

The Serpent and the Rod

The following thoughts concern the incidents surrounding the one recorded failure of one of the greatest of the few great men that have ever lived. The background of the story begins in Exodus 3—the account of a strange event of tremendous significance in the development of the eternal purpose of God.

As the account begins, we find Moses tending sheep—an occupation in which he has spent forty years of his life; surely one of the humblest and simplest occupations possible, but they were not wasted years for Moses, though they would appear so in the eyes of the ambitious of the world.

At the end of this forty years of patient preparation, God appeared to Moses in the sign of the burning, but unconsumed, bush. The original means “thorn-bush.”

Remembering Jothan’s parable about the fruit trees and the bramble (Jdg. 9), Jehoash’s taunt about the cedar and the thistle (2 Kgs. 14:9), Isaiah’s and Ezekiel’s use of the tall cedars as mighty nations, the great, wide-spreading Babylonian tree that reached to heaven (Dan. 4), and Jesus’ parable of the Kingdom as a minute grain of mustard seed that finally filled the earth—in the light of these symbols, and others, how fitting is this fire-swept but never destroyed thorn-bush as a manifestation of God’s purpose in and through Israel.

As shown on Roman coins, the emperors of Rome—one of the mightiest tree-kingdoms—wore a laurel wreath as a badge of their authority, but the King of the thorn-bush kingdom wore a crown of thorns.

In this manifestation to Moses, God revealed the eternal, memorial, covenant Name—I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE—the multitudinous purpose.

And this solemn occasion—the call of Moses, after forty years probation, to lead and bring to birth the nation of God—one of the key points in the Plan of the Ages—is marked by three signs: the serpent and the rod, the leprous and cleansed hand, and the poured-out water becoming blood, symbols of deep significance.

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Moving forward another forty years, we reach the scene depicted in the 29th of Numbers. This chapter opens at the beginning of the fortieth year of Israel’s wanderings.

Very little is recorded of the terrible forty years—just glimpses of the beginning and the ending—but it is well to ponder upon this weary period. Forty long, monotonous years in a hot, barren, dusty, comfortless wilderness—all the adults under the shadow of the sentence of death, waiting their turn to die.

Think of living under such conditions of hardship, with no hope of any release but death. The Scriptures speak of it as a waste, howling wilderness, a place of withering drought, and infested with fiery serpents and scorpions.

What did they do during those long years of endless waiting? In those forty years they moved their camp forty-two times, and they never knew—from one day to the next—when the next move would be.

Why were these people in this position? God had chosen and called them, brought them close to Himself and shown them marvelous things—but they had remained earthy and had failed to rise to the call. So a whole generation were cast aside to perish in these miserable surroundings.

And now the last year begins. The promised land of plenty, with its fruitful fields and green valleys and pleasant, settled houses, is within sight. They have arrived at Kadesh, south of the Dead Sea and on the west border of the land of Edom. (Kadesh means holiness. In the antitype it is the point reached at the end of the wilderness journey, before entering the Promised Land.)

The first event at Kadesh is the death and burial of Miriam. What a long, eventful time it had been—120 years—since we saw Miriam as a little girl courageously facing the majesty of the Princess of Egypt on behalf of her baby brother!

And now Miriam was gone. She, too, had had a great moment of failure and shame, when she questioned the supremacy of Moses and suffered the humiliation and affliction of leprosy, but this would now only be a regretted incident in their long period of working together.

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“And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and Aaron” (v. 2).

The people on one side—Moses and Aaron on the other. The same old picture! Forty years had taught them nothing of faith in God or affection and trust for their leaders.

“And the people chode with Moses, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord!” (v. 3)

From time to time during the forty years, many had been smitten by God—as concerning the golden calf, the report of the spies, the lust for meat, the rebellion of Korah—and now in their faithless despair they wished they were among those whom God had destroyed.

We can, and must, sympathize with the bitterness of their lot, but how displeasing would their complaining be to God, and how grieving it would be to Moses who had given his life to teach and to care for and to entreat for them! Human nature is an evil, sinful, ungrateful thing. Moses and Aaron went to the Tabernacle and fell on their faces before the Lord. They were two old men against an ignorant and enraged rabble, but their strength was in God.

“AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD APPEARED UNTO THEM.”

What a wonderful thing! The glory of the Lord appeared unto them.” If Moses had stopped to think, this could have settled and quieted his overwrought emotions, and brought a great peace and calm that no outward provocation could disturb.

As we consider these instances of open divine manifestation, we may feel that if only the glory of the Lord would appear to us, we could cheerfully and fearlessly face anything! But—does not the glory of God appear to us—if we will let it?

Does it not appear in all His wonderful works around us in the ever-present marvels and beauties of His holy Word; in the terrible but inspiring accuracy of the working out of His purpose with the seething nations in these closing Gentile days, and above all in the promise that if we truly seek Him, He will come and make His abode with us? It is only our fleshly heedlessness that prevents our feeling the power of the presence of that glory.

The brotherhood today is being shaken to its foundations, and long-accepted standards of truth and holiness are being cast aside, but good will come of it if we hold fast and are not swept backwards by the general tide. Let us pause and step aside and take time to let the glory of God appear unto us and envelop our lives, and all else will fade into insignificance, and we shall have calm and peace.

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“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Rod” (v. 7).

“THE Rod.” Clearly some particular rod is meant. What rod?

“And Moses took the Rod from before the Lord” (v. 9).

Arising out of Korah’s rebellion, some time before this, God had confirmed the authority of Moses and Aaron by the token of the blossomed rod. And God had said (17:10)—

“Bring Aaron’s Rod before the Testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels.”

Paul tells us (Heb. 9:4) that this rod was kept inside the very Ark of the Covenant itself. This was the most sacred place possible, teaching us the importance of the significance of this Rod.

So the Rod Moses was to take was Aaron's Rod that budded. Now let us trace this Rod back a little further, and we shall find that it has an interesting history. We shall find that "Aaron's" Rod is the same as "Moses' " Rod.

Turning back to Ex. 4 (the occasion of the burning bush), we find Moses protesting (v. 1)—
"Behold, they will not believe me."

God says, "What is that in thine hand?" Moses replies, "A rod." Then comes the sign of the rod turned into a serpent, and back again. Concluding the vision, God says (v. 17)—

"Take THIS Rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs."

So this is the Rod by which the serpent sign is to be manifested. The particular appointment of this Rod is further emphasized when we note in v. 20 it is called, "The Rod of God."

It also helps us to form the picture when we remember (see v. 16) that Aaron is appointed as the mouthpiece for Moses—they are one unit. V. 30 informs us—

"And Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and DID THE SIGNS in the sight of the people."

—Aaron did the signs, with Moses' Rod—the "Rod of God." Turning to Ex. 7, we find the same thing happening. In v. 10 (at Moses' command) Aaron cast down "his" rod before Pharaoh, and it becomes a serpent. In v. 15 God tells Moses to take the Rod which had become a serpent. In v. 17 Moses is to speak of it as "the Rod in mine hand" smiting the waters. But in v. 19 we find Moses telling Aaron to "Take thy rod" and smite the waters.

This was the first plague. If we trace the plagues through, we find that some (Ex. 7:19; 8:6, 17) Aaron brings with the Rod, some (9:23; 10:13) Moses brings with the (same) Rod.

The point to be noted is that throughout Moses and Aaron act as an interchangeable unit, and it is the same Rod—the "Rod of God." It is again spoken of as the Rod of God when it is used to play an important part in the defeat of Amalek (Ex. 17:9). As long as Moses holds up this Rod, Israel prevails. Truly this is a very important Rod.

Now, in the Scriptures, "rod" is a common figure of rulership—of one who rules—particularly, of the Messiah: the King of Kings:

"The Lord shall send the Rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies" (Psa. 110:2).

"Israel is the Rod of Mine inheritance" (Jer. 10:16).

"There shall come forth a Rod out of the Stem of Jesse . . . with righteousness shall he judge" (Isa. 11:1-4).

So we see in this Rod of Moses and Aaron—this "Rod of God"—the manifested power and authority of God.

At its first mention God's power is manifested in turning it into a serpent and back again to a rod. Is this just meaningless wonder-working? On the contrary, here is a deep symbol, embodying the whole purpose of God with man.

God made Adam in His Own image, and gave him dominion over all the earth—note the two aspects, manifestation and rulership. Solomon records (Ecc. 17:29) that God made man upright, but that man forsook this upright state—that is, the Rod became a Serpent. Sin took over, and natural man became the seed of the serpent—no longer the Rod of God.

But God's loving purpose is to bring man back from the serpent condition to the rod condition—to make him again upright, the true and complete image of God, exercising holy and faithful dominion over an earth filled with God's glory.

All this shown in Christ—the typical man—born under the serpent-cursed constitution to which man had fallen, but cleansing and transforming himself from it by obedience, and achieving royal honor and dominion as the chosen Rod of God.

The other two signs of the burning-bush manifestation emphasize the same truths. The hand that became leprous and then was restored to health shows another aspect of the picture. The Rod and Serpent show a change of position and activity—the leprous hand shows a change of

physical condition. Leprosy, the dreaded living death that slowly but relentlessly consumed its helpless victims, is a scriptural symbol of the deadly uncleanness of sin.

The third and culminating sign was the water of the river (living water) poured out on the dry land and becoming blood.

In John chapter 2 there is something strikingly similar—a “sign” in which poured-out water becomes wine (type of blood)—a sign which appears on the surface to be mere wonder-working, but which undoubtedly has a deep meaning.

It was on the third day (John 2:1). And it was the “beginning of miracles (RV signs) that Jesus did.” Surely the water that became blood is the Word made flesh for the redemption of fallen man—the blood poured out on a dry and thirsty land.

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When Moses (Num. 20:8) is told to enter the sacred Most Holy Place—the very presence of God—and bring out this Rod, the whole forty year history of its use would be before his mind, from the time of the burning bush forward.

Now, all its former uses had been judicial. This fact has a significant bearing on Moses’ action at this time. With it he and Aaron had brought the plagues on Egypt; with it he had smitten Amalek; with it he had smitten the Rock before at God’s command; and finally, it had been laid up in the Tabernacle as a testimony “against the rebels” who challenged Moses and Aaron’s authority.

Now—when rebels are challenging his authority again, God says: “Take the Rod.” It is perfectly natural, then, that he should smite the Rock, at the same time crying: “Hear now, ye rebels!”

It was natural—but it was wrong. Moses had lost control of himself, and contact with God. He was not thinking calmly. He was excited and angry, and not paying attention to God’s words. Every word God speaks to man is vital. God had plainly said: “Speak to the Rock.”

When Miriam had questioned Moses’ authority, it was testified:

“Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3).

Webster’s Dictionary defines “meek” as:

“Mild of temper, not easily provoked or irritated, patient under injuries: not vain, haughty or resentful.”

Truly a beautiful character. Here is true strength. In Proverbs the wisdom of the Spirit tells us (16:32)—

“He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city.”

Meekness is true self-control—the greatest achievement and victory possible to man. And the man Moses was meek above all the men on the face of the earth.

But on this occasion his self-control gave way. Angrily denouncing the children of Israel, he struck the Rock twice. The water came out; the congregation drank; and the incident appeared closed. Moses, though doubtless regretting his brief outburst, would probably—in the light of his forty years of faithful labor—not regard it very seriously.

But it was not closed. God called him to account, and humbled His faithful servant Moses before this evil multitude who were not fit to tie his shoes.

God said to him: “Ye believed me not.” Did Moses really disbelieve God? Belief is a far greater and deeper thing than mere assent to the truth of a matter. Belief is what we DO. Our way of life is the true index of what we actually believe, whatever our professions may be.

“What doth it profit though a man SAY he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?” (James 2:14).

If we SAY we love God and desire to please Him, then deliberately choose a way of life (as marrying into the world) that we know He hates, we clearly demonstrate what our belief actually is—our faith (belief) is in the flesh, not in God.

John, the gentle apostle of love, records plainly and bluntly:

“Let no man deceive you: he that DOETH righteousness is righteous.”

Moses did not sanctify God on this occasion—therefore it was necessary for God to sanctify Himself in publicly punishing Moses. David says that, under provocation, Moses “spake unadvisedly with his lips.” James warns us (3:6)—

“The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. If any man offend not in word, he is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.”

Not only evil taking, but all foolish talking, says Paul, is an abomination to the God of holiness. How much we say lightly—and forget! But God does not forget. Jesus said—

“Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36).

Because of the apparent drasticness of this saying, some have endeavored to water it down by changing the meaning of the word translated “idle,” but when we look it up and face it squarely we find it does mean “idle.” Saintship is no light thing!

The word is “argos,” meaning “idle, profitless, barren, unfruitful.” It carries the idea of empty unproductiveness when there should be usefulness.

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Of the Rock that Moses struck, Paul says (1 Cor. 10:4): “The Rock was Christ.” Here is a key to something far deeper than the literal transaction, opening up to us a wide panorama of spiritual significance—“The Rock was Christ.”

There were two incidents of the smitten Rock—one just before Sinai when they had just come out of Egypt, and this present one at the end of the forty years wandering.

The first time, Moses was commanded to smite the Rock to bring forth the living water for Israel. It was in God’s purpose and providence that Israel, under the Mosaic constitution, should smite the Christ-Rock, releasing the life-giving stream.

But forty years later, at the end of the probation period, after the wilderness journey, just on the verge of entering the Promised Land, it was God’s wisdom to portray a far different state of affairs.

In the meantime the Rod of God had budded with new life, manifesting His divine choice and approval. (Incidentally, we learn from the budding that it was the “Rod of an almond-tree,” for it “yielded almonds”—Num. 17:8. Jeremiah, amid the desolations of Jerusalem, saw the prophetic budding of an almond-rod (Jer. 1:11).

And the Rod had been laid up beyond the Veil in the Most Holy Place—the very presence of God. Now, as the time for entering the land draws near, Moses is to bring forth the Rod out of the Most Holy Place before the whole congregation of Israel, and then by speaking to the Rock draw water for the thirsty, waiting people.

It is impossible to miss the significance. The blossomed, resurrected Rod—hidden beyond the Veil—clearly portrays Christ, as does the life-giving Rock.

But how can the Rod and the Rock both typify Christ, when one strikes the other? It is exactly the same problem we have in seeing Christ in both the slaying Priest and the slain Offering.

In the first place we must recognize the overall hand of God throughout, in both Rod and Rock. The smiting was ordained by God, and the Rock was provided by God. This unites the two symbols. Not only so, but Christ himself was an active and voluntary participant in the smiting. His crucifixion was his own voluntary repudiation and smiting of the sin-power, so we can see him in the Rod as well as in the Rock.

Furthermore, we must view the Rod of God in its broad historical perspective. It was first figuratively placed in the hands of Adam—that is, divinely-bestowed authority and dominion.

In Moses' day it was embodied in the Law in the hands of Moses. In Jesus' day the Rod and sceptre of the Kingdom of God was still in the hands of Moses' successors, though the true Rod and heir to the sceptre was in their midst.

In the age to Come, God will "send the Rod of His strength out of Zion."

But from beginning to end, Christ is at the heart of the Rod symbol, for he was ordained from the world's foundation to be its Ruler and Lawgiver.

When regathered Israel stands in the later day before the Christ-Rock, at the entrance to the land, there is to be no repetition of the smiting—only a humble speaking to the Rock.

This was one time above all times in his long and eventful life—when he stood at the end of the wilderness journey before the Christ-Rock as the representative of a regathered and repentant Israel—that Moses needed to portray self-abasement, and humility, and glory to God.

But by his words and actions he made himself a type of the rebels who, says Ezekiel (20:38) will be purged out of Israel in the wilderness of the people, and , declares the Spirit,

"THEY SHALL NOT ENTER INTO THE LAND."

And so it was said to Moses, "Thou shalt not enter." We see again in these things the limitless depths of divine wisdom in bringing all things into conformity with the interwoven pattern of type and antitype, for apart from this specific sin, it was not fitting that Moses should lead Israel into the Land of Promise.

Why? Because Moses personified the whole Mosaic constitution—the "law of condemnation"—the "ministration of death." The Law could not give life—could not give them the true, eternal entrance to the Land—could not give them the "Rest that remaineth for the People of God."

Therefore Moses, the ministrator of the Old Covenant, could not lead them into the Land—that must be the work of Joshua, the type of Jesus, whose name he prophetically bore.

In like manner the High Priest Aaron, too, must give way to a successor before the inheritance is entered into—for, as Paul says (Heb. 7:12), the Mosaic Law and the Levitical priesthood stood and fell together; a change in one required a change in the other also.

So—beginning in v. 23—we find the instructions for Aaron's death and the transferring of his office to another. God says (v. 24):

"He shall not enter, because ye REBELLED against My Word."

Moses had addressed Israel as rebels—"Hear now, ye rebels!"—little realizing that in God's sight he himself was a rebel in that very act. Surely a sobering lesson for us in the life of this great man. It is when we are condemning others that we are most likely to fall into condemnation ourselves.

When faithfulness to the Truth requires us to take a stand for what is right, and to stand aside from what is wrong, let us be especially careful to remember this lesson. We may warn, and exhort, and point out what we believe is wrong, and sorrowfully separate—but it is not ours to condemn. At such a time especially, meekness and humbleness and kindness and gentleness (in heart and not just in oily words) is essential—

"Considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

At God's command, Aaron ascends Mt. Hor to die. He is stripped of his priestly garments of "Glory and Beauty," and they are placed upon his son Eleazar.

In this solemn ceremony, the weakness and imperfections of the Levitical priesthood are emphasized. In Heb. 7 Paul points out these imperfections, in contrast to the perfect priesthood of Christ.

He says Christ's priesthood is eternal, but the Levitical was but temporary and passing. This we see in Eleazar superseding Aaron who headed and personified the Levitical order.

In the Levitical, Paul says, men with infirmities served—how sadly this is illustrated in the circumstances of Aaron's punishment!

Then, he points out, apart from any specific wrong-doing, death must inevitably claim every succeeding Levitical priest, because they are mortal. This, too, is portrayed in this scene on Mt Hor.

Now Miriam and Aaron are gone—and Moses alone remains. These three were all about 120 years old. A vast gulf separated them from the multitude of Israel, among whom were now none over sixty.

In between was a lost generation, whose carcasses had fallen in the wilderness—a generation that had been transformed in a day from the degradation of slavery to the true kings of the earth—a royal nation, a kingdom of holy priests.

They had been divinely chosen from all the people of the earth and had stood closer to God than any other nation or generation before or since.

But of this once greatly-favored host only two now remained—Caleb and Joshua—the faithful two who had incurred the rebellious multitude’s bitter enmity by standing out against them on the side of God.

Just previous to Aaron’s death (Num. 20:14-21), Israel had sought permission to travel through Edom on their way to the promised land. Edom were the descendants of Esau—Jacob’s brother—but Edom’s attitude was far from brotherly, for they turned Israel back at the point of the sword.

Was not this a time for God to show Himself strong on behalf of His people? Apparently not. God’s hand has often been withheld while His faithful people have been abused and humbled, and the ungodly have triumphed.

Even in Old Testament times, warfare was not the prerogative of man but of God. It would have been as wrong for them to have warred against Edom on this occasion, as it would have been to have refused to war against Canaan.

Edom in Hebrew is the same basic word as Adam, and means “red.” Edom, like Adam, stands for the flesh, and it adds great interest to the relations between Israel and Edom throughout their history when we see therein a symbolic portrayal of the lifelong conflict between the spirit and the flesh. Israel must submit, for this was the time of their testing and discipline. Edom dwelt in comfortable plenty, Israel must still labor through a wilderness.

Edom’s refusal was another bitter test for Israel, and a great added hardship. As they stood at the edge of Edom’s fruitful valleys and respectfully asked a favor of one from whom they had reason to expect kindness and sympathy, it seemed that escape from that “great and terrible wilderness,” and the long, monotonous sameness of food, was finally at hand.

How bitter, then, their disappointment at being threateningly rebuffed and turned back and forced to make the long wilderness journey once again toward the Red Sea and around up the other side of Edom’s territory!

“And they journeyed from Mt. Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way” (Num. 21:4).

Once again they were marching away from the Promised Land; instead of toward it. It is necessary to fully realize the severity of their trial to truly evaluate its significance and results, and to learn its lessons.

Our circumstances are far easier than Israel’s, our blessings are far more abundant, our trials far less, and the strengthening knowledge revealed to us far greater. And God—Who was hidden in the terrible cloud and smoke and thunder of Sinai—has drawn personally near to us in the person of His Son.

As Paul points out (Heb. 12:18-24), we do not have to stand afar off at the base of the shaking, burning mountain that dare not be touched on the pain of instant death—but we have come nigh to God through Jesus the Mediator of the New and better Covenant. And yet we often murmur, and are cast down, and “discouraged because of the way!” How DARE we be discouraged, in the face of the glorious divine assurance and promises!

At this point, Israel in their despair committed one of their worst offenses, and received one of their worst punishments. Not only did they again rail at Moses, and murmur, but they spoke despisingly of the Manna—the heavenly bread that God had lovingly provided.

“Our soul loatheth this light bread” (v.5).

These were terrible words! We know the meaning of the Heavenly Bread. Moses had in anger smitten the Rock; now the people reject and despise the Bread.

The Manna was a constant miracle of divine care, not only in its regular provision, but in the fact that none appeared on the Sabbath, and then only would it keep two days. They were provided for but ONE DAY AT A TIME. If hoarded, it “bred worms and stank” before God. Do we perceive the lesson? Have we ever pondered on the deep significance of the prayer the Master taught?

“Give us THIS DAY our daily bread.”

“Our souls loatheth this light bread” . . . “We want the spicy meats of the world—we are tired of this thin, unexciting spiritual food—we prefer the onions (and the slavery) of Egypt.”

We would never say this in so many words, but it is so easy, by our actions, to say plainly to God: “Our soul loatheth this light bread.”

Israel were the subjects of the greatest opportunity and adventure that had ever befallen a nation. They had seen the great Egyptian Empire humbled (Egypt at that time was the fear and marvel of the world). They had seen the sea miraculously parted before them and closed upon their enemies. The perpetual pillar of fire and cloud led them, and to them was offered the glorious mission of being set apart from all nations to manifest God to mankind and pioneer the world to everlasting holiness and peace.

But they never rose to a conception of their divine mission. Though the divine hands lifted them up as a nation, and set before them marvellous visions of eternal things, still they remained earthly and untransformed. The glories and responsibilities of the divine selection could not drive from their minds the lust for the onions of Egypt.

Is that happening to us today? Are we unmoved at the touch of the divine fire, stumbling on our blind, earthly way, and taking the great vision of the unspeakable glory of the Sonship of God as simply the natural sequel of a natural life? The Sons of God are only those who live in the spiritual atmosphere of an all-consuming zeal for divine things. As a nation, Israel had no interest in the wonderful imagery of the Tabernacle. They had no conception of the significance of the heavenly bread they despised. These things are not recorded that we may look down with pitying condescension on what we may regard as their incomprehensible blindness (in contrast to our assumption of perception). Rather they should teach us a deep, searching humility—a constant and trembling self-examination. Perhaps WE are not as far from their example as we assume.

Paul sadly said to the Corinthians (1:3:2)—

“I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for ye are not able to bear it—for ye are carnal.”

And to the Hebrews (5:11-14)—

“We have many things to say (about the great Melchizedek-Priest), and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing . . . For when ye ought to be teachers, ye have need of milk, and not of strong meat: strong meat belongeth to them of full age.”

What would he say of us? How do we stand in relation to this same “meat?” Are we growing acceptably and pleasingly “in grace and in the knowledge of the glory of God?” It is all too possible to unconsciously repeat the tragic error of blind Israel at the very time we are pitying that blindness.

God’s action in this instance was swift and terrible:

“The Lord sent fiery serpents among them, and they bit the people, and many died” (v. 6).

When they were afflicted they repented, as was to be their unworthy custom with monotonous regularity all down their history, until finally the long-suffering of God was withdrawn.

God chastens His children in the process of their development, but when this process is repeated over and over with no permanent effect, it amounts to mocking God and despising His longsuffering. It is easy to get into the habit of assuming that repentance will always bring forgiveness, until life becomes a mechanical see-saw of commission and confession.

THERE MUST BE A PROGRESSIVE “OVERCOMING.” The promise is only “to him that overcometh.” Note how this phrase is seven times emphatically repeated—at the summation of each of the seven messages to the ecclesias (Rev. 2 and 3).

At God’s instruction Moses made a serpent of brass and put it upon a pole, and whosoever was bitten—and looked upon it—lived. Jesus said (John 3:15)—

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish.”

How could a brass serpent be a type of Christ? A serpent of brass is a perfect symbol of the body of sin—sin’s flesh—that was publicly and historically condemned in the crucifixion of Christ.

That crucifixion is the turning-point of human history. While—to outward appearances—it was apparent shameful victory of sin over Christ, it was actually the glorious victory of Christ over sin. How often are things in God’s sight the very opposite of what they outwardly seem! Cooperating in the great work of justifying God and creating a foundation for the extension of God’s mercy while honoring His holiness, Jesus voluntarily submitted to this public condemnation and repudiation of the serpent-cursed body of sin—the body of which Paul said:

“In me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.”

Those who know the Truth, and realize the value and REALITY of Christ’s mortal warfare with the devil, and his complete victory over him, will have no difficulty in seeing in the brazen serpent, the devil—sin’s flesh—defeated and condemned and crucified on the hill of Calvary—the banner and ensign of the greatest victory that any man has ever won.

In the original, “serpent of brass” is “nechosh nechosheth”—for the words for “bass” and “serpent” are from exactly the same Hebrew root. This adds great fitness to the use throughout Scripture of brass as a symbol of the flesh.

Moses was commanded to put the serpent of brass “upon a pole.” The Hebrew word here translated “pole” should be “standard, banner, or ensign”—that which is a rallying-point for armies in battle—this word is almost invariably so translated elsewhere.

It is the same word (nes) as occurs in the expression “Jehovah-Nissi”—The Lord Our Banner—the name given to the altar built by Moses to commemorate the victory over the Amalek-sinpower by the lifting up of the Rod of God (Ex. 17:9, 15).

The uplifted serpent of brass was the saving ensign of serpent-bitten Israel, just as its great anti-type is the banner and ensign of all the sin-smitten race who look to him for life. Isaiah uses this same Hebrew word nes ten times, in stirring imagery, as

“At that day there shall be a Root of Jesse who shall stand for an ensign of the people: to him shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious!” (Isa. 11:10).

We note that the ensign has two parts—the Rod erect and triumphant, the Serpent conquered and impaled.

In later years, in the fulness of Israel’s degeneracy, this brazen serpent became an object of ignorant superstition and worship (just as the cross of Christ has today) and Hezekiah, the great typical Temple-cleanser, “broke it in pieces, and called it Nechushtan—a piece of brass” (2 Kgs. 18:4).

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Paul says all these things were “written for our admonition” and are “able to make us wise unto salvation.” In the divinely-recorded history of Israel, we have the wonderful “patterns of things in the heavenlies.”

How clearly we see the Messiah in the budded rod, the water-giving Rock, the great Mosaic Lawgiver and Prophet—meekest of all men, the dying and yet continuing High Priest, the heaven-sent manna, the glorious saving ensign of the uplifted serpent—just as we see him in our day in the bread and the wine, and the open Bible, for “His Name is called The Word of God”—he was that Word made flesh. David prayed, with a yearning heart—

“Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law.”

This mind must be in us, if we are to be among the few chosen from the earth’s perishing millions. We must make ourselves one with the Word of God—steep ourselves in it—live constantly in its atmosphere—both the written Word and the living Word, for they are one.

John says (1 John 2:5)—

“Whoso keepeth his Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected. Hereby KNOW we that we are in him!”

And then he adds—

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, EVEN AS HE WALKED.”

Do we walk “even as Jesus walked?” We have the four-fold story of his marvellous, heavenly life on earth, and this great Book of rich and entrancing symbol that all revolves around him .

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Is he our pattern in all we do or say? Let us make it our daily endeavor—our whole ambition in life— to “be in him” and to “walk even as he walked.”

Today the ecclesial world—as we have known it—is being torn to pieces. Ensigns that have long been faithfully upheld are being pulled down. Though it saddens us, it need not worry us. It is the last days—these things must be. Salvation is an individual matter, and in the end those who are trying to be faithful will be more and more alone.

Let us, therefore, let this one obsession possess each mind like a transforming, consuming fire, crowding out all doubt and fear—

“Hereby KNOW we that we are in him—IF the love of God is perfected in us . . . and we walk even as he walked.”

(Taken from “Be Ye Transformed” Volume 1 pages 159-174 by Bro. G. Growcott)