



AND as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: ¹⁵ That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. ¹⁸ 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 hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. ²¹ But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (John 3:14-21)

The Scriptures make reference to serpents in many places, and always with evil connotation, even that reference in our leading text though some opine against it. The Serpent that deceived Eve - Satan – is the first example. Our lord made reference to the Jewish rulers as *“a generation of vipers.”* *“O generation of vipers, how can all of you, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”* (Matthew 12:34) (There are those among us today who might suggest that our Lord was politically incorrect. Perhaps, but always CORRECT!)

THE SERPENT’S DEBUT on earth was at the very beginning eastward in Eden.

The subtle deceit of Satan most often begins with a question concerning the Word of God: *“Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had*

made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1) When we engage this slippery old culprit in dialogue, we risk being outsmarted for he is smarter than we. Beginning with a question, the serpent then presses on to flatly deny the Word of God and plays upon the pride of his prey: "*Ye shall not surely die.*" (Genesis 3:4) Had Eve avoided walking to the Tree, standing at the Tree, and conversing with the serpent of the Tree, she may never have partaken of the forbidden fruit.

Well, this was the serpent's introduction to man, and man lost. He must be having a field-day with theologians of our day!

We have a number of accounts in which the Serpent, as Satan or Lucifer, is mentioned in Holy Writ which we can put aside for future commentary. Enough to say that the cause of the Serpent's fall from Heaven was centered on PRIDE – a sin which the Lord will not countenance since most other sins derive therefrom: "*The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, everyone in his own house. But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet. Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evildoers shall never be renowned.*" If Pride is the mark, we may have a great number of ministers and laity standing watch at the last with Lucifer.

THE SERPENT'S EXPULSION from Heaven: "*3And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. 4And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. 5And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. 6And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. 7And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, 8And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. 9And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*"

(It is interesting to consider the symbol of one of the most heartless and oppressive nations in the world today – Red China- is a RED DRAGON. There are many fine Christian people in China, but no civilized people would ever favor that Communist government.)

That old Serpent has possessed the minds and hearts of prideful victims from the moment of his expulsion.

So, to get to the point of the devotion: Why Did Christ compare His crucifixion to the brazen Serpent? He used the brazen serpent, not as a type of Himself, but an Antitype. The serpent represented sin nature of the serpent and his people. To fully comprehend this, we need to go back in Old Testament history to discover the meaning: *"4 And 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. * 5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. 6 And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. 7 ¶ Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, 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. 8 And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. 9 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."*

The serpent pinned to the pole in the wilderness represented the sins of the people in murmuring against God and Moses. The serpents gave fiery stings that resulted in a quick and painful death – just like sin. But when the people beheld the Serpent nailed to the pole, they were healed. That serpent on the pole represented the sin-burdens of the world which our Lord bore on the cross at Calvary. In a certain sense, Satan himself was symbolically, and justly, crucified on the Cross and his powers over the Gates of Hell were destroyed by Christ who conquered both death and hell.

In both, the Pole and the Cross, cases it is by directing the eye to the uplifted Remedy that the cure is effected; in the one case the bodily eye, in the other the gaze of the soul by "believing in Him," as in that glorious ancient proclamation—"Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," &c. (Isa 45:22). Both methods are stumbling to human reason. What, to any thinking Israelite, could seem more unlikely than that a deadly poison should be dried up in his body by simply looking on a reptile of brass? Such a stumbling-block to the Jews and to the Greeks foolishness was faith in the crucified Nazarene as a way of deliverance from eternal perdition. Yet was the warrant in both cases to expect a cure equally rational and well grounded. As the serpent was God's ordinance for the cure of every bitten Israelite, so is Christ for the salvation of every perishing sinner—the one however a purely arbitrary ordinance, the other divinely adapted to man's complicated maladies. In both cases the efficacy is the same. As one simple look at the serpent, however distant and however weak, brought an instantaneous cure, even so, real faith in the Lord Jesus, however tremulous, however distant—be it but real faith—brings certain and instant healing to the perishing soul. In a word, the consequences of disobedience are the same in both. Doubtless many bitten Israelites, galling as their case was, would reason rather than obey, would speculate on the absurdity of expecting the bite of a living serpent to be cured by looking at a piece of dead metal in the shape of one—speculate thus till they died. Alas! is not salvation by a crucified Redeemer subjected to like treatment? Has the offense of the cross yet ceased?