

# B.A.S.I.C.

*Brothers And Sisters In Christ*

## The Bronze Serpent

By Pastor Jyothi Benjamin

How many people like snakes? Snakes just aren't something that turns us on or that we want to look at too often. Some people even don't like to see a snake at all. And yet, in our text today, we find people looking at a snake. They were not looking with revulsion or dread, but with eagerness and anticipation. To the people of Israel at that time, the bronze serpent was a promise of help in some extremely serious trouble. Not only that, the bronze snake also pointed them ahead to an even better promise of help the shadows of our Savior who rescues for some even more serious trouble.

When the Israelites drew near Canaan the first time and sent the spies, their terrifying report spoke of walled cities and giant warriors so frightening that Israel again forgot the Lord and His mighty hand. They rebelled against the Lord. To train them, God had them wander for forty years in the desert until every Israelite over the age of twenty had died, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, who had trusted the Lord. Moses led the Israelites back again into the difficult desert, all around the kingdom of Edom, the descendants of their relative, Esau. Rather than fight relatives, they went around the land of Edom.

With horrible heat and wind that never seemed to cease, they became impatient on the way, testy and tired because of the route. The Bible says, "They spoke against God and against Moses." They defied His leadership, complained about the bread He gave them, and doubted His guidance.

The Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. This was a new generation of Israelites, but they had the same sins and needed the same lessons. They needed to learn that God is not someone to trifle with. Venomous snakes bit them. The original says "fiery snakes." This description might refer either to their copper color or to the burning wounds their bites caused.

That poison is still working today. Many of us have been walking in Israel's sandals, more times than we realize or care to admit. Compared to Israel, we have it easy. Most of us have no real material needs, and yet we complain. We complain about the difficulty of making a living these days or about how our neighbour makes a better living than we do. We complain about the weakness that hits our bodies and the pain and suffering that go with it, meanwhile ignoring the blessed fact that we are still living and breathing. We complain about our roles in life because we think somebody else has something better. Like Israel of old, we forget. We forget what a God we have, how many times he has helped us in the past, and how all his promises hold true forever and ever. Like Israel of old, we make the mistake of lowering our eyes from the Great Giver to what He gives or doesn't give, and, as a result, we grumble and groan. Rather than point the finger at Israel of old, let's turn it around to point it at ourselves.

It is the bite of sin that sends its poison through our whole system. We've been bitten, and we don't even know or want to know it.

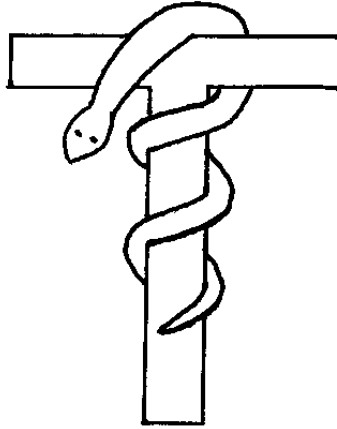
Let all of us look at ourselves today. We can feel sin's poison going through our systems, affecting our minds. We need to feel that poison, and even more so, to realize we're dead people because of this dangerous poison from sin.

The people of Israel realized their sin that day out in the desert. Humbly, penitently they came to Moses and confessed, "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you." Earnestly, confidently they asked, "Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us." Moses, faithful leader that he was, did just that. And God, faithful loving Father that He always is, answered. Up on a pole in the middle of their camp went that snake made out of bronze. That bronze snake itself was not some miraculous cure. It was a sign of God's promise that He would heal them. Without God's promise, that snake was ridiculous, just some inanimate object. But because of God's promise it was a beautiful sign, a sign that He would hear and heal. It was a sign and a symbol of God's promise of help and healing. 1,500 years later to Jesus told Nicodemus "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." [John 3:14-15]

Jesus said that bronze snake in the desert was a shadow of Him - in several ways.

1. The bronze snake looked like a real snake but was without poison. So Christ became like us, took on our human nature, but without its poison of sin.

2. Secondly, the snake was not made of precious silver or gold but of common



metals. So Christ left His golden throne of heaven and came to this earth to share in our ordinary human flesh and blood.

3. Thirdly, the snake brought the Israelites healing through God's promises. Christ has brought us healing through hanging on the pole of that cross. With His perfect suffering and death He has paid for

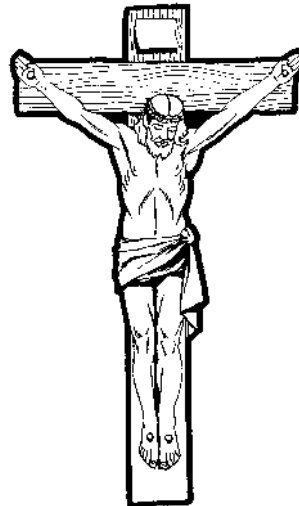
all sin and provided the only antidote that relieves sin's poison. With His perfect payment for sin he has canceled the sure death in hell to which sin's poison condemned us.

4. Fourthly, just as the snake on the pole was the only remedy for Israelites who were fatally bitten, so Christ on the cross is the only remedy for souls bitten by sin.

That's what Lent is all about, time to look at the cross. It is not something like what Israel later made out of that bronze snake. People polish it, wear it, put it up on the bedroom wall and that's about all. Cross by itself its nothing, just like that bronze snake. But because of what our God has done on it, because of His payment for all sins, it promises me the ultimate. It tells us that we don't have to be afraid; that our sins are gone; that God is our Father; that heaven is our home; that though things may not always go the way we want

them to go in this world, they will go the way He wants, and His ways will be right. That cross tells us that the antidote is still effective.

"Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived." (Numbers 21: 9) Up on that pole in the center of that camp was the bronze snake. No matter who was bitten or how far the poison had entered his system, if that person looked - not at himself, not at his burning sores, but at



that snake - he recovered. Some may have scoffed, but anyone who looked at that bronze snake lived.

That look is still necessary today. We sing it, and confidently by the working of God's Spirit, we believe it. "I am trusting you, Lord Jesus, trusting only you, trusting you for full salvation, free and true." Lent is looking time, time to look again at Jesus on that cross. That look is much more than just a casual glance. We need to look and believe, "This is God's Son and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin." We need to look and believe, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Just as with Israel that day, we all need to look for ourselves. Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). He didn't say, "Let your parents, your spouse, your children, or your pastor believe, and you will be saved." No, the look of faith is individual, and it is still effective. It is praying time, time to pray again to our gracious God, for he only can cause each one of us to look up to Jesus, our Lamb of Calvary and Savior divine.  
Amen!

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