



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Numbers 20: 1 – 22: 1

“Meribah, Aaron's Death and the Brazen Serpent”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures and we thank Thee for these marvelous passages from the Old Testament that so suggest important truths in the New Testament. We thank Thee for the evidence of the inspiration of the word of God found in the way in which the Scriptures are unified and explain one another and lead us, both of the Testaments, to a deeper understanding of him whom to know his life eternal, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We give Thee thanks for him.

We give Thee thanks for this time of study together. We pray that our minds and our hearts might be open to Thy word. May the things that we particularly need each of us come to us through the Scriptures as we think over them. We ask Thy blessing upon this hour and the hour that follows in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we are turning to Numbers chapter 20 and looking at three incidents found in Numbers 20 and 21. Our Scripture reading or Scripture section, we will not read all of it because it is rather lengthy. Tonight is Numbers chapter 20 verse 1 through the first verse of chapter 22. But we will read these three sections as we deal with each particular one of them. We are continuing our study of Israel's journey from

Egypt to the promised land of Canaan, notable it is for the rich illustration and typological teaching concerning the New Testament realities.

We think again of the passages on the New Testament that say this specifically and doctrinally such as Romans 15 verse 4, “For whatsoever things were written afore time were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” So the apostle regarded the Old Testament as something that was written not simply for those to whom it was first given but for us as well. And as we read the Old Testament and reflect upon it, if we read it properly, then we have the ministry that the apostle is speaking about here. Our hope for example should be encouraged as a result of it and other spiritual blessing should be ours too.

Now we are going to look say at three striking and interesting sections, one having to do with Meribah, another classic murmuring story. We have had a number of these already in Exodus chapter 15, 16, 17, Numbers chapter 11. And then here in chapter 21, we will have still another, the final time, that they murmur against the Lord and against Moses, but this incident of Meribah, which we will look at in just a moment in chapter 20 verse 2 through verse 13 is one that illustrates the truth of the once for all death of the Messiah.

And then the second incident which we will only touch briefly, more briefly, is the death of Aaron and what happens in connection with Aaron’s death, the ritual symbolism expressed in the removal of the garments of Aaron’s as the high priest and the installation of Eleazar in the office. That will illustrate, of course, the inadequacy of the priesthood of the Old Testament and the priests who served in the priesthood.

And finally we will look at the most familiar of all of these incidents. The incident of the brazen, or I hate to say this, but this is probably the meaning of the Hebrew expression, the copper serpent. Now most people would not know of the copper serpent. We would think of it as the brazen serpent. The incident of the brazen serpent, but as you probably can guess, this is a little bit of a scholarly debate over the meaning of

the Hebrew word. And in the light of the place where that incident takes place and in the light of what we know about the background of it and the language as well, it is probably right to say the copper serpent but I will keep on saying the brazen serpent and in your mind, you scholars, you just parenthesis equals copper serpent. This will suggest the atonement by the divinely provided penal substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are looking when we come to Numbers chapter 22 at the third and the last of the travel narratives of Exodus Numbers, if you reflect back over the history of Israel when they came out of the land of Egypt up to this point, they moved from the Red Sea to Mount Sinai and there they were given the law and given also instructions concerning the construction of the tabernacle and things like that. And they were also given the instructions that are found in the book of Leviticus.

Then they move from Mount Sinai to Kadesh and there at Kadesh-Barnea, we looked at a few weeks back, they sent spies into the land, spot out the land, found it exactly as God had said it would be but nevertheless refused to go in. One of the great illustrations of unbelief in the word of God and as a result of that they experienced sin unto physical death. And so that generation will perish in the wilderness with the exception of Caleb and Joshua.

And now in the third of the travel narratives, we notice that they move from Kadesh-Barnea to what we would call Trans-jordan. Now this is the third and the last of the travel narratives. It is a very short travel narrative, chapters 20 and 21 and in this way, we can keep those three travel narratives in our mind. We will have our general idea of what Israel did when it was in the wilderness.

Now when they come to the plains of Moab and next week we will look again to look at this, we have these interesting prophecies given by Balaam, the false prophet. So we will deal with those prophecies. They are very unusual prophecies by false prophet but nevertheless messianic prophecies which of course illustrates a lot of interesting truth which we will save for the study of the next two three weeks.

Let us turn now to Numbers chapter 20 and let me read verse 2 through verse 13 and this is Israel at Meribah. “And there was no water for the congregation and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and the people chode with Moses and spake saying.” Now I know you do not understand what that word chode means, but just think of the way that your wife talks to you after you have forgotten to do something that you should have done and that is chiding and this is the past tense. So the people chode with Moses and spake saying -- you know there are only two fellows out there that smiled. The rest of you, congratulations, you wives, you do not chide your husbands but the rest of us, we suffer of course. Now,

“There was no water for the congregation, so the people chode with Moses and spake saying, ‘Would God that we have died when our brethren died before the Lord and why have you brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness that we and our cattle should die there. And wherefore have you made us to come out of Egypt to bring us unto this evil place. It is no place of seed or of figs or of vines or of pomegranates. Neither is there any water to drink.’

“And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation and they fell upon their faces and the Glory of the Lord appeared unto them. And the Lord spake unto to Moses saying, “Take the rod and gather thou the assembly together, thou and Aaron Thy brother and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes and it shall give forth its water and thou shall bring forth to them water out of the rock. So thou shall give the congregation and their beasts strength.”

And Moses took the rod from before the Lord as he commanded him and Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock and notice he is doing exactly what the Lord told him to do up to this point and he said unto them, “Hear now, you rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?” And Moses lifted up his hand and

with his rod, he smote the rock twice and the water came out abundantly and the congregation drank and their beasts also.

I had not attended to say the thing about this but as you can see lots of interesting things that this incident illustrates and one of them is this. That God sometimes gives his blessing even when we are disobedient. Not because of us of course, but because of the promises that he has made. And so even though Moses and Aaron are disobedient in what takes place, God is still faithful to his word.

And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, “Because ye believed me enough to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore, ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.” This is the water of Meribah. Because the children of Israel strove with the Lord and he was sanctified in them.

Now when you read this, it is obvious this an incident very similar to the incident described in Exodus chapter 17. When shortly after they had come into the wilderness or out of Egypt, they then did not have water and so they complained to the Lord and then God had Moses smite the rock with the rod that he had at that time with which he had smitten the waters of the Nile and from which had come blood and water had come out and God had assuaged the thirst of the people.

So you can see this is very similar and it is not surprising that unbelieving scholars should look at something like this and say, “Well, what we have here really is just another account of the same incident given in a slightly different way.” It is what we call a double. And therefore, we are to think of this as the same incident but the language is different because it is two different accounts of the same thing.

When I have you all study this carefully, you will see that that is not true because the account here presupposes what has happened in chapter 16 of the Book of Numbers which occurs much later than Exodus 17 where that other account is found.

And furthermore, it presupposes chapter 17 verse 12 and verse 13 and in addition, the command to take the rod here is to take the rod that is before the Lord verse 9 and

Moses took the rod from before the Lord. Now the rod from before the Lord is the rod of Aaron described in chapter 17 which had budded with almond blossoms and which had been put before the Lord as a result of what had happened in order to be a memorial of the fact that the priesthood rests with Aaron and his family. So this is not another account of the same incident, this is a different incident.

Why is Moses behavior here so similar? It may seem to some and why is it so damnable? After all, he smote the rock in chapter 17. Here, he is told to speak to the rock but instead he smites the rock twice. Why is Moses condemned here when he is not condemned for what he did in chapter 17? And I want to look at this in two ways.

First of all, we will look at the plain sense of the text, what we would call a dramatical historical interpretation of the text and then I want to look at the typical significance of it. And since we are doing three of them, you will have to pardon me if I go a little rapidly but I will try to give you just the essence of what Moses I think is telling us.

The plain sense of the text seems very plain to me because what it illustrates is the fact that Moses acts out of unbelief. Notice what Moses does. He is told to speak unto the rock. Instead of speaking unto the rock, he takes the rod and he smites the rock twice. And the Lord replies in verse 12, “Because ye believed me enough to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore Moses, you and Aaron, will be not be able to bring the children of Israel into the land.” So it was an act of unbelief. Now he did precisely what he was supposed to do at first. He gathered the assembly together as God had said. He had his rod, but he was to speak unto the rock before their eyes.

And when it came to the speaking, he lost his temper. He called the congregation of the children of Israel, rebels. And later on in Psalm 106 and verse 33, it is stated specifically that he spoke with rashness. So Moses, the great leader, the great illustration of the Lord Jesus as the Prophet of God, is disobedient to the Lord in that instead of speaking to the rock, he smites the rock.

Now furthermore, the Lord said that he disbelieved and he did not sanctify him in the eyes of the children of Israel. What does that mean? Well obviously is act of unbelief, was an act of disrespect towards the Lord God. The rock was the symbol of the presence of God. In fact, Paul will say later on in 1 Corinthians that the rock followed them through the wilderness, and evidently is alluding to the spiritual significance of the presence of law of the Lord with the children of Israel, symbolized by the rock. Because he is the rock, it is of course what the Old Testament specifically states.

So this was not only unbelief on Moses’ part, but it was an act of disrespect for the Lord and he did not set the Lord God apart as the holy other God by this action that he took. Now when we think of the typical significance of what happened here, there are some very suggestive things I think. I think it is very suggestive of a high priestly ministry of the Messiah.

Now Moses and Aaron of course represent the prophet on the one hand and the captain of the Lord’s host in the sense that Moses was their leader. But on the other hand, Aaron is the appointed mediator between the Lord God and the children of Israel. He is the high priest of Israel. So these two men are typical figures and Aaron is typical of the high priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is typical not so much by virtue of his person as we learn from the Epistle of the Hebrews, because he dies.

Melchizedek is the high priest who is typical of our Lord’s person. Because he is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek, so the writer of Hebrew says. Melchizedek illustrates an eternal priest. Aaron illustrates the fact that the Old Testament priests were not the true priests because they died. They were priests by reason of the law of a cardinal commandment, that is, they had to be a member of a certain family. And the fact that they died showed that they could not be the true priest. Aaron is a type of Christ by the functions that he performs, Melchizedek by the person of him. So Aaron and the carrying out of the sacrificial system illustrate the ministry of the Lord Jesus who

will offer the sacrifice that is represented illustratively and the sacrifices of Aaron in the Old Testament.

Now Aaron’s rod is the rod of the priesthood by resurrection. Remember, Aaron had left the rod in. The next morning, they had come, God was showing who is the true priest. Aaron’s rod had budded and blossomed with almond blossoms. That was the sign that his rod was the chosen rod and he was the chosen high priest and the fact that it was alive suggests that the resurrection power of the Lord God resided with Aaron when it came to priestly work.

Now Aaron’s rod then that is used here is the rod that is before the Lord. So that rod is the rod to which Moses is to speak, not smite with but speak. And so we read here, “Speak ye unto the rock before their eyes.” Now when Moses in the first incident took the rod and smote the rock, remember it was rod that turned the river of Egypt into blood. Moses the great representative of the law in the striking of the rock illustrates divine judgment and divine judgment upon the rock, of course, ultimately is the Lord Jesus Christ and the water that comes out is as we pointed out when we looked at that incident, the ministry of the Holy Spirit illustratively. Life and ministry of the Spirit. But that was the rod of divine condemnation.

This rod is different. This is the rod of the high priestly ministry and so when Moses here takes the rod of Aaron, representative of the life-giving resurrection power of the priestly ministry of the Messiah, and smites the rock twice. He was typically saying in effect that the rock which has already been smitten -- still thinking about chode I think -- the rock which has been smitten is to be smitten again and that is one of the great things we learn in the New Testament that the rod of divine judgment smites our Lord Jesus once and in the Epistle to the Romans in chapter 6 and Hebrews in chapter 7, chapter 9, chapter 10, chapter 13, it is stated that the Lord Jesus has suffered once and for all. That is why at this point, Moses is told to speak unto the rock.

We sometimes sing, “Jehovah lifted up his rod - oh Lord, it fell on Thee! Thou wast sore smitten of Thy god, there’s not one stroke for me.” We are thinking about our Lord’s death once and for all for sin. But now afterwards, the true believers do not have a savior who is to be smitten over and over again. Such as in the sacrifice of the mass on Sunday, after Sunday, after Sunday, after Sunday in the Roman church, but rather we can come at anytime and speak unto him as Hebrews chapter 4 puts it, “We come boldly to the throne of grace, that we might find mercy for help in time of need.”

So to speak unto the rock is obviously it seems to me designed to represent the high priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus and Moses was to speak unto the rock. But when he smote the rock, that was a violation of the word of God and also a violation typically of the force. I would like to point out one other thing that might perhaps support this.

If you turn back to Exodus chapter 17 and you were able to look at the Hebrew text at that point, you would find that the word for rock there is the word *tsur*. That word is often associated with a sharp kind of rock, whereas the word that is used in chapter 20 of the Book of Numbers as the word *cele* and *cele* is the word that is often associated with elevation. This distinction between these two words is not always observed. That is the general sense of the two words and if that is true, it further supports the idea. We not only have Moses told to speak to the rock, but we also have a different word for rock that suggests an elevated rock and of course the elevated rock would go very well with the idea of a high priest who is at the right hand of the Majesty on High.

So this incident then at Meribah is an incident in its plain sense of the disobedience of Moses and physical judgment pronounced upon them, and as a result of that Moses and Aaron were not allowed to leave the children of Israel into the Promised Land, in a sense, this is a special commission of sin unto physical death, so far as they are concerned.

Now the death of Aaron is next described in verse 22 through verse 29 and I would like to read these verses, so turn on to verse 22. And we read, and the children of Israel, even the whole congregation journeyed from Kadesh and came unto Mount Hor and the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the coast of the land of Edom saying, “Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, for ye shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son and bring them up unto Mount Hor and strip Aaron of his garments and put them upon Eleazar his son. And Aaron shall be gathered unto his people and shall die there.”

And Moses did as the Lord commanded. They went up unto Mount Hor in the site of all the congregation and Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them upon Eleazar his son and Aaron died there in the top of the Mount. And Moses and Eleazar came down from the Mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron 30 days, even all the house of Israel.

Is not it interesting how the Bible describes things. Almost like a clinical report of a hospital or a medical doctor, Aaron’s death is described. And in fact no emotion whatsoever is mentioned until the final statement in verse 29, “And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron 30 days, even all the house of Israel.” This is designed to represent the inevitability of the judgment of God that had been pronounced upon Aaron and so it is carried out specifically as the Lord God had said. So Aaron died the death of physical disciplinary judgment as did also Moses, in the sense, that they were not permitted to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land.

All of this, my dear Christian friends, is to impress upon all of us that it is a serious thing to disobey the word of God and while we do not see such signal instances of divine disciplinary physical judgment today, we must never forget that those things are known and recognized by the Lord God, and we shall inevitably suffer for them. And when the

judgment seat of Jesus Christ takes place, there all of these ways in which we have been disobedient to the Lord God shall have their place in the dispensation or disposition I should say of the rewards that are given to believers.

Now I want you just to notice a couple of points here so far as the plain sense of the text is concerned. Notice the expression in verse 24 repeated again that Aaron shall be gathered unto his people. Now some people think that in the Old Testament, they did not really have any conception of life after death. In fact, even in evangelical seminaries, you will occasionally find professors of Old Testament that offer this is a kind of suggestion that the Old Testament saints did not really have the sense of life after death that we have now.

Now these men are not trying to deny that. They are just trying to say that in the Old Testament, it is not there. Well, in the Old Testament, it is not as clearly there as it is in the New Testament, but that is not surprising because the Lord Jesus has brought death and immortality in life to light or virtue of his death, burial, and resurrection. So we should expect forever life now. But you can see from this expression and others, and this expression is used of Abraham, it is used of Isaac, it is used of Jacob, it is used of others, that there was in the Old Testament a central conviction that there was such a thing as life after death. And you can find it I think particularly illustrated in the life of David when he lost that son at birth as a result of his sin when he said the child was not able to come back to him, but he would go to be with that child.

So what this simply says is the punishment or the disciplinary judgment, I like disciplinary judgment better because punishment suggests what Christ did on the cross, penal judgment. The disciplinary judgment that Aaron and Moses experienced came to its end in the death of those men. Physical death, just like the Corinthians. They were weak, sickly, and some slept, saw Moses and Aaron, slept as a result of their disobedience. But it came to an end then. And their communion with the Lord God and

their communion with the saints, again with their death. They were gathered unto their people.

Now the other thing I would like for you to note is the statement concerning the stripping of Aaron and the putting on of the garments of the priesthood. Now the priests wore magnificent clothes. Brookes’ brothers could not compare with the kind of garments that the priests wore. And the high priest particularly had garments of glory and beauty. Israel had a magnificent liturgy. Some people today like to repeat the liturgy in New Testament times forgetting that God has swept all of that away in the cross of Christ.

Some like to put us back under the law, the Ten Commandments as a code. Some like to even put us under the simple law like the theonomists. Some like to put us under the whole thing like others. They would like to preserve some of the features of the sacrificial system but it was all swept away in the death of our Lord when the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom.

But when you think about liturgy and when you think about the beauty of the service, nothing could compare with the Old Testament liturgy as set out in the Law of Moses. Roman Catholicism with all of its pop and pageantry could never compare with the children of Israel and what God had given them.

And so Aaron had magnificent garments but these magnificent garments which expressed the mediatorial dignity of the person in an age when they were not as enlightened as we, seeing the finished work of the Lord Jesus now. Those magnificent garments which expressed the mediatorial dignity of his office were taken off and now put on his son. Of course that suggested that what Aaron had done up to this point did not really do the work of mediation because he could not be depended on. Aaron would die and the other priests would die, so they could never really be depended upon to do their work but in the pageantry and in the typology, Eleazar now succeeds to the high priestly office.

Now there are some people that are still so impressed with the odd one, but they would like to have a lot of liturgy. They would like to have a little pageantry. They would like to have us lay hands on people publically. They would like to have us do a lot of things like that and they would like to have certain things in the services but let me tell you this. There is nothing more beautiful than the simplicity of the Lord’s Table and the simplicity of the bread and wine with the significance of that as set out by New Testament truth. Nothing can compare with it.

No liturgy can express the centrality of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done in comparison with the wine and the bread on a table. That is why the early church did away with all of the liturgy which suggested the incompleteness and lack of finality of the Old Testament saving work and rejoiced in the simplicity of the observance of the Lord’s Supper in the open meetings described in the Book of Acts, in I Thessalonians, I Corinthians, and indications of aspects of it in other places of the New Testament.

By the way, perhaps you know this from the Old Testament, but Aaron was a mediator and if you remember, there was such a thing as a city of refuge. In fact, there were a group of cities that were marked out as cities of refuge. We have time and the series, I wanted to refer to this but we may not have time to do this. In the cities of refuge, those cities were cities for people who committed man slaughter and if they were many, if they committed man slaughter, and they managed to escape in physical safety to a city of refuge, legally they were safe.

In other words if I should be out in my garden and I should pull back my pick and start to hit the ground and the head should come off and flow over the alley and hit my neighbor on the head and kill him, then what I would do would run in to house quickly, pack a little bag and flee to one of these cities because I might be liable for death.

Now I had to stay there, I could only be in danger as long as the high priest lived. That is the high priest under which this man slaughter took place. So if it happened

under Aaron for example or under Eleazar, let us say, then as long as Eleazar lived, I better stay in the city of refuge. I was not safe because the redeemer, actually the word is called redeemer, the redeemer would be looking out for me to exercise vengeance but when the high priest died, then I was freed.

Is not that striking? In other words, he was in danger until the high priest died but when the high priest died, the person that committed man slaughter, the sinner, typically was free. That is illustrative as any Christian can see I think obviously of how the Lord Jesus Christ as the great high priest offers the sacrifice and all guilty of man slaughter and all of the other effects of human sin are free. And they may escape from the city of refuge for home.

Now one final thing we want to look at the brazen serpent, so let us read verse 1 through verse 9 of chapter 21. Well to make it a little easier, let us begin at verse 4 through verse 9. “And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go compass the land of Edom; and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.” They are so illustrative of us but this is the last time it happens by the way.

So the people was much discouraged because of the way and the people spake against God and against Moses, "Wherefore have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread." They did not have to say this. They just turned on the record player. "Neither is there any water and our soul loatheth this light bread."

The psalmist calls it the food of angels. But they call it light bread, that they loathe, the manna. And so the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned." They are slow to learn. “And we have sinned for 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 the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, "Make thee a fiery serpent 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 Moses made a serpent of brass or copper 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.

Now you do not have to be told that this is something that the Lord Jesus Christ, not only read but studied because when he was talking to Nicodemus, he had made reference to it. He said this. John chapter 3 verse 14 and verse 15. “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.” So the Lord Jesus finds in this an illustration of his own saving ministry.

Now of course it is such a beautiful illustration of the Lord’s work that I am not surprised that Old Testament scholars can find some further difficulty with this passage because in 2 Kings chapter 18, we read in the time of Hezekiah, this copper serpent was still in existence. And so what would you think that an Old Testament professor sitting at his desk looking for something unique on which to write an article for *Novum Testamentum*, might be thinking about. Well he would be thinking I need a subject, I need a startling subject, I need a subject I can write my article on it and I will get some recognition and maybe I will get to be applauded professor of Old Testament at the university of whatever.

So why not this incident here being written, because after all, the Books of Moses were written long after the time of Moses. We all know that. Don’t we? That is, we scholars. So why not this incident, being written in order to explain how that serpent was found in the day of Hezekiah? So this is the fictitious explanation of the serpent destroyed by Hezekiah. Well it does not take much reading to see that that is not true.

Now in John chapter 3 in verse 14, we read, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” So the Lord Jesus is the authentication for this particular incident. And further, he uses it as an illustration of his own ministry. That is a striking symbolism when you think about it. Here are people

who are bitten by serpents and so being bitten by a serpent, the Lord is going to provide a remedy for it and his remedy is to make a serpent of brass and put it on a pole.

Now you would think that he would think of something other than a serpent, saved by a serpent. What a strange thing? Saved by a serpent! But here we have actually an incident in which if a person was bitten and if he followed the instructions, he would look off at that if it is copper, it is a reddish colored snake and in looking off at the reddish colored snake, he would be healed.

Well the analogies I think are clear when you think about it because the symbolism is a symbolism found in the Old Testament sacrificial rights. For in the Old Testament sacrificial rights, animals are slain, blood is shed in order that sinful men may be delivered from their sins. And the offerings of the Old Testament are the offerings of animal slain, blood shed in order that men who are guilty of trespass or sin or whatever may be cleansed.

So here is life from the dead. The Israelites are sinners. They have been complaining and they represent sinners. They are dying physically. But they represent sinners who die spiritually. They are delivered by a serpent. Now the serpent suggests sin of course. In fact that goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden and so the serpent suggests sin.

The remedy is a supernatural remedy because a brazen serpent cannot heal. It is sufficient for all, everyone who looks is healed; it is infallible, you do not have to look twice, you have to look once. You know, do not read any one who said I looked, but I was not healed, he looked and he was. God is not treating us all fairly. It was infallible, it was enduring. In fact, this serpent existed on into the time of Hezekiah. We know it was unique. It was the only way in which you could be healed and it was personal.

I like the way that Moses is told to put this because he says in verse 9, “And Moses made a serpent of brass and put it on a pole and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.” A father could not do it

for a son. A mother could not do it for a child. Your friend could not do it for you. A priest could not do it for someone else. Aaron or anybody else could not do it for anyone else but that individual person only had to respond.

I want to say just one more word about the serpent I would like to suggest to you. When the Lord Jesus used this and when he said, “As Moses lifted up the serpent, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,” he is thinking of himself as being lifted up as the penal sacrifice for a sinful man. In fact, putting in two particular texts. He hath made him to be sin for us. That is why he is pictured as a serpent. He has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Or Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us. So how appropriate it is. Bitten by the serpent of sin, the one who is to be the means by which we are delivered is one who in his saving work is the curse for sin, is made the penal sacrifice through substitution for sinners.

One thinks of the personal side of it and of Wesley’s words as he described what happened to him in Aldersgate Street in London when he heard the prefaced Luther’s commentary on the Roman’s read. Among his words are these. “An assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

Can you not imagine some Hebrew youngster maybe from the tribe of well Dan or Naphtali and you can imagine him moving out around the barn or whatever and suddenly one of these little snakes strikes him and he realizes that he has been bitten. He begins to feel the poison coming through and finally he is carried in to a tent and there he just awaits because he knows this has happened to others, the death, that is sure to come.

And someone hears about the brazen serpent that Moses has put on a pole and he rushes in and he says to this young Hebrew fellow from the tribe of Dan, look Moses has put a serpent on a pole and if you look to the serpent, you will live. Others have tried it

and they have lived. And I can imagine him say it because he is the member of the Unitarian Church. And he will say that is so irrational.

What possible connection can there be between a serpent of brass or the pole and the fact that I am dying in this tent. You can look at my ankle here and see the swelling. What connection has a brass serpent got with this? But I have seen it happen. That I can hear him say, now if it were some kind of ointment, something that the priest would do if he would bring in some new medicine, some like some of those other churches have, some of those Mormons, they talk about salamanders and things like that. If they would bring in and if they would strike their hand over the place, I can see how there might be some connection with that.

But looking at a pole and just looking at it, why just imagine that those people that you saw healed are just some of those credulous fundamentalists. But we Unitarians and Mormons and others who are enlightened, we obviously see that there is no connection between that serpent on the pole and the fact that I am dying of the fever here now. But of course that may see irrational. It may seem strange. But it was the divine remedy.

And the gospel is the divine remedy. It is the divine remedy for sin. And we have all been bitten and the Scriptures say and our Lord is the authority, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” That whosoever is baptized shall be saved. Now whosoever believes it, as a matter of fact, anything that is more of an activity than simply looking is an obfuscation of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the remedy. The serpent on the pole and the means by which it becomes ours is the look of faith. Anything added to that is to make the Gospel other than the gospel. Aren’t these marvelous incidents? Magnificent pedagogical devices to prepare Israel for the coming of him who as the serpent on the pole was and is the remedy for sin. Let us bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for these marvelous incidents from the Old Testament that so marvelously and beautifully illustrate the saving ministry of our great priestly offering, our great high priest who offered himself as Thee penal sacrifice through substitution by which the people of God are saved now and forever. We give Thee thanks for him. We pray Lord that Thou wilt by Thy grace enable us to be fruitful in the preaching of him.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.