

THE BRAZEN SERPENT

Israel at this time had experienced opposition from various tribes as they endeavoured to travel northward towards the Promised Land but the Canaanite tribes had been warned of their intentions and that Israel was travelling north by the way of the spies, and was currently encamped at mount Hor. King Arad on hearing this decided to attack the Israelites, and took some of them prisoners. This would have taught the Israelites that they could not rely on their own strength and should have sought Yahweh's approval and help. So the Israelites gathered together and vowed a vow unto Yahweh and prayer for assistance was made: - "If You will deliver this people into my hands, then Israel will utterly destroy their cities." This time Yahweh acknowledged their prayer. An army was organised by Moses and the Israelites defeated and destroyed the Canaanites and later under Joshua destroyed their cities, this place was called 'Hormah' – meaning "utter destruction.

It might be thought that with this encouragement the Israelites would feel that Yahweh was looking after them, but not long after as they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. What was the problem? Nothing new but "the people spoke against God, and against Moses," what was the trouble? The same old complaint "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For *there is* no bread, neither *is there any* water; and our soul loathes this light bread. (Num. 21:4-5) THE Israelites were travelling in the vicinity of the Ramon Crater in the Negev desert, the world's largest erosion crater. Having visited some years ago this area in the summer months, it certainly is an arid region. Travelling along the roads 40 years ago, the roads were treacherous with massive lorries coming and going to Eilat. A man we went to see in the Negev, lost control of his vehicle which overturned and killed him, caused probably by falling asleep at the wheel.

Scattered scrap metal either side of the road indicated that such calamities were quite common. Israelites were indeed pilgrims in a barren land.



The Israelites must have been disappointed when viewing the route they had to take which lead them through the mountain passes, barren lands indeed. So we learn how the people were discouraged at the thought of the effort to haul there way. This sadly led once more to complaint against Yahweh and Moses, and the failure to control their tongues. Constant grumbling and moaning lead to the discouragement of the people leading to revolt. It also led to the criticism of the food and water supplies and they murmured against God. Doubtless Moses took the matter to Yahweh in prayer. The people had given way to the lusts of the flesh, the same desire that brought Adam and Eve to the dust of mortality. The Israelites were given a sharp reminder of this for Yahweh sent fiery serpents among the people and many of the Israelites died. The snakes are believed to be a species of viper, common in Africa including Kenya, India and south west Asia. The Israelites were quick to connect the appearance of these snakes with their own behaviour and they came to Moses and acknowledged their sin. "We have sinned against Yahweh and against you (Moses) For we have spoken against Yahweh and against

thee. Pray unto Yahweh that he take away the serpents for us. The apostle James teaches how sin acknowledged and repented of leads to forgiveness when he writes “Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. (Jam 5:16-20)

Yahweh then instructed Moses to make a fiery serpent (from molten brass or bronze) It is not called a serpent but a saraph , a model in fact made from copper. The copper saraph was given to heal the deadly poison. This was done and it was fixed to a pole probably of wood. This brazen Serpent typified the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus when he was nailed to the stake. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived. Jesus himself declared “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. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (Joh 3:14-17) The scriptures point to the same sacrifice

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa 53:4-6)

For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (2Co 5:21 KJV)

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: (Rom 8:3)

The brazen serpent was preserved until the time of Hezekiah who destroyed it because it too had become an object of Worship which is idolatry 2 King2 18:4

Another episode in Israel's journey to the Promised Land was now behind them and once again they moved on and pitched their encampment at Oboth, the meaning of which is "water skins" It was some 15 miles to the the Dead Sea. From there they moved to Zared, a valley of exuberant growth and it was here that the last of the old generation died, and the end of the 38 years of wandering.

It seems significant that the incident of the serpent on the Pole, actually changed the minds of the Israelites at this point. The fact that the serpents biting caused them great distress and death seemed to open their minds revealing that without divine intervention they could not save themselves. Those bitten by a serpent were taught by the word of God that salvation depended on their willingness to accept that, without help they would die and they must of necessity to look upon the brazen serpent for their salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin condemned sin in the flesh. Those that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. ¹⁰ And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. (Rom 8:8-10 KJV)

But as the apostle John makes clear, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already,

because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For every one that doeth evil hates the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. ²¹ But he that does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God". (Joh 3:16-21 KJV)

Reading on, in Numbers 21 it seems that this incident did have a profound affect upon the Israelites. The murmuring and complaining ceased, it was still hard going but victories were being won, water no longer seemed to be a problem, the princes dug a well under the direction of the Lawgiver, and they sang a song as they dug down to reach the water. There is also spiritual water that needs drawing from the word, some of which needs much thought, so that the people marched on with increased enthusiasm, singing as they went. Next they came into contact with Amorites who came out against them under the leadership of Sihon and the Israelites overcame them taking all their cities, followed by the conquest of Og the King of Bashan and the Israelites possessed the Land and encamped in the plains of Moab near Jericho.

DHH