I pray. We promise not to go through your fields or drink water from your wells. We will go by the king's highway."*

But the king of Edom prided himself on his strength and power rather than his mercy and he gave the people of Israel a very rough answer:

"If you dare set foot on my land, I'll come out against you with the sword!"

So Moses led his people away from Edom till they came to Mt. Hor. Here they were faced with an even greater danger.

This time the army of the Canaanites swarmed down on the Israelites.

Helpless against so mighty a foe, the people turned to God in their need...and again God proved He was ready to help.

A terrible battle was fought and God gave Israel a tremendous victory!

Yet in spite of all the evidences of God's mercy and goodness to them these people would not trust their lives to God's care. And as they continued their journey around the kingdom of Edom the Israelites began to murmur.

They grumbled bitterly to each other that they were tired of traveling, tired of searching for water! They even complained about the manna which God faithfully sent from heaven, year after year, for their daily food.

The people of Israel not only said mean things about Moses, this time they spoke right out against God! The time had come for God to each these people that rebellion is sin and the penalty for sin...is death! And suddenly...

Serpents! Fiery serpents! ...swarmed in from the desert upon the terrified Israelites.

The people tried to run away but the deadly snakes were everywhere! There seemed to be no escape!

Many Israelites were dying from the fiery serpents' sting, but God's purpose was not to destroy. It was to show these people the terrible results of sin and to bring them back to trust in Him.

At last the people came to Moses saying: *"We have sinned greatly, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee. Pray unto the Lord that He take away the serpents from us."*

So Moses prayed for the people and the Lord told Moses what to do. God said: *"Make thee a fiery serpent of brass, and set it upon a pole, and it shall come to pass that everyone that is bitten when he looketh upon it shall live."*

And it happened just as God said. Those who looked on the brazen serpent lived because they believed what God had said and turned to Him in faith for forgiveness. But those who turned away died because they did not believe God and rebelled against Him.

As God provided the way for those Israelites in the wilderness to be free from the penalty of their sins so God has provided the way for us to be forgiven of our sins and made acceptable in His sight.

When Jesus died on the cross of Calvary to pay the penalty for our sin, the real meaning of the serpent of brass became clear. For Jesus said,

“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.”
(John 3:14-15)

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