

[R4047 : page 252]

THE BRAZEN SERPENT AND ITS ANTITYPE

- *NUMBERS 21:1-9* - *SEPTEMBER 8* -

Golden Text: – "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." – John 3:14,15.

ABOUT thirty-eight years intervened between the narrative of our last lesson and the present one. During that time the Israelites wandered hither and thither in the desert, probably keeping Kadesh-Barnea as a kind of center of their camp, which, consisting of so many people, must have spread out over a large area of country. During that time the rebellion of Korah and his band occurred. (Numbers 16.) It was another demonstration of the same lack of faith which hindered the Israelites from entering Canaan at the first. Had Korah and his followers recognized the Lord as Governor of the nation and general superintendent of its affairs they would have accepted Moses as his representative, and would no more have thought of rebelling against Moses and the institutional government which he had established than against God himself. Lacking faith, however, in the special divine guidance of the movement, they imagined merely a general supervision on God's part, and that Moses and Aaron and those associated with them [R4047 : page 253] were usurping authority. They took the broad grounds that God was dealing with the whole nation, and that therefore any Israelite had as much standing before him as had Moses and Aaron. The Lord's dealing in the matter showed most distinctly their error. And the Apostle calls our attention to the same, warning us of the danger of a similar failure to note the divine leadings and to accept and follow them implicitly.

We see such a spirit today amongst some who are disposed to ignore our Lord Jesus, and to talk about the general brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God, declaring that all men have access to God as his children – that sin and atonement are unnecessary – that without special call or divine appointment anybody and everybody is privileged to become a priest and to enter into any and every part of the divine service. This thought is in direct contravention of our dear Redeemer's words, – "No man cometh to the Father but by me," and the Apostle's words, "Neither is there salvation in any other." The Apostle also points out the exclusiveness of the priesthood, saying, "No man taketh this honor to himself but he who is called of God, even as Aaron." Thus we see Christ was the one called of God to be the great High Priest, and that he in turn is calling, not all mankind, but a special class of believers under special limitations and conditions to be his members, or the under-priesthood. We do well to keep this in memory and to profit by the lesson of Korah's wrong course.

Another connected thought is that the recognition of Moses and Aaron implied a recognition of the entire arrangement of which they were the heads. This arrangement in the Church the Apostle points out, saying that the Lord hath set in the Church the various members as it hath pleased him. (I Cor. 12:18.) We are not to forget that he does the setting; we are not to ignore it, we are not to set ourselves. The Apostle illustrates this matter of the setting of the various members of the Body of Christ, that some are hand-members, others eye-members, others feet-members, etc. He points out that there is plenty of service for each member of the Body, but not all the same service. We do not hear with our feet, and although the hands assist in talking by illustrative motions, and although they assist in discernment by feeling that which the eyes see, nevertheless it would be a mistake to suppose that God set the hands in the Body to see and to talk and the feet to hear. For the members of the Body of Christ to leave their positions in the Body to which they are adapted and for which they

are set, to use some other place in the Body, is sure to bring serious confusion to themselves and to other Spiritual Israelites.

THE SIN OF MOSES

It was during this interim of waiting that Moses committed the sin which hindered him from entering the promised land. (Num. 20:2-13.) Peculiarly enough his sin was along the line of his principal excellence of character. When he was chosen to be captain of the Lord's hosts, one of his special qualifications was declared to be, "Now Moses was the meekest man in all the earth." (Num. 12:3.) Yet it was because of a lack of meekness that eventually he failed to reach the promised land. We may surely sympathize with Moses; we may well realize that had he not been the very meekest of men he would have been unfit from the very first for the great service entrusted to him. And is it any wonder that with the great responsibility resting upon him and all of the people looking to him for nearly forty years, he gradually grew less humble, until finally at Meribah, instead of speaking to the rock as the Lord directed, he exclaimed, "Ye rebels, must I bring you water out of this rock?" We have no thought that Moses on account of this transgression has lost his standing as one of the honorable members of the company of Ancient Worthies, but we observe in his experiences a typical lesson for all the members of the Body of Christ.

We do see that the Lord has indicated that humility is one of the chiefest graces amongst his people, and that without it we would be unfit for the Kingdom. We do see that even though the Truth appeals chiefly to the humble-minded, even though the Lord favors these alone in connection with his work, nevertheless they are in great danger of stumbling along this very line. At no time has there been greater danger than at present. The feet-class will need to be specially upheld by the Lord that they stumble not through pride or boastfulness or self-conceit. So many and so

great are our privileges in connection with the knowledge of the Lord and his glorious plan, that if we for one moment think of these as being in any sense of the word our own, we begin to lose our humility and to be in danger of the sin of pride and self-assertion. Our only safety is in continually watching and praying lest we enter into temptation – lest we should think of the truths we are honoring as being in any sense our own. Surely we have nothing that we have not received of the Lord – nothing, therefore, of which we ourselves could boast. Appropriately, then, let our boast be of the Lord and his greatness and his goodness to us and to all. Humbling ourselves thus under the mighty hand of God we shall be kept from the self-assertion which was Moses' sin, and which typified a difficulty and cause of rejection in some of the Lord's prominent ones of Spiritual Israel. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he might exalt you in due time," that you may be permitted to enter with the Lord's hosts into the glorious Kingdom in due time. – I Pet. 5:6.

THE FORWARD MOVEMENT CHECKED

When finally the time arrived in the last of the forty years of the wilderness experience for the people to move forward and to enter into Canaan they essayed to go by the nearest route, through Edom. But the Edomites – descendants of Esau – forbade this and threatened them with war. Next they thought of the route pursued by the spies through Southern Palestine; but the Canaanites were prepared and fought them off and captured some of the stragglers. This seemingly **[R4048 : page 254]** greatly discouraged the Israelites, who supposed that because the Lord's time had come they would have no difficulty in entering in and taking possession. They lacked faith thirty-eight years before when they should have exercised it, and now instead they had come to have a kind of credulity that was unwarranted.

So it is with Spiritual Israelites; sometimes credulity is accepted and cherished as instead of faith. Many Christians, for instance, seem to expect that they will be carried to Canaan on flowery beds of ease, without any fighting, without proving their courage, without demonstrating their faith by overcoming various hindrances and obstacles. Let us not make such a mistake; let us understand from the first that God is seeking a class of overcomers, and that there could be no such class unless there were difficulties to overcome, and that it is the patient perseverance in well doing that demonstrates true character.

Israel's credulity shattered, they began their journey to the eastward of Edom through a dense wilderness, "and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way" – their hardships, especially their disappointed hopes of an easier route. Here a rebellious spirit again broke out and they murmured, as did their fathers thirty-eight years before, against Moses and against God, declaring that their condition of bondage in Egypt, severe as it was, was preferable to the experiences they were having. Had they possessed a proper faith in God, in his wisdom, love and power, and a proper resignation to the same, their difficulties would have been lightened, their bitterness all have been sweetened. And so it is with those of Spiritual Israel who do not exercise the proper faith in the promises of God. To them the trials by the way and the disappointments are most discouraging, and "hope deferred maketh the heart sick." (Prov. 13:12.) Here again we see necessity for faith and proper devotion. With these we can endure all things; yea, and take adversities joyfully, as the Apostle explains, "Rejoicing in tribulation." (2 Cor. 7:4.) Hope and courage, inspired by the divine promises and strengthened by the experiences of the way, alone will keep us joyful while we are still in the enemy's country.

LACK OF FAITH

The Israelites murmured against the whole divine arrangement, especially complaining that there was no water, and that the manna that they gathered daily was too light – not strong enough for them; they craved the flesh-pots of Egypt. Similarly some of Spiritual Israel, not properly grasping the hopes and promises, not sufficiently living by faith on every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, find themselves in a half-starved condition because unable to appropriate a sufficiency of the spiritual food from lack of spiritual faith and hope. They crave the worldly things, and long to satisfy the carnal appetite, and feel themselves in a measure of bondage under the antitypical Moses. As a punishment for this rebellious condition the Lord permitted to come upon them a host of fiery serpents, the particular kind of which is not certain. They are supposed to have been called the fiery serpents because of red streaks upon the head, and because of a glistening of the skin in the sunlight. Such serpents are found in those desert parts and are very ferocious, very poisonous. Their bite so inflames the body and nervous system as to cause the feeling of fire throughout the entire body, often resulting in death in a very few hours. Such serpents are said to be numerous in those parts, but the "plague" of these seems to imply that they were present on this occasion in vast numbers as a scourge to the rebellious Israelites. Their agonies were increased by the bites of these serpents and by the dying of the members of their families. They began to realize that the chastisement of the Lord was upon them, and they cried to Moses for help, saying, "We have sinned because we have spoken against the Lord and against thee; pray unto the Lord that he take away the serpents from us." And Moses prayed for them.

How often it is thus with Spiritual Israelites. It seems in many instances to require several adversities to awaken them, to cause them to appreciate the great antitypical Moses, the Christ, and to

come unto the Father through him for relief. In this connection we remember the words of the Prophet, and see that they well apply to the experiences of many of the Lord's spiritual family, "Before I was afflicted I went astray." – Psa. 119:67.

THE BRAZEN SERPENT

By divine direction Moses erected on a pole a serpent made of brass, apparently of immense size and capable of being seen by the Israelites from quite a distance. By this means God would teach Natural Israel a lesson of faith. They had sinned, the punishment of their sins was upon them, but his mercy was extended to those who would recognize it by faith. We can well imagine the credulity of the people at first, and how they would say, What benefit could come from looking at a brass or copper serpent on a pole? How could that affect the wounds? How could that heal the dying ones? Is not this a fraud upon us? What does Moses, our great captain, think of us? Why does he thus trifle with us, and why does he not prepare some special balm? However, as the news would circulate that those who looked upon the serpent were healed, we can imagine the spread of the message among the people and their efforts and zeal to help one another to look and live. We can imagine parents pointing their dying children to the serpent, others helping themselves and being helped to the doors of their tents or other points from which the serpent might be seen. We can imagine better than describe the commotion experienced throughout so large a camp by this arrangement, and we can see that it was not only a penalty for their transgression, but incidentally it became a valuable assistance to their faith. Henceforth they might more clearly than ever realize that God was their leader, that through him they could do all things, and that murmuring against him would bring divine displeasure and some unfavorable punishment. **[R4048 : page 255]**

"HE WAS MADE SIN FOR US"

We might not have discovered without divine aid the antitypical signification of this incident. But our Lord himself directs our attention to the fact that the Israelites bitten by those serpents represented or typified sinners bitten by sin and suffering from the consequences thereof – the fall. He calls our attention to the fact that he himself was the great antitype of that brazen serpent lifted in the wilderness – that by his crucifixion he who knew no sin was made a curse for us who were transgressors. From our Lord's explanation we perceive the great truth taught by this type, namely, that in no other way has God provided for eternal life for the people than by the acceptance of Christ – yea, more than this, the acceptance of Christ crucified.

How plainly does this show us that it is not sufficient for us to believe in Jesus as the great teacher, classing him with Plato, Zoroaster, Confucius or others, nor even by himself as a teacher above all other teachers. The lesson was that there was a redemption accomplished by our Lord in his crucifixion, which was necessary for us and without which we could not have eternal life.

And further, the lesson outlined in the type is that not only was it necessary that Christ should die for our sins, but that none could be saved through his death except by looking unto him, exercising faith in the merit of his great atonement-sacrifice. It is in harmony with this that we, seeing, look and live. It is in harmony with this that we are looking unto Jesus, the author of our faith, until he becomes its finisher. It is in harmony with this that we are exhorted to look away from our own imperfections and dying conditions to the perfection of life in the Son of God, who gave himself our ransom price, and that we realize that through faith in his blood we have forgiveness of sins, reconciliation to the Father, and thus eternal life through him.

ALL THE BLIND EYES SHALL BE OPENED

But alas, says one, if it be true that there is no salvation except through faith in Christ – faith in his blood, faith in his sacrifice, faith in the redemption accomplished thereby – then how few will be saved! Some tell us that they cannot accept so narrow and limited a Gospel, that they believe that the heathen are saved without looking with the eye of faith to the crucified one, that they are as much saved as we who do look. We answer that we must not be wiser than the great Teacher himself, that we must not claim to have a greater benevolence than he who gave his life as our ransom price, and who declares that no man can come unto the Father but by him, and who points out that faith in him is necessary to such an approach to the Father and the getting of life eternal.

But while looking to him from the standpoint of faith and accepting his Word, we hear from him a blessed message, which comforts our hearts and bids us rejoice. He assures us through the prophets that the hour is coming when all the blind eyes shall be opened and all the deaf ears shall be unstopped. He assures us that every eye shall see him, including those who pierced him.

Those "eyes of understanding" now blinded, as the Apostle declares, by the god of this world and the cares of this life, will all be opened wide, in God's due time, to see the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of divine love and provision of grace in Christ. Our Lord informs us that the power of his cross is not limited to the present life. He declares, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." He declares that the hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth. Those who have already seen and already been cured come forth to the resurrection of life, resurrection of glory and blessing and cooperation in the great work of blessing the remainder. **[R4049 : page 255]** Others will come forth to judgments, disciplines,

corrections in righteousness, either that they may learn to look and live, or that, persistently refusing divine favor, they shall ultimately be destroyed from amongst the people. – Acts 3:23.

THE DRAWING POWER

As soon as the Israelites began to realize the divine power behind the brazen serpent they began to respond. Similarly our Lord informs us that as a result of his being lifted up at Calvary he shall ultimately exercise a drawing power upon all mankind. Not that he is exercising this drawing power now, however, for he declares respecting those who now come unto him that they are drawn of the Father. He says, "No man cometh unto me except the Father which sent me draw him." (John 6:44.) Thus the little flock, the Royal Priesthood, the members of the Body of Christ, are now being drawn. But the great mass of mankind are not drawn of the Father, but will be drawn by the Son, as we read, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32.) Thus we see that the drawing of all men is a future work, and to be accomplished by the Christ, while the drawing of the little flock in this present time is the Father's work through various agencies. Let us rejoice in the divine plan, which is so complete, so harmonious, so satisfactory. Let us not mar in our minds the beauties of that plan by any false theories of our own or of other men, but let us receive with meekness the heavenly message that we may be wise, for our own benefit in making our calling and election sure now, and be prepared for a share in the heavenly Kingdom and its work of blessing all the families of the earth under the promise made to Abraham's Seed, the heirs according to the promise. – Galatians. – 3:29.

"SEPARATE FROM SINNERS"

Our Lord, we are told, was actually holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. (Heb. 7:26.) Thus, as God's holy one, he took the sinner's place. As the representative of Adam (and the

race in his loins) Jesus tasted death for every man, – paying the sinner's penalty. He was made sin for us, he who knew no sin. He was treated as a sinner in order that we might be received by the Father and treated as righteous through the merit of his sacrifice. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. Let us learn well the lesson, let us dread the bite of the sin-serpent and its death penalty, let us flee from this and let us receive the healing full and free; let us abide in his love. More than this, let us who at the present time have heard of the grace of God – which invites us not only to be justified through the precious sacrifice of Christ, but also to be adopted by him figuratively as members of his Body – accept the glorious proposition that we may thus become dead with Christ, that we may thus share with him in his sufferings as his members, that we may thus be members in him in the uplifted condition of the future, the glorious condition, and that from him and from us as members of his Body in glory may proceed the blessings of the Life-Giver to all the families of the earth, who will then be invited to look and to live.
