Numbers 21:9 Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. If a snake had bitten anyone, if that person looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

I know, I know! We hear this history of God’s people and we immediately think, “How can God be so mean as to send the snakes among his people?” But let me just remind you of the real truth of what is going on.

These are the very people who witnessed things you and I could only dream of seeing. They witnessed the Ten Plagues that God had sent. Remember that after the third plague the Israelite people were not affected by the plagues. So at plague four, when the flies came, the Egyptians are covered and the Israelites are fly free! All the remaining plagues are upon the Egyptians and the Israelites are sparred.

These are the people freed from slavery. The last plague, the Passover, was what set them free. The Angel of death passed over the land of Egypt but every Israelite who had the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorframes was indeed passed over and there was no death in their homes. They were declared free and we are told the Egyptians were so anxious to get rid of them that they were able to loot the Egyptians of whatever they wanted. The slaves of the land left with the wealth of Egypt!

When God had Pharaoh change his mind and chase them down, then came the crossing of the Red Sea. A passageway in the water. A wall of water on each side and yet dry ground beneath as they crossed to the other side to escape. A total wonder of awe and power. Please don’t forget that all the while they are crossing, the Cloud of the Lord that was leading the Israelites now went behind them so that it was between the Israelites and the Egyptians. We are told one side was light to help the Israelites see and the other side was total darkness to keep the Egyptians away. This went on until the Israelites were across.

Or the fact that the army of Pharaoh was drowned as they foolishly decided they could ride through on the path between the waters. The judgment of God was upon them.

These are the Israelites who heard the voice of God give them the Ten Commandments! We are told the whole spectacle was terrifying and yet they all lived and learned of the greatness and wonder of God. These are also the Israelites who within days of Moses being called up to that Mountain made a golden calf and began to worship it as God! These are the people who though they have seen the power of God and had the promise that God would fight with them and for them refused to enter into the land of Canaan for fear of the Canaanites! That’s how these people ended up wandering in the wilderness. Their consistent and persistent refusal to simply hear and believe God!

And now, understand. God 6 days a week feeds them manna, bread from heaven. Every morning it is there to sustain them. In the evening there are quail provided from the Lord. This is happening because they complained of a shortage of food. Yet God provides them with an abundance to eat! In other words, these people have seen God’s power, experienced God’s grace, are sustained every day by the goodness of God and what does our text say? **“The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? Look, there is no food! There is no water! And we are disgusted by this worthless food!”**

No doubt we are seeing that these are an unbelieving people. They have seen marvels, tasted of the Lord’s wonder and goodness, been blessed, saved, personally lead by God and still they have the gall to speak against God, speak against His goodness, and seriously, if you know the truth here, you realize they have outright lied about God’s goodness, not just spoke against but denied! Because they had the rock that supplied water. They had the manna and the quail. They are just an ungrateful, unbelieving people. They provide us a lesson. Our theme will be: **THE SNAKE OR THE LORD?**

If you haven’t given this any thought, you should. Why did the Lord decide that it would be snakes, poisonous snakes that would be the nemesis for his people during this time of unbelief? Well, the answer is, “Because of who these people are.” They are the people of God, given God’s Word. They are a people who know from there history the truth of sin and how it all came to be. They are a people who knew that Adam and Eve were deceived by “the serpent” in the Garden of Eden and it was that “Serpent” who lead Adam and Eve to sin by his lies and falsehoods. Fact of the matter is, we are told point blank in God’s Word that the Serpent of the garden was indeed Satan, the leader of the angels who rebelled against God which lead to the creation of hell. I do have a personal theory about all of that, but that is not for this sermon. What I will tell you is that I think God in his wisdom is trying to get his people Israel to see that their rebellion, their unbelief is the direct result of the unbelief that Satan wants of all people, especially people who are in the hands of God. In a simplistic way, we need to understand that Satan can’t snatch people from the hand of God, but boy, if he can get you to jump out of that hand and away from God he is going to give it a try. So as you think of this history, recognize that those snakes represent the poison and death that Satan surely brings upon souls that turn away from God.

Fact is, among God people there are always those who have the “hiss” of Satan. Jesus taught us this when he gave us the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds or even the Parable of the Sower. Or Jesus taught us this as he warns and warns against those who are false teachers and false prophets who want to lead you away from the goodness of God. I can tell you right now, that among the Israelites, there were found any number of people who whined and moaned, who complained and groaned against God and His grace for no other reason than that they were weeds among the wheat. The sad part is that evidently a good majority of the people still listen to the hissing of the Serpent as they rebel and complain against God and his ways. We can easily fall prey to that. In the situation before us, God simply determined, “If you want to follow and hear the Serpents poisonous lies in these unbelieving people, then how about some actual poisonous snakes among you!”

The result was disaster! I think a very just disaster. God was trying to teach his people faithfulness once again. Our text simple says, **“As a result many people from Israel died.”** What saddens me most is that I think many of those people died not only physically, but they also ended up dead spiritually forever. My heart aches because we know that rebellion, rejection of God’s ways and truths has eternal implications. But where I have hope and confidence in the grace of God is how all of this continues to play out. Because you see, the death of the many lead the people to repent. We are told, **“7The people went to Moses and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord to take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed on behalf of the people.”**

Please don’t miss this important lesson. Moses, himself serves as a type of Christ for us. In other words, as the people go to Moses, Moses intercedes for them, pleads their case before God, and seeks God’s grace and mercy on behalf of God’s repentant people. That reminds us that Jesus is also the one who intercedes for us before his Father. But Jesus does more for us.

That more is foreshadowed for us in the bronze snake. Seriously, I just love the way the Lord operates. The people have come with repentant hearts, but the Lord is going to measure whether that repentance is genuine or not. He is the only one who can do such, measure our hearts, but in this case, it is clear that God is able to expose hearts. Why do I say that? Because in order to live, in order to not die of the poison of the snake, you are going to have to explicitly, directly, actually obey the Lord. In truth, you are going to have to believe in the bronze serpent!

What an awesome and yet what a pointed lesson on faith. Picture the situation. There are snakes all around. They are poisonous and people are dying. Now the human way to have dealt with this is to have all the snakes just go away, you know, kind of like a Pied Piper sort of wonder. But that is not what the Lord our God does. The snakes remain but the bronze snake is now raised up for all to see. The simple command of God, “When you get bit, just look at the bronze serpent and you will live!”

You know as well as I do that there were people who still died even after the bronze snake was put in place. I can just hear them. “I am not looking at some stupid snake sculpture. Why doesn’t God just cause the snakes to go away? God is so unfair. If he were really a loving God he would just save us and not lay on us all these dumb tricks. Look at a bronze snake! How dumb!”

You do get it, don’t you? Looking at the bronze snake is the ultimate in trust in the Lord. Yep, it sounds silly. Yep it is illogical that some bronze statue could actually deliver from the deadly poison of the snake! But there it is. Either you trust in God and what he has decreed or you do not! Pretty simple point isn’t it? The snakes or the Lord! Do you trust God enough to save you by just a glance alone! And I love the fact that here is exactly where the history stops. We are told nothing more. The whole thing pivots on whether you believe the Lord or not! In truth, that is still, exactly where we are at today.

You do understand this whole incident would be a preview of what salvation is today? For right now, just go back and think about what our Epistle lesson said to us. Here it is again. “**4But God, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved! 6He also raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. 7He did this so that, in the coming ages, he might demonstrate the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast.”**

You ask an Old Testament person: “How were you saved?” They answer, “It was a snake, the bronze snake on a pole. Look at it and you live. All of this because it is what God has done for us. Saved because God has done it.”

You ask a New Testament person: “How are you saved?” They answer: “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Don’t you see, it is the very same lesson!

Or did we miss the point of our Gospel lesson? Here is John 3:14 **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** We are saved because of what God has done. We are saved because Jesus has come to be our Savior from sin, death and the Devil. We are saved because Jesus has been raised up just like the bronze snake. Because God has said, “Here is my solution to the poison of Satan, the first deadly serpent. The solution is Jesus. Jesus takes away the poison of sin, Jesus saves from the bite of false doctrine and the wound of unbelief. Yet we need to look to Jesus. And what I love is that God has put Jesus in a position so that everyone can see Him and the saving He brings. Just look, look to Jesus!

But how sad, that even in today’s world, there are so many who just won’t look. “It’s all make believe. It’s all fake and none of it ever happened. How do you expect me to believe that some supreme being called God gave the life of his Son in order to save the world? Who could even come up with such a silly premise and story? Saved because of Jesus? Ridiculous!”

Worse yet there are those who try anything but God’s way. You know there were Israelites who had little snake charms made and who thought those could save! They did not, but you know it was done. Those who declare, “Hey here is my wooden snake, or Hey here is prettier gold snake to look at!” That is not the bronze snake God has provided and it is not the way of salvation. The bronze snake is the thing just as it is Jesus and his grace that is the thing. All of this because of the power and promises of God!

So there it is, still for you. The serpent or the Lord? Do you believe the lies, the falsehoods of Satan? There is no heaven! There is no hell! There is no God or sin or any of this religious junk! Is that how you live, in despisal of God’s Word and way. You do it your way and you think God has got to accept that?

Or do you what God has said and done? Here is Jesus. Our Savior. **“For God so love the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”** Lord, I believe your promise of life. Help me to grasp the truth of Jesus and His salvation. Amen.