



International Bible Lesson

International Bible Study Commentary
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The Serpent and the Son of Man John 3:11-21

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
(John 3:14-15—KJV).

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life (John 3:14-15—NASB).

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (John 3:14-15—NRSV).

Nicodemus knew about this serpent incident in the wilderness. In Numbers 21:4-9, we learn that having been saved from slavery and death in Egypt, the LORD led the Israelites into the wilderness where He met their needs for leadership, guidance, food, and water. But the Israelites continued to complain against God and Moses; so, as punishment, the LORD sent poisonous snakes among them and many died. Then, the people repented, and Moses prayed for them. In answer to Moses' prayer, the LORD told Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a poll; then, whenever someone was bitten, they could look at the serpent and live. Using this example, Jesus taught that the result of sin is death, and continuing to live sinfully will lead to condemnation. Therefore, God sent Jesus into the world to save people from sin, death, and condemnation. God did not send Jesus to wave a magic wand so people could be saved. God is love, and love includes acting justly and mercifully. Because God loves us, Jesus Christ came as the way for sinners to receive mercy and avoid just condemnation.

Jesus hanged on a cross and died a sacrificial death, because “the Son of Man must be lifted up” so people can look at Him and receive eternal life. When the Israelites saw their bitten brothers and sisters healed when they looked at the serpent, they looked too. When some people see believers looking to Jesus and receiving forgiveness, freedom from slavery to sin, and enjoying eternal life, they believe in Jesus too.

Thinking Further

1. What types of things could or would Jesus have seen that He could testify to having seen (give evidence to having seen) that He knew the religious leaders and probably many people would not receive?
2. Explain what Jesus meant when He said the Son of Man had descended from heaven?
3. Why do you think Jesus compared the serpent that Moses lifted up to the Son of Man being lifted up?
4. How can a person have eternal life? What does having eternal life mean to you?
5. Why do you think some people think Jesus Christ came to condemn the world rather than save the world?