

The Inscrutable Question: Jesus Compares Himself with the Brass Cobra of Numbers 21:6-9, John 3:14-16

Numbers 21:6 - And the Lord sent Egyptian cobras among the Israelites and they bit the people so that many of them died [**the sin unto death**].

v. 7 - So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned because we have spoken against the Lord and you. Intercede with the Lord that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people.

v. 8 - Then the Lord said to Moses, "Make a venomous snake and set it on a standard; and it shall come about that everyone who is bitten when he looks at it, he shall live."

v. 9 - And Moses made a brass snake and caused it to be placed on a standard. And it came about that when an Egyptian cobra bit any man, when he looked to the brass cobra, he lived.

13. In John 3:14-15, the Lord makes reference to His work on the cross but that is yet future and therefore He must use some illustration which will convey to Nicodemus what He is saying.
14. Nicodemus, being a top theologian and religious leader, knows the theology of the Jewish religion. He is familiar with Messianic prophecies and the fact that the Redeemer is to become a sacrifice for the sins of the people. For example, Nicodemus is well familiar with:

Isaiah 53:5 - He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastisement for our reconciliation was laid upon Him and by His scourging we are healed.

15. This speaks of the Messiah's vicarious sacrifice for the sins of the people. And in order for a person to be reconciled to God, he must believe that the Messiah has removed sin as an issue.
16. Now Nicodemus was an unbeliever who must come to understand these things in order to be saved. Therefore, the Lord uses the brass cobra as an *illustration* of these principles.
17. Nicodemus knows what the brass cobra depicted. He knows that his forefathers were believers who had sinned and following confession were offered the option of looking to the brass cobra for miraculous healing from the venomous bites of the real cobras.
18. The brass cobra in the *Jornada* represented sin judged. Those who by faith looked upon it avoided the sin unto death and were permitted to resume their spiritual life.
19. These first-generation Jewish believers were in status quo carnality and on the verge of a collective sin unto death. Those who, having been bitten by an Egyptian cobra, could simply look upon the brass cobra and be healed and restored to their spiritual life.
20. The Lord uses this incident to dramatize His coming substitutionary sacrifice. As those who looked upon the brass serpent lifted up on the standard for physical healing so must the unbeliever look to the Son of God lifted up on the cross for eternal salvation and spiritual healing.
21. Nicodemus must learn that the priority is to look upon the Messiah for forgiveness of presalvation sins so that forgiveness of postsalvation sins may occur.
22. Those of the Exodus generation who looked up to the brass cobra were healed from the venom in their bodies.
23. Unbelievers may look up to Christ for healing from what Paul calls in 1 Corinthians 15:56, the "sting of death which is sin."

24. The Lord has introduced Nicodemus to the divine solution for sin. He now introduces him to that solution, its demonstration, and the result for those who believe.

John 3:16 - For God demonstrated His unconditional and undiminished love to the world in the following manner: He gave His Son [**undiminished deity**], the uniquely born One [**true humanity**], for the purpose and with the result that anyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life.

25. It is at this point that we paused to study time, the environment in which human life is to function during Satan's appeal trial.
26. Once our time expires on earth we are removed by means of physical death. This is the means of transferring the soul from time into eternity for the believer in Jesus Christ.
27. This is made possible by the creation of the human spirit at the moment of salvation and the simultaneous imputation to it of eternal life.
28. This is the life of God which He has chosen to provide only to the angels and to certain members of the human race who during time use their free will to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.
29. In order to completely distinguish temporal life in time from eternal life in the eternal state we now need to turn our attention to the doctrine of eternal life.