

Dear Judy,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You wanted to know why Moses was told by God to make a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole.

Because the Israelites grew impatient as they sojourned through the desert on their way to the Promised Land, they spoke against God and Moses. "Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look on it and live.' So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived." (Numbers 21:6-9) As they looked upon this bronze serpent, which was apparently large in size, they were reminded of their sin. It was only by an acknowledgement of their sin that they could gain freedom from the curse that had come upon them. They looked and lived.

It was to this incident that Jesus referred when he said to Nicodemus: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:14-15) Because bronze, or copper, is a symbol for perfect human life, which Jesus had, and the pole is a symbol for the cross (John 12:32-33), Jesus was telling Nicodemus that when he would be lifted up onto the cross, he would be as one bearing sin, which is a synonym for the serpent. This graphic picture not only shows us how the ransom would be provided, but also that the poison of sin could be eradicated and the sufferer completely healed by acknowledging his own sinful nature and through faith in the blood of Jesus. Since the fiery serpent represented sin, our Lord had to be viewed as a serpent in the sense that he underwent all the experiences and punishments that a sinner could have been required to undergo. Jesus, who was holy and sinless, had to bear all the sins of the world in order to redeem all of humanity.

Why was Moses required to make a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole? It was so that the Israelites (who were a picture of the entire human race) could look at the serpent (a picture of sin that Jesus bore), acknowledge their sins and live.

We hope we have answered your question. Be sure to sign up for CQ rewind at www.christianquestions.net. The service is free without obligation and will provide you with scriptural perspective on many questions and topics.

Sincerely,

Christian Questions Radio