

# Moses and the Brass Serpent

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Numbers 20:17, 21; 21:4–9; John 3:14–15; 1 Nephi 17:41; Alma 33:19–20; Helaman 8:14–15

*And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.* Numbers 21:9

After the prophet Moses led the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt, they journeyed in the wilderness for 40 years. During this time the Lord blessed the Israelites in many ways, including taking care of their physical needs.

The Israelites were nearing the end of their travels and were close to the borders of Canaan—the promised land. But when they asked the king of Edom if they could pass through his land, which would have been a short journey into Canaan, he told them no (see Numbers 20:17, 21). As a result, they had to travel a long way to find a different route into the country (see Numbers 21:4).

The Israelites became discouraged during this journey and “spake against God, and against Moses.” They complained about the very things they should have been thankful for: God’s help in freeing them from bondage and the manna He had provided for them in the wilderness. (See Numbers 21:5.)

Because of the ingratitude of the Israelites, “the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died” (Numbers 21:6).

When the children of Israel saw family members and friends dying, they realized they had sinned in complaining against God. They asked Moses to pray to the Lord to take away the serpents. (See Numbers 21:7.)

Moses prayed, and in response the Lord told him to make a brass serpent, put it on a pole, and place it where the people could see it. The Lord promised that

everyone who had been bitten would live if they looked at the serpent. (See Numbers 21:8–9.)

Alma, a Book of Mormon prophet, explained that many Israelites did look at the serpent and live, “but few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them” (see Alma 33:19–20; see also 1 Nephi 17:41).

Part of what the Israelites did not understand, because of the hardness of their hearts, was that the brass serpent was a symbol of Jesus Christ being lifted up on the cross and bringing eternal life:

“Yea, did [Moses] not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come.

“And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal” (Helaman 8:14–15).

Jesus Christ Himself taught that the account of the brass serpent is a lesson for us about the importance of looking to the Savior and His atoning sacrifice: “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).

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## Summary

After the Lord helped free the children of Israel from bondage, Moses led them in the wilderness for 40 years. The Lord provided for all their needs. When the people complained and were not grateful for all Heavenly Father had done, the Lord sent serpents among them, which bit some of the people. The people knew they had

sinned for not being grateful. Moses prayed for them. The Lord told Moses to make a brass serpent and set it on a pole for the people to see. The brass serpent represented the Savior’s sacrifice. The Lord promised that everyone who had been bitten would live if they looked at the brass serpent.

THE CHURCH OF  
JESUS CHRIST  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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