

Look Snake!

I recently had an unusual experience. Right beside me with a logo showing a snake wrapped around a pole! Two roots of this medical emblem back 2400 years ago to a god. Interestingly, this insignia also features on the flag of the prophet Moses lifted a bronze snake up on a pole as a deadly snake could look at the snake and be healed. Jesus 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.”



stuck in the traffic, unable to move, was an ambulance weeks earlier I had read a number of articles tracing the called Asclepius to whom the Greeks prayed for healing. World Health Organization. A thousand years earlier the instructed by God so that anyone who was bitten by a referred to this incident in John 3:14-15, “Just as Moses

The snake logo that we see on emergency vehicles across the worldwide called to mind another startling experience I had a few years ago. While visiting a refugee from Kurdistan I noticed a depiction of a snake image displayed on his living room wall. This emblem was prominently positioned right next to a picture of the Yezidi temple in Sinjar, the main pilgrimage centre for devout Yezidis!

I began to connect the dots and wondered if this sacred serpent image was perhaps an echo-effect, so to speak, from 3,500 years ago when Moses' lifted up the bronze snake? I began reading a number of articles by scholars who are intimately familiar with Yezidi culture, lore and literature and I learned that this imagery is actually associated with healing. Dr. Peter Nicolaus visited Yerevan, Turkey where he interviewed a Yezidi Sheikh who performs a healing ritual using a “wish-tree” (bamboo stick) often with a bronze serpent/dragon! (p. 66-67, *The Serpent Symbolism in the Yezidi Religious Tradition and the Snake in Yerevan.*)

The use of a serpent symbol for sacred purposes raises a question: “How could God glorify himself using a strange metaphor like a snake?” This leads to a careful consideration of mankind's downfall. The Bible plainly states that Adam and Eve were banished from the perfect garden of Eden, having been deceived by a crafty, deceitful serpent. Is it not strange, therefore, that God would use a snake metaphor to signify a good remedy – a way to rescue and redeem mankind?

Allow me to answer these excellent questions by posing another question: “Why did God include a prophecy by a pagan magician as part of his prophetic plan of salvation?” (Numbers 24:17ff) Also, why does Scripture include a prophecy spoken by the evil High Priest Caiaphas' saying that it is good for one man (Jesus) to perish instead of the whole nation? (John 18:14)

Scripture also tells us God also used a donkey to rebuke Balaam. (Numbers 22) For what reason? Obviously, God deliberately did this to show that Balaam was a fool. He used a donkey – known for its stupidity – to underscore Balaam's foolishness. In a similar way, God performed a miraculous sign in Egypt, transforming Moses' rod into a snake. This strange sign enabled Moses to powerfully confront Pharaoh. God showed himself supreme and he outwitted Pharaoh's 'wise magicians' using a creature which epitomized their magical arts! God glorified himself in an unexpected and astonishing manner: way. As it is written in 1 Corinthians God's foolishness 'destroys' and 'outwits' human wisdom;

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1 Cor. 1:19-20)

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.” (1 Cor. 3:19-20)

Make no mistake, God (in his wisdom) decided to use the uplifted snake in Numbers 21 (& John 3) as a redemptive analogy pointing people to spiritual healing and salvation. In fact, those who were bitten by a poisonous snake could now look at it impaled on a pole, no longer a threat but captured, disarmed overpowered, so to speak. In this way, they found healing and deliverance.

Let us begin by reading the story of the uplifted snake in Moses' time as recorded in *The Action Bible*, Numbers 20:22ff. (with apologies for not showing the beautiful visual pictures!)

The Israelites travel on. When they come to Mount Hor, God tells Moses that Aaron will soon die, and he should take Aaron and his son Eleazar to the mountaintop.

“Eleazar, take your father's robes. You will take his place as High Priest of all Israel.”

Aaron dies on Mount Hor and Israelites mourn for 30 days. Then they move on. A cloud leads them by day, and a pillar leads them by night. But the people soon forget God's care ... and again they complain ...

“There's not enough water I'm always thirsty.”

“Hasn't God always given us water when we needed it?”

“Yes, but the food-- I'm always sick of this stuff that we have to gather every day and make into bread. I want food like we had in Egypt – melons, fruit ...”

“And you said God would give us freedom! Do you call this freedom? Wandering around the wilderness?”

Suddenly, as punishment for their grumbling, the camp comes alive with poisonous snakes.

“Help! I've been bitten!”

“Help me or I'll die!”

Moses, we've sinned against God and against you. Forgive us and take away these snakes! Please!”

“I will ask God to help you.”

Moses prays and God tells him to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole.

“Listen to me, everyone who has been bitten by the snakes. God said that if you look at this bronze snake, you will be well again.”

“I'm well! God has healed me.”

Everyone who looks up at the snake is healed.

We know that snakes were a common symbol in the ancient world and, significantly, during the time of Moses, various snake cults were known in Egypt and in the land of Canaan. So why did God use the image of a bronze snake lifted high on a pole in a positive manner, signifying deliverance?

While this story strikes many moderns [and even contemporaries] as some form of ancient magic, the text is clear that it is actually the Lord's solution and works only because of his power. By having the Israelites look at the very symbol of their judgment, the Lord is having them acknowledge, “This is the judgment that you, Lord, have justly brought upon us, and only you can deliver us from it.” Jesus uses this event to explain his death on the cross. (John 3:14-16) [Footnote to Numbers 21:8-9, NIV Zondervan Study Bible, D.A. Carson]

How does the imagery of the uplifted snake (conveying cursed connotations) correspond with Jesus lifted up on the cross? – someone pure and undefiled like Jesus? Read and think carefully about these Scripture passages.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” Galatians 3:13

“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness... 2 Peter 2:24

Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ... Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am **lifted up** from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be **lifted up**’? ... Who is this ‘Son of Man’?” (bold added for emphasis) John 12:23-34

The last book of the Bible records the final events of world history, in line with the divine verdict against Satan as predicted earlier by Christ in John 12:31 and indeed, as foretold by God in Genesis 3:15.

The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. ... He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ... And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (Revelation 12:9, 20:2,10)

The final divine judgment against Satan as found in the Bible, calls to mind what the Yezidis know and believe, i.e. “the serpent (who) caused harm to man was **finally caught and burned.**” (Yezidi lore & their *Black Book*) Of course they do not recognize that God's Messiah mortally wounded Satan at the cross, with a crushing blow to his head as God foretold in Genesis 3:15;

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

1 Corinthians 15: 54-57 reads, “the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory!’...

Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Jesus compared the snake uplifted by Moses to himself being lifted up and then said; “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

I invite you now to humbly accept God's gift of eternal life through believing in Jesus. He died in your place as the sacrificial Lamb of God to take away your sins. If you want to let me know you've decided to receive this I'd like to rejoice with you. Write me here:

rolandclarke1139@yahoo.com A more detailed examination of serpent symbolism is available in the article, [Serpent to Savior](#).