

ISRAEL,THE BRAZEN SERPENT,SINNERS,AND CHRIST

Num.21:4-9; Jno.3:14-18

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The story of the brazen serpent in Num.21:4-9 deals with the specific sin of the Israelites on one occasion in their O.T. history, and the specific Divine remedy for their sin is a type of Christ as indicated in Jno.3:14-18.
2. As we consider Israel, the brazen serpent, sinners, and Christ, we are reminded of the fact that what the brazen serpent was to Israel in Num.21:4-9, Jesus Christ is to sinners today, as Jno.3:14-18 declares. (This we shall emphasize in this study)
3. Let us explore this idea.

II. DISCUSSION

A. FIRST WE NOTE WHAT NUM.21:4-9 HAS SAID.

1. As the Israelites journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom, the soul of the people was much discouraged or grieved because of the way, V.4.
2. As a result they spake against both God and Moses complaining and falsely charging that God had brought them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. For, they said, “there is no bread, neither is their any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread (i.e., the manna from heaven which God was providing them),” V.5.
3. As a punishment for their sin, the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, that bit the people causing the death of “much people of Israel,” V.6.
4. Therefore the people came to Moses confessing their sin of speaking against both God and Moses and pleading for Moses to pray to the Lord that he would take away the fiery serpents from them, which Moses did, V.7.
5. The Divine remedy for their snake bite was a serpent of a similar appearance, a fiery serpent of brass, to be set upon a pole, for the one that is bitten to look upon in order to be healed and to live, Vv.8,9.

B. NOW BRIEFLY NOTE WHAT NUM.21:4-9 HAS REVEALED ABOUT ISRAEL AND GOD’S REMEDY FOR THEIR SIN AT THAT TIME

1. The occasion of their sin.
2. The nature of their sin.
3. The punishment for their sin, which was:
 - a. Severe.
 - b. Just.
 - c. Divine.
4. Their repentance, confession, and prayer of Israel, the sinners.
 - a. Their punishment led to their penitence.
 - b. Their penitence led them to appeal to Moses for help.
 - c. In response to their appeal Moses entreated God on their behalf.
5. In response to their penitence and Moses’ intercession for them, the Divine remedy for the deadly plague of fiery serpents among them was ordained.
 - a. It was prescribed by God.
 - b. Though made of brass, it resembled the real, live poisonous, deadly, fiery serpents.
 - c. It’s efficacy (It’s power to produce the effect intended) was conditional: each one bitten must look upon it in order to live.
 - d. It’s efficacy was infallible (not liable to fail): “and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld (looked upon) the serpent of brass, he lived,” V.9.

C. ISRAEL OF OLD NEEDED THE BRAZEN SERPENT BECAUSE OF SIN IN THEIR LIVES, SINNERS TODAY NEED JESUS CHRIST FOR THE SAME REASON.

1. Num.21:5 reveals the fact of Israel’s sin.
2. Such passages as Rom.3:23 and Gal.3:22 reveal that all, both Jew and Gentile, have sinned.
3. Only by looking upon the brazen serpent set up on the pole, as ordained by God, could Israel be healed of their snake bite and live, Vv.8,9.

4. Only by believing on Jesus, who is both the Son of God and the Son of man, lifted up on the cross of Calvary, can the sinner today be saved and have eternal life, Jno.3:14-18; Lk.19:10; Ac.4:12; Jno.8:24.

D. THE BRAZEN SERPENT WAS PLACED ON A POLE AS ORDAINED BY GOD AS THE MEANS OF LIFE FOR THE ISRAELITES BITTEN BY THE DEADLY, POISONOUS SERPENTS (Vv.8,9), JESUS CHRIST WAS LIFTED UP ON THE CROSS OF CALVARY:--

1. "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life," V.15, and/or "everlasting life," V.16.
2. "That the world (i.e., sinners in danger of perishing) through him might be saved," V.17.
3. Jesus Christ was placed on the cross as a sin-offering for sinners, 2Cor.5:21; Heb.9:14,25,26; 10:10.
4. He was placed on the cross "to abolish death," and to bring "life and immortality to light through the gospel," that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly, 2Tim.1:10; Jno.10:10.
5. He was placed on the cross to "destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," Heb.2:14; Cf. Gen.3:15; Gal.4:4.
6. He was placed on the cross that he might bring sinners to God, 1Pet.3:18.

E. THE BRAZEN SERPENT WAS PUT ON THE POLE AND WAS MADE AVAILABLE TO ANY AND ALL OF THE ISRAELITES WHO WERE BITTEN BY THE FIERTY SERPENTS, JESUS CHRIST IS MADE AVAILABLE TO ALL WHO HAVE SINNED.

1. Mt.1:21; Lk.19:10; Heb.2:9.
2. He was even available to those who were responsible for his crucifixion, Lk.23:34: "Then said Jesus, Father forgive them; for they know not what they do."

F. THE BRAZEN SERPENT PUT ON THE POLE HAD TO BE LOOKED UPON BY EACH ISRAELITE WHO HAD BEEN BITTEN (THAT IS, THEY HAD TO ACT BY FAITH) IN

ORDER TO LIVE (Vv.8,9), SO JESUS CHRIST, WHO WAS LIFTED UP ON THE CROSS, MUST BE LOOKED UPON, BELIEVED ON AS BOTH GOD AND MAN, IN ORDER FOR THE SINNER TO HAVE LIFE, Jno.3:14-18; Jno.8:24; Ac.4:12.

1. Moreover, it is not “faith only,” or faith without other acts of obedience, for today’s sinner, anymore than it was for Israel in looking on the brazen serpent.
 - a. Cf. Num.21:7-9 with Mk.16:15,16; Jno.3:36 (ASV); Lk.6:46; Mt.7:21-23; Jas.2:24; Heb.5:8,9; 2Th.1:6-10.

G. THE BRAZEN SERPENT WAS THE ONLY REMEDY, BUT THE INFALLIBLE REMEDY, FOR THE ISRAELITES WHO WERE BITTEN, THE ONLY WAY THEY COULD LIVE (Vv.8,9), AND JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY ONE THROUGH WHOM THE SINNER CAN HAVE FORGIVENESS AND THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE, Jno.3:14-18; Ac.4:10-12; Jno.8:24; 1Pet.1:3-5; 1Tim.2:3-6; 1Cor.15:1-3,57,58.

III. CONCLUSION

1. If you can understand why the Israelites:--
 - a. Needed the brazen serpent, then you can understand why sinners of today need Jesus Christ.
 - b. Needed to look upon the brazen serpent set on the pole in order to live, then you can understand why sinners today must believe on Jesus Christ in order to have live.
 - c. Had no other way to be cured of their snake bite and live, then you can understand why Jesus Christ is the only way for sinners of today to have forgiveness of sin.
 - d. Looking upon the brazen serpent and living thereby was not simply a matter of faith without other acts of obedience, then you can see why the sinner believing on Jesus Christ today in order to have life is not simply a matter of “faith only,” or faith before and without other acts of obedience.