God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole so that anyone bitten by a snake could look at it and be healed immediately.

Numbers 21:8-9 (NIV) states:
“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at 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, they lived.”

This event occurred during the Israelites’ journey in the wilderness, a time marked by their repeated rebellion and God’s judgment (cf. Numbers 21:4-7). The bronze serpent served as a visible symbol of God’s mercy and healing—a tangible sign pointing to divine salvation through faith. The serpent’s image itself held no inherent power; rather, it functioned as a means of grace, requiring the faith of the one who looked upon it.

However, over time, the Israelites misunderstood the purpose of the bronze serpent. Instead of seeing it as a temporary sign pointing to God’s power and mercy, they began to idolize it,

believing the object itself had healing power. This is clear from their practice of burning incense to the bronze serpent.

Centuries later, King Hezekiah took a decisive stand against this idolatry:

2 Kings 18:4-5 (NIV):
“He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.) Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him.”

The name *Nehushtan* was a derogatory term that highlighted how the bronze serpent had become a false god in the eyes of the people. Hezekiah’s reforms emphasized the centrality of worshiping the living God alone and the rejection of idolatry.

Theological Reflection: The Bronze Serpent as a Type of Christ

The bronze serpent is a powerful Old Testament type

(foreshadowing) of Christ's crucifixion. Jesus Himself draws this comparison:

John 3:14-15 (NIV):
"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

Here, Jesus reveals that just as the Israelites were healed by looking at the lifted serpent, so we are spiritually healed and saved by looking to Him lifted on the cross. The serpent, a symbol of judgment and death (cf. Genesis 3), paradoxically becomes a symbol of healing and life when lifted up—mirroring Christ's sacrifice, which takes away sin and brings eternal life.

The real power was never in the serpent itself, but in God's gracious provision through faith. This highlights a key biblical principle: faith in God's means of salvation is what brings healing and deliverance, not the physical object itself.

Modern Misapplications: Idolatry in Christian Practice

Unfortunately, many today repeat the same mistake the Israelites made by attributing spiritual power to objects or rituals rather than to God Himself. For example:

- Some believe salt or water have inherent healing power, misapplying stories like Elisha purifying water with salt (2 Kings 2:19-22) or Jesus healing the blind man with mud (John 9:6-7). These acts were God-directed signs, not magical formulas.
- Crosses, relics, or religious objects are sometimes worshiped or venerated in ways that border on idolatry, overshadowing worship of God alone. This echoes the warning against idolatry throughout Scripture (Exodus 20:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:14).
- When Christians place excessive emphasis on objects or rituals, they risk displacing faith from the power of Christ's blood and resurrection, which alone can remove sin and bring true healing (Hebrews 9:12-14).

Warning Against Jealousy of God

The Bible teaches that God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5), jealous not out of insecurity, but because He alone deserves worship. Idolatry provokes God's jealousy and leads to His judgment.

Proverbs 27:4 (NIV):
"Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?"

Song of Solomon 8:6 (NIV):

“Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.”

This jealousy is God’s holy zeal for His people’s exclusive devotion.

Call to Repentance and True Worship

Now is the time to repent and return to worshipping God in Spirit and truth (John 4:24). Let us not trust in objects or rituals but in Jesus Christ alone, the source of all grace and healing.

May the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be glorified forever. Amen.

The Lord bless you.

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