

CHURCH SCHEDULE

Sunday School & Bible Study:
9:45 a.m.

Sunday Service: 11:00 a.m.

Wednesday Bible Study:
7:00 p.m.

SPEAKERS

January 5: Ivan Niemela, *Holy Communion*

January 12: Ivan Niemela

January 19: Paul Coponen

January 26: Ivan Niemela
Potluck meal following the service

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The Brazen Serpent

“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” - Numbers 21:9

This incident is part of the narrative in which the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years due to their unbelief. In our text, Moses created a bronze image of a snake and placed it upon a pole so that anyone who was bitten by a fiery serpent could look at it and not die. God sent these poisonous snakes among the people to awaken them to their sins to save them from eternal death. Thus, this bronze snake on a pole is arguably the most important sign of God’s plan for the salvation of all mankind—offering forgiveness of sins through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the center cross of Golgotha.

About three months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, where they stayed for about eleven months (Exodus 40:17). During this time, Moses received the Ten Commandments and built the Tabernacle for God to dwell in (Exodus 40:34). They departed from Sinai on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year after leaving Egypt (Numbers 10:11-12). After an eleven-day journey (Deut 1:2), they reached Kadesh-Barnea in the wilderness of Paran (Numbers 10:33). From there, Moses sent twelve spies to assess the land and its people (Numbers 13:18). This decision to send the spies represented a serious distrust in God’s care and safekeeping, despite His guidance manifested through the pillars of cloud by day and by fire at night. After forty days, the spies returned, verifying the land’s richness, but ten of them drew attention to its formidable inhabitants (Numbers 13:27,33). Only Joshua and Caleb trusted God’s promise and encouraged the people to proceed (Numbers 14:6-9). However, frightened by the reported challenges ahead, the people decided to give up and return to their old ways in Egypt. In response, God said that the Israelites would wander in the wilderness for forty years until the generation that doubted Him had passed away (Numbers 14: 28-29).

After wandering for thirty-eight years in the wilderness, the Israelites returned to Kadesh-Barnea (Deut 2:14) to attempt to enter Canaan once again. This time, King Arad the Canaanite heard about this and attacked them, capturing some of them. However, instead of becoming fearful as they did last time, they fervently prayed to God—something they hadn’t done before. They prayed for God’s help, but only if it was His will to do so, similar to Jesus’ prayer asking God to remove the cup of wrath from Him (Luke 22:42). God answered their prayer by allowing the Israelites to defeat the Canaanites. With their immediate opposition removed, they may have been tempted to continue northward into the Promised Land. However, God had different plans; they were to go south, swing around Edom, and then enter Canaan from the east. This extra-long, arduous, and indirect route upset the people, leading them to complain bitterly. Consequently, God sent the fiery serpents among them, and those who were bitten started to die. Realizing their complaints against Moses and God had serious consequences, they confessed to Moses that they had sinned and pleaded for His forgiveness. God promised to forgive them if they would look upon the brazen serpent. This act of confession, leading up to their gazing at the serpent, required God-given faith in His promise and was not merely an outward gesture.

The Brazen Serpent was originally intended to be used by sinners seeking God's forgiveness. However, over time, it was transformed from a token of God's grace to an object of worship. The Israelites began to worship the serpent itself, known as Nehushtan, rather than recognizing it as a means to connect with God, effectively turning it into an idol. Many centuries after Moses made the brass serpent, during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah, this token-turned-idol was broken into pieces. This act showed that its original intent had been corrupted. This shift from worshiping God through a token to worshiping the token itself reveals how easily living faith can devolve into idolatry within man's religion.

The journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land of Canaan is a significant event in the Bible that mirrors the spiritual journey of believers toward heaven. Just as the Israelites faced numerous trials and had to rely on God's guidance throughout their journey, believers today encounter spiritual challenges and must seek His direction in their pursuit of eternal life. The Israelites' encounter with the Brazen Serpent foreshadowed Christ's crucifixion, signifying that the path to reconciliation with God has remained unchanged since the Garden of Eden. Just as faith in God's word allowed the Israelites to be healed by looking at the brazen serpent on a pole, believers today can find forgiveness for their sins through faith in Jesus, who was sacrificed on the cross as payment for their sins. This concept is beautifully expressed in John 3:14-15: *"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."* Jesus has entrusted the keys to the kingdom of heaven to all believers on earth, empowering them to proclaim the forgiveness of sins to those whom God awakens to their sin (Matt 16:19). The account of Nehushtan serves as a constant reminder not to worship these keys but to use them as God intended.

God's Peace,
Charles Korhonen