

GROWING IN GOD PODCAST



GIG274 – The Bronze Serpent

Hi everyone, welcome to this podcast. I want to talk today about the story of the bronze serpent in the wilderness. I think it holds some keys for us in our focus on the Lord, our walk with Him. So let's just dive into the story and we will go from there in talking about what the meaning is. We begin in Numbers the twenty-first chapter at verses 4-11. It says,

Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. The people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and you; intercede with the Lord, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived. Now the sons of Israel moved out and camped in Oboth. They journeyed from Oboth and camped at Iyeabarim, in the wilderness which is opposite Moab, to the east.

This is a very interesting story here, because it is talking about the fact that the children of Israel got tired of the journey. They were not liking the way their surroundings were, they were very focused on just the material world, and they were not any longer that impressed with the fact that with them they had the Presence of the Lord day and night. And you know, it seems almost impossible to think that we would get tired of having the Lord's Presence with us day and night; but I think in all honesty, we do lose our focus on the Lord, and we tend to bring our focus back into the lower level or lower realm of the natural world, the material world about us. We get focused on the material world and what we are lacking, in our minds, in that material world. What we wish we had in that material world becomes really what we focus upon on a daily basis, and it is not any longer the awesome reality to us that we have with us every day the Presence of the Lord.

Of course, I think that these stories and everything about Israel and what Israel went through, what Israel is going through today, always is an admonition to us; and the Scripture says it is an example to us (1 Corinthians 10:11). It is for us to learn by, because it is like a family – they are the older brother, and we are younger children in the family, and we learn a lot by watching how the parents relate to the older siblings. And so this story has great meaning to us, because it gives us an opportunity to watch and to realize, "My gosh, we do today forget sometimes that, "Hey, we are believers in Christ, and Christ is within us, and the Holy Spirit is in us. We have the opportunity to be filled to all the fullness of God by the Holy Spirit, and we have the Holy Spirit here to lead us and guide us." Look at all of the benefits that God has given us. It says in the Scripture, "He has given us all things pertaining to life and godliness." God has provided all things, and He was providing all things for them in the wilderness; and yet because

of their focus they said, "There is no food here. There is no water here." Then they turn around and say, "We loathe this miserable food." Well, what do you mean? If there is no food, how do you loathe the food? In other words, all of these things are their mental state of focusing on what they are not happy about, what they wish they had that they do not have, and forgetting all they do have that God is providing for them like it is nothing. It is like it does not exist: "We do not like this. We have no food here." Well, "We loathe this food." They did have food. God was feeding them. They had food, they had water. God was taking care of them. But the truth was, in that second part of the sentence, they loathed it, and they were not happy with their conditions, and they were impatient with the journey. They were tired of being in the wilderness, whatever was going on with them.

And so, we need to look very carefully at our own lives and realize how often we get into the same place, where we are forgetting all of the benefits. The Scripture says, "Do not forget His benefits." (Psalm 103:2) We need to remember that we have the Presence of the Lord with us. We need to remember that we have the cross of Christ, we have forgiveness of sin. We have Him in our life. He surrounds us on a daily basis, as He did them. God is omnipresent, He is with us all of the time. The Holy Spirit is with us all of the time to lead us, to teach us. So we recognize that we focus on things which are not of the Lord in our flesh and in our perception, in our awareness, and we let our awareness drive us to a focus on that which is not really significant in the world that is around us.

So we see that the Lord got upset with the people, and because of their complaining against Himself and complaining against Moses, He sent these fiery serpents. The serpents were venomous snakes that He sent in among the people, and the snakes were biting individuals, and it says many people of Israel died from the snake bites. When God gets upset with us, a lot of times He gives us something different to focus on, and He did that in this case; He brought in these fiery serpents. So the people wisely recognized that they had sinned, and they came to Moses in verse 7: "The people said, 'We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and you; intercede with the Lord, that He may remove the serpents from us.'"

Now this, to me, is really an important part of what we are talking about in this podcast, because the people confessed their sin; we assume they were repentant of the sin that they had in their murmuring and complaining against God and Moses. They confessed it, they recognized it, came to their senses, and they asked Moses to go request of God that He remove the serpents from them. Now, I think what happens from here is really unique, because God does not answer their prayer. God does not remove the serpents from them. Instead, in verse 8, the Lord speaks to Moses and He says, "Make an image of a fiery serpent, make an image of one of these snakes, and put it on a standard, or a long pole, that can be held up, and that way it can be carried in the midst of the camp. When somebody is bitten by one of these snakes, then they can look up at the bronze serpent on the standard and they will not die, they will live."

So it is kind of a unique answer that God brings. He does not give them their request. They said, "Ask Him to remove the serpents from us," and God did not remove the serpents; the serpents continued to be among them. Instead, what God did was He gave an answer which focused the people on Himself. Of course, God in His great wisdom is always doing things like this for us. Instead of taking away our problems, many times what He does is He gives us an answer that brings our focus in our relationship back to Him; because ultimately, He is the answer.

Obviously not having fiery serpents among them was no answer. Before, they did not have fiery serpents and they complained, they moaned, they griped about everything that was going on. And so,

not having fiery serpents was not an answer, and God understood that. "If I just take away the fiery serpents, give them a week and they are going to be complaining again, against Me and Moses and whatever." It is interesting how God left the serpents in there so that they were still contending with the problem that was the result of their murmuring and complaining. But God did give an answer. He saved their lives, because all they had to do was get their focus right and they no longer died from this problem.

Now the rest of this chapter is really fun, and I encourage you to read on past verse 11 where we stopped. It is interesting because once this event takes place and they have this bronze serpent, and their focus is changed to realize, "Hey, the Lord must be my focus," it is like the Scripture says, "When all these things begin to happen, look up. Do not look down, do not look around you, do not focus on the material world." And that is a good idea for us in these days that we live in. You are going to get tired of this journey that we are on in these end times if you are focused only on what is going on around you. But if we can keep our focus looking up, looking upon the Lord and what He has provided, then these other things are not going to destroy us. At some point, the serpents in the wilderness would have destroyed all of Israel; but they did not destroy Israel because their focus changed. Did the serpents go away? Nope, they did not go away. What changed? What changed was their focus being upon God as the answer to all of their needs and the provider for everything that they wanted and everything that they were to have; having their focus up upon the Lord, realizing, "Okay, yes, my problems are still here." And I realize that a lot of times, just like with them, my problems are a result of my own disobedience, or my own lack of focus upon Him, upon His Word, upon what He has promised and said; and I lose that focus and I get into a wrong place of focusing on other things. Then I get discouraged, or I start complaining, or whatever the scenario is for us as individuals. But God changes our focus to be on Him. He does not necessarily take away the problems.

I think we need to understand that, because as we walk through these days of the end time, we realize a lot of what is going on around us on a natural level is a result of people's actions and people's words, and what people are setting in motion by their rebellion, by their disobedience, by their lack of focus on the Lord, on His Word, on what He has promised and what He has said. And so, if you find yourself surrounded by problems that seem to be eating you up, then maybe you look at something different than just a prayer that says, "God, please take away my problem"; because the problem may actually be placed there by the Lord. Do not forget, those terrible, terrible serpents were from God. He is the one that brought the serpents because of where they were coming from, because of their attitude. And when we look at the end time, there will be many seemingly negative things that take place around us. But I do not think the answer is just praying that those things go away, because many of the happenings and the happenstance of the end time days are by virtue of what man has brought upon himself from our lack of walking in obedience and in submission and in love with the Lord.

I do not know that He is going to take away this tribulation I am going through, take away these other things I am witnessing happening around me. Well, do not be surprised if they do not go away. What God may provide, however, is another focus for you. He may give us Himself to focus on. He is looking to bring us to Himself, bring us to a life in Him, bring us to a life in His Word and a faith and a believing in Him, to a walking in Him and with Him in a way that we may be not doing at the moment. Remember, the Scripture says, "Draw me, that I may run to You." Some of these problems we find ourselves in, some of the way that the end time works itself out, may be an absolute result of the fact that really, truly, God is drawing you, trying to get you to run to Him. And maybe you find out you have to run to Him because you have to run away from the problems, and the problems are not going to go away, you

are going to leave the surrounding of the problems. You are going to run to Him and find yourself in a different place than where you were when those problems began.

I want to look again at this story in the Gospel of John, chapter 3. I will read verses 12-21.

“If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. 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. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

This is so unique, because I think that in here is probably one of the most quoted verses, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” And yet, it is totally connected to this story that we just read about Moses in the wilderness, and how the children of Israel sinned, and it is talking about the world; in verse 12 He is talking about earthly things, and then He says, “If I tell you of heavenly things.” But we find ourselves in this world many times surrounded by serpents that are set to destroy us, situations and circumstances; and what we have to be careful with is, are those circumstances of our own choice, in a sense, that we have brought these circumstances upon ourselves? They are not just some accident of the material world, but they are a result. And so, God brings His Son. And we must remember, it is using this illustration of the serpent in the wilderness. And what happened in the wilderness? The people said, “Take away my problems. Take away the judgments. Take away the situation I am in, in this world,” and God did not do that.

We may reread these verses and realize that in bringing Christ, God so loved the world, and what did He do? He brought Christ as a true answer. He is not necessarily going to take away your problems or your circumstances or what surrounds you that seems to be negative. What He is going to do is give you another focus. He is going to allow you to focus upon Him, upon His salvation. He is our deliverance, not some material thing. He is not going to come and remove all the circumstances in this age. He is not going to come and take away our problems. When we think that way, I feel like it affects our prayer life so that we begin praying for things in a way that are not going to happen. Now, I am not saying to stop praying, but just go back and review the story. What Israel asked Moses to pray for, God did not give. And there may be confusion in your own heart at times, going, “Gosh, I have been praying over this, I have been praying over this.” Well, maybe what God is doing is not wanting you to pray for the problem to be removed, or the circumstances to be done away with; maybe He is trying to get your focus and your relationship onto Himself and onto Christ, who is the Mashiach. He is the answer. He is the one who is the freedom from the situation we are in. With Him we have eternal life. None of these things that we are surrounded by are going to destroy us, that is the point. When we focus on Him, when we get a relationship with Him, when we believe in Him, then we will not perish in these problems. We will not perish in our circumstances, but we instead will have life.

So I encourage us to read these stories over, read these verses over, and realize that whatever is happening, whatever your circumstances are, try focusing on Him in another way. Make Him your focus, and make Him where you are journeying to. You are moving into Him. You are not looking down; they had to look up at the brazen serpent. We have to look up to Christ. "When you see all these things beginning to happen, look up." We raise our eyes above everything that is going on around us in a material world, and we begin to focus upon Him and upon His Kingdom. That will change everything. We believe for it.

I hope this is a great blessing to you, and it is something that you can walk in today as a solution to all that you are crying unto the Lord for. God bless.

Amen.