

201125-4 Nu 21, 1-9, The Serpent of Brass–CThurman

Israel has come to Mt. Hor, or the mount of mounts, in the area of Kadeshbarnea, **קִדְשׁ־בְּרִנְעָ**, where Miriam died. This place forms the western border to Edom and a southern border for the Canaanites.

Kadesh, Kadeshbarnea and Enmishpat are the same place. (cf. Ge. 14.7, Enmishpat; Nu.13.24, Kadesh; 32.8, Kadeshbarnea)

Here at Hor Aaron died and the people mourned him for 30 days. It was at this place that the king of the Canaanites troubled Israel and too some of them prisoner. But it is also here that Israel's conquest begins. This is very interesting because it is at this time that *nearly* all of the first generation of warriors have died. The Scriptures note when Israel arrives to Zared they have all died.

De 2:14 And the space in which we came from Kadeshbarnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them.

They come to Zared in Nu.21.12. There is something we can make of this that is informative. Only as we put off the flesh, the attributes of the old man and put on the things of Christ do we begin to live by faith. And what is faith? Faith is the victory.

1Jo 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

Let's not confuse our victory through Christ (cf. 1Co.15.57) with a carnal concept of victory. We can die and yet be victorious.

Re 15:2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

To the Christian dying is not loss. The apostle Paul said it was to him gain. Victors may die, but they do not lose the war.

Phl.1.20 According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

21 ¶ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Living by faith is living victoriously.

Col 3:8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

put off, ἀπόθεσθε, 2ppl. aor. imper. mid. of ἀποτίθημι, ἀπό from, of, off, out of + τίθημι to appoint, lay down, set, ordain, purpose, etc.; ἀποτίθημι, is tss, to lay down, cast off, put off, put away, lay aside, lay apart.

The land before Israel is a promised land. It is called Canaanland. It is first a land of conflict. It is a land for conquest. Then after the fight it will be a land of peace. Now begins the conflict. Edom said no, they could not come through their land. Now the king of Canaan acts preemptively to frustrate Israel's purpose of ascending from the south into Canaan.

1 ¶ And when king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south,

Arad, מֶלֶךְ-עֲרָד, me-lek, king, [g]a-rad, meaning a wild ass (Gen.4.18; Job.39.5) Then for wild ass, פֶּרֶה, peh –reh, see below. A wild ass seems to indicate a creature that is untamable, stupid, lustful, wanton, not subject to a yoke, but desirous to be free and in desert places. The wild ass certainly presents a good type for the unregenerate man. This is the unregulated man; a man driven with swiftness by his nature. Ishmael was such a man.

wild ass, פֶּרֶה, peh-reh, first refers to Ishmael, Ge. 16.12, a wild man: Ge 16:12 And he will be a wild man (lit. 'he shall be a

wild ass of a man', *The Interlinear Bible*, J. P. Green Sr.); *his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.*

Job 11:12 For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt.

Exposition of the Old & New Testaments, John Gill, vol.3, p.284, says, *though man be born like a wild ass's colt ... 'foolish, stupid, without understanding of divine and spiritual things; given to lust and wantonness, to serve divers lusts and pleasures; not subject to the yoke of the law of God, stubborn, refractory, and untameable, but by the grace of God ... being a very stupid creature, and a very lustful and wanton one, chooses to be free, will not bear the yoke, but ranges about in desert places.'*

Job 39:5 Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass?

ibid., p.502, 'Into the wide waste, where it is, ranges at pleasure, and is not under the restraint of any; a creature which, as it is naturally wild, is naturally averse to servitude, is desirous of liberty and maintains it: not but that it may be tamed, ... but it chooses to be free, and , agreeably to its nature, it is sent out into the wilderness as such: not that it is set free from bondage, for in that it never was until it is tamed; but its nature and inclination, and course it pursues, is to be free.'

Jer.2.23 How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: thou art a swift dromedary traversing her ways;
24 A wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure; in her occasion who can turn her away? all they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her.

ibid., vol.5, p.409, 'A wild ass used to the wilderness, &c.] That is, one that has been brought up in the wilderness, and has been accustomed to live, and run, and range about there; as men in general are compared to this creature for its ignorance, stupidity, folly, stubbornness,, and unteachableness, Job xi. 12, so the Jewish people are represented as like unto it, for its wantonness and lust: *that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure; draws it in at her nostrils, and snuffs it up; or opens her moth, and takes it in with her breath: or, with the desire of her soul ...*' That is

Ho 8:9 For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers.

Da 5:21 And he (king Nebuchadnezzar) was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.

The name of the king probably well describes his character and the character of his people. The saying is, 'as the king so are the subjects,' or again, 'Like the king, people are.' This is not Scripture, but I'll quote an verse from an apocryphal book.

Ecclesiasticus 10.2, As the judge of the people is himself, so are his officers; and what manner of man the ruler of the city is, such are all they that dwell therein.

heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies;

This *way of the spies* now appears to be a route well-known that Israel used to send up its twelve spies to search out the land (cf. Nu.13.17, 21, 29) some 38 years earlier (cf. Deu.2.14, see above in the introductory remarks)

Deu.1.20 And I said unto you, Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the LORD our God doth give unto us.

21 Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged.

22 And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come.

23 And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe:

24 And they turned and went up into the mountain, and came unto the valley of Eshcol, and searched it out.

then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners.

2 And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.

then I will utterly destroy, וְהָחַרְמָתִי, Hiphil (causative act.) pret. of the verb חָרַם, tss. to utterly destroy, to to destroy utterly, to consecrate, to devote, to forfeit; v.3, and they utterly destroyed has both the verb (חָרַם, char-am) and the noun (חֹרְמָה, chor-mah).

3 And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah.

4 ¶ And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom:

Edom denying Israel passage through their land means that Israel must go a long way around. *By way of the Red Sea*, probably refers to the route they had taken earlier as they came from Sinai. They did some backtracking until they came to a place far enough to the south so that they could go around Edom's most southern borders.

*De 2:8 And when we passed by from our brethren the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, through the way of the plain from Elath, and from Eziongaber (a place that appears to be at the northernmost tip of *Gulf of Aqaba), we turned and passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab.*

*The northernmost reaches of the Red Sea divides into two, one to the northwest and the other to the northeast. The northwest of this fork is the Gulf of Suez; the northeast is the Gulf of Aqaba. It is at the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba where Ezion-Geber is located. This appears to be the furthest southern border of Edom and norther of Midian. So the LORD leads Israel to come down to this place and then ascend up Edom's easternmost border until they arrive to Moab.

and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.

Why were they discouraged? They were discouraged because the way was not as direct as the other way was.

Pr 13:12 Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.

Remember, that it is the LORD directing them. We need to remember that it is the LORD directing us. They way is not as we would hope, but it is, for our good, the LORD's way. For Israel there were still things for them to learn and to put away before they could possess the land promised to them. They were ill-suited for the land as they were. Therefore the LORD continued to prove them again and again.

5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses,
[from their discouraged state]

Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

loatheth, קִצָּה, qa-tzah, Qal pret. of the verb קִצָּה, kootz, tss.
Ge.27.46, *to be weary*; Nu.21.5, *to loath*; Ex.1.12, *to be grieved*;
Le.20.23, *to abhor*; Nu.22.3, *to be distressed*; Is.7.6, *to be vexed*.

The next generation's complaint sounds so much like the firsts'.

Nu.11.4 ¶ And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?

5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

Nu.32.13 And the LORD'S anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed.

14 And, behold, ye are risen up in your fathers' stead, an increase of sinful men, to augment yet the fierce anger of the LORD toward Israel.

The children of Israel had become wearied and vexed at that which was sufficient to bring them through the long sojourn experience. They loathed the manna. They set it aside, they despised it. That is what happens to us, not all at once, but slowly as we become discontented with the will of the LORD for us. Slowly we begin to push aside the word of God. We begin lay aside the importance of Christ in our lives. In effect we loathe that one provision which can truly cause us to live in the land as we should. (cf. He.10.29, some of the believing brethren '*counted the blood of the covenant, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace.*)

Now, it is fitting at this place to be reminded of Israel's problem. It is a sin problem. They are an unregenerate nation. I think, as we read of their 40-year wandering experience we are shocked again and again and again, at how Israel could act so suddenly, so wickedly against the LORD. And the event here helps us understanding why it is so with them and with all men. This is the picture of a man, woman, boy and girl as they are without Christ, dead in trespasses and sins. We have a sin problem. And the effect of sin

continues even after we come to faith in Jesus Christ. But without Christ man is thoroughly corrupted by sin.

*Ps 39:5 ... verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.
Selah.*

Ps 53:3 Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Is.1.2 ¶ Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

3 The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

4 Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

5 Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick,

This extent of his corruption is thorough. There was not no any part of man excepted. This corruption began in Adam the day that he chose to disobey the LORD when he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree that the LORD commanded Adam not to eat, he ate. He ate it willfully. He purposely plunged the whole of humanity into sin in that one act. That day all of humanity in Adam. Mankind wholly died before the LORD spiritually. Not a soul could descend from Adam apart from this corruption.

Ge 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die...

The punishment for this sin was death.

Ro 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned ...

Ro 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The proof of death working in all men is that they sin. For sin man is condemned to die. Notice now in our text that the LORD condemned Israel with a judgment of serpents.

6 And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

bit, נִשְׁכוּ, Piel (intensive act.) fut. of נָשַׁךְ, na-shak, a verb most often tss. to bite, but also, to lend usury.

These serpents appear to be some kind of a flying serpent.

Isa 14:29 Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.

Isa 30:6 The burden of the beasts of the south: into the land of trouble and anguish, from whence come the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they will carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people that shall not profit them.

This *fiery serpent* is a good type for the Serpent, Satan, Lucifer which is the prince and power of the air.

Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.

the serpents, שֵׁנָּחַ, han-na-chah, singular, but meaning it was this kind of serpent.

Serpents is in the Hebrew a singular serpent, meaning a singular kind of serpent. They were bitten of this one kind of serpent, and they were dying as a result of the venomous bite. The poisonous bite of the serpent worked in them death. And now they begged Moses to pray that the LORD would be pleased to take away the serpents. Let's pay attention to what the LORD will do.

And Moses prayed for the people.

8 And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole:

pole, עֵז, nehs, a masc. noun tss. *a pole, a sign, an ensign, a sail, a standard.*

set, שָׂם, seem, Qal imper. of the verb שָׂם, soom, tss. *to make, put, set, appoint, to set up; v.9, and put it* (Qal fut.) *on a pole.*

and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

9 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.

Notice the remedy for the serpent's bite is in the likeness of the serpent that bit them. This signifies that there is one that will be raised upon a pole, a tree; one that will be raised up in the likeness of their death, in order that they might live.

Ro 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh ...

That the serpent was raised on a pole didn't change the fact that they had been bitten. The LORD didn't remove the serpents from their presence, but they that looked were saved from dying of that poisonous bite.

Brethren, we that have come to faith in Jesus Christ still exhibit the marks of having been bitten by the Serpent. The Serpent still taunts to sin. He hasn't been removed, but we have been saved from dying of that terrible bite. Jesus Christ raised upon that pole bore our punishment and died in our place so that we might live.

Jn.12.32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

Jesus Christ draws men of nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people for what purpose, but to be saved from the bite of that Serpent.

Jn.3.14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

Lifted up for what purpose?

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

The Son of man *must* be lifted up so that believing should not perish, but have eternal life. If any sinner will live it is because he understands what Jesus Christ did for him. He understands that Christ died in his place on the cross. Notice what this statement says (vss.14, 15). Jesus Christ *must* be lifted up so that the believing should have eternal life. Faith does nothing unless it is founded upon the necessity of Christ's death for them.

It was necessary that the serpent was raised on a pole to save them that looked upon it. It was necessary that Christ was crucified to give eternal life to them that believe when they look upon Him.

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

God so loved the world, He loved the world to such an extent that He gave, that is He *delivered up* His only begotten Son so that the believing should have everlasting life. This verse is not an invitation. Christ isn't being offered. We aren't be told here that if we do anything that God will do something in return. None of these verses say anything of this sort. These verses simply state facts; facts concerning what God did through His Son to give eternal life to them that believe. Everything that the Lord Jesus says to Nicodemus is a statement of fact. (cf. Jn.3.3-21)

For example, in this verse, v.16, *believing* is part of the subject of the statement *whosoever believeth in him* (is the subject) *should have* (is the verb) *everlasting life* (is the object). Concisely we can say, 'The believer has everlasting life.' It doesn't say that 'if' he believes he will receive everlasting life. It only says that the believe should life. Believing is a result of life, not the other way around.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him (subject) is not condemned: but he that believeth not (subject) is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Statements of facts: the believing are not condemned, and the unbelieving are already in a state of condemnation.

19 And this is the condemnation (which applies to every man bitten of the Serpent), that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

In other words, the proof that men are condemned, dead in trespasses and sins, bitten by the Serpent, is the fact that they love darkness, not light: their deeds are evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd (rebuked).

Proof of unbelief, proof of the Serpent's bite: he hates the light; neither comes to the light ...

21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in [manufactured by] God.

are wrought, εἰργασμένα, nom. pl. neut. part. perf. pass. of ἐργάζομαι, a verb tss. to work, to trade, to inister, to do, to labor; manufactured. In the English the word wrought is an adjective.

Notice, this doesn't say, 'But he that doeth good comes to the light ...' No, this says, 'But he that doeth truth comes to the light ...' the subject, 'but he [the one doing truth] comes ...' The true ones, the true believers, them that agree with God, the ones that acknowledge that God is right: I AM THE SINNER THAT IS WORTHY OF DEATH. I SHOULD HAVE DIED FOR SIN. BUT CHRIST DIED FOR ME WHEN HE CAME AND WAS CRUCIFIED UPON THAT TREE. The one that does the truth comes to the light to manifest his God-wrought deeds.

Php 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Though the serpent wasn't taken away from the people the LORD provided for them that looked life. Have we looked to Christ as the one and only remedy for sin? Do we manifest that our works are God-wrought works? Living for Christ is possible only by the power of the Spirit of God working within.

1Co 15:56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength (δύναμις, power) of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory [over sin] through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Isa 45:22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

If so, let us live the rest of our time to the glory of God.