Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal study only)
Numbers 21:8–12

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time for our Bible reading again. We will continue reading Numbers chapter 21. Today, we are reading verses 8 through 12.

The Israelites journeyed from Mount Hor because the Edomites refused them passage, and God had already given the hill country of Seir to Edom. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, and since Esau and Jacob were twin brothers, God instructed the Israelites to go around the land of Edom. Deuteronomy 2:8 tells us that the Israelites traveled southward all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba by the Red Sea, passing through the coastal towns of Elath and Ezion-geber. Looking at a map, this detour formed a massive arc that added approximately 240 kilometers round trip, traversing rugged, mountainous terrain that was arduous and exhausting.

The older generation among the Israelites who had not yet perished began once more to lead complaints against God and Moses, repeating their customary grievances: Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? Many among the rising generation were influenced by them and joined in the grumbling. This time, God did not tolerate the rebellion, nor did He issue a warning; He simply withdrew His protective hand. Fiery serpents invaded the camp, inflicting venomous bites that left many people dead and countless others wounded.

I am inclined to believe that the vast majority who died belonged to the older generation, while the assembly was now largely composed of the new generation. Witnessing the severity of the plague, the people recognized their guilt, came immediately before Moses to confess their sin, and begged him to pray to the Lord to take the serpents away. Moses prayed on behalf of the people, and the Lord heard his prayer, causing the serpents to leave. Yet while the snakes were gone, the pressing question remained: what was to be done for those who had already been bitten?

Verse 8: “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.’”

The Lord instructed Moses to make a fiery serpent and mount it upon a pole, declaring that anyone bitten who simply looked at the serpent on the pole would be healed of the venom, restored to life, and spared from death. This was a truly remarkable method of healing: no injections, no oral medicine, and no ointments applied to the bite. All that was required was to turn one's eyes and gaze upon the serpent on the pole to live. Only God could grant such an extraordinary decree and provide so miraculous a way of salvation. Moses proved himself a faithful servant of God; without questioning why, he simply followed everything the Lord directed.

Verse 9: “So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”

Moses acted strictly according to the Lord’s instruction, crafting a serpent of bronze and lifting it high upon a pole so that bitten Israelites could see it clearly even from afar. The result fulfilled God's promise completely: whenever someone who had been bitten looked upon the bronze serpent on the pole, they lived. In that era, it was an undeniable miracle. But why did God choose to work in this particular way?

As we have often noted, the spiritual truths of the Scriptures are primarily unveiled in the New Testament, whereas the Old Testament presents pictures and types. Therefore, when beginning one's pursuit of Bible reading, it is often best to start with the New Testament. What, then, does this Old Testament picture of Moses lifting up the bronze serpent on a pole signify? During His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ personally unsealed the answer for us.

In the third chapter of the Gospel of John, an elder, highly respected Pharisee named Nicodemus came to visit Jesus under the cover of night. He was a ruler of the Jews and a teacher of the law who instructed others in the divine commandments. Yet deep within, he recognized that while he could teach the law, he was unable to fulfill it himself, leaving him inwardly conflicted. When he

observed Jesus speaking and acting with full divine authority, he humbly approached Him at night, hoping to receive higher instruction.

Yet the Lord Jesus responded with words that Nicodemus could not comprehend at all. Jesus declared, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” and emphasized that one must be born of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. Having never encountered such deep spiritual reality, Nicodemus found it incomprehensible. To explain it to him, Jesus spoke the words recorded in John 3:14–15, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Since Nicodemus was a teacher of the law, he was thoroughly versed in the Pentateuch. Jesus therefore pointed him to the example of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, stating that just as the serpent was lifted up, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. When the Israelites were bitten by fiery serpents, the deadly venom left them awaiting certain death in the desert. God provided a means of rescue, and Moses obeyed by crafting a bronze serpent and mounting it on a pole. Anyone who looked at the bronze serpent lived.

Jesus explained that this bronze serpent was a prophetic type of the Son of Man, pointing directly to Himself. Jesus is that serpent, destined to be hung upon the cross as God's ordained way of salvation. In Moses’ day, every afflicted Israelite who looked at the bronze serpent lived. In the New Testament era, God’s salvation is not confined to the physical nation of Israel, but reaches out to all mankind. Whoever believes into Jesus receives eternal life—the very regeneration and being born of the Spirit that Jesus described to Nicodemus.

In the beginning, Adam, the forefather of humanity, was seduced by the serpent in Eden, ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and was injected with the venom of the serpent. From that point forward, all descendants of Adam are born tainted with serpent venom—the sinful nature. As Romans 5:12 reveals, through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, so that death spread to all men. Not a single person in the world can escape the destiny of death.

God therefore sent His only begotten Son into the world, taking upon Himself the form of man. Because He was entirely without sin, He alone was qualified to bear all sins on behalf of mankind.

When Jesus was hung on the cross, God laid the sins of all upon Him. Romans 8:3 declares that He came in the likeness of sinful flesh, and God condemned sin in the flesh. Bronze signifies divine judgment, and Jesus truly became that bronze serpent. In outward appearance He took the form of the serpent because He bore all our sins, yet He Himself was entirely sinless—just as the bronze serpent possessed the outward form of a snake but had no venom. Bearing God's righteous judgment for our sake, He was crucified and died for all, so that anyone willing to look to Him and believe in Him might receive eternal life.

Eternal life is the divine, uncreated life that comes from God. Three days after His death, Jesus was raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, sat down at the right hand of God the Father, and poured out the Holy Spirit so that all who believe into Him may be born of the Spirit. This leads directly to the most famous verse in all of Scripture, John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” This single verse forms the foundational reality of salvation for all New Testament believers.

The Old Testament type was Moses lifting up the bronze serpent in the wilderness. The healing virtue did not lie in the physical metal of the serpent itself, but in the fact that those who looked upon it acted on God's word in faith, receiving divine healing through that faith. It is identical for New Testament believers today: salvation does not come from venerating the image or object of a cross, but from placing one's faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Through faith, we receive the Holy Spirit, who imparts eternal life into us.

The bronze serpent lifted up by Moses later became a venerated relic among the Israelites, to the point that people burned incense to worship it down to the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah. Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. As 2 Kings 18:4 records, “He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut

down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan." King Hezekiah shattered the bronze serpent because it had degenerated into an idol for the people.

The same caution holds true for us today. Christ crucified on our behalf is the emblem of our salvation. We must treasure this reality within our hearts and live a life pleasing to God out of gratitude, rather than treating the cross itself as a holy object to be revered, which turns it into an idol and provokes God's displeasure.

Verses 10–12: "Now the children of Israel moved on and camped in Oboth. And they journeyed from Oboth and camped at Ije Abarim, in the wilderness which faces Moab, toward the sunrise. From there they moved and camped in the Valley of Zered."

Here Scripture records the continuing journey of the Israelites: they first camped at Oboth, and then set out from Oboth to camp at Ije Abarim. Abarim refers to the mountainous region east of the Dead Sea, while Ije is the name of a town; because another town named Ije existed west of the Dead Sea, Abarim was specified to distinguish it. Ije Abarim was situated on the eastern side of Moab, facing it toward the sunrise. The land of Moab lay north of Edom, bordered by the Brook Zered. The Brook Zered flowed from east to west, emptying into the southern end of the Dead Sea near Zoar; during the dry season, the brook bed formed the Valley of Zered.

The encampment of Israel in the Valley of Zered was a momentous event. Deuteronomy 2:13–15 recounts: "'Now rise and cross over the Valley of the Zered.' So we crossed over the Valley of the Zered. And the time we took to come from Kadesh Barnea until we crossed over the Valley of the Zered was thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war was consumed from the midst of the camp, just as the Lord had sworn to them. For indeed the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from the midst of the camp until they were consumed." Here Moses personally recounts the scene of crossing the Brook Zered as he composed Deuteronomy.

Moses specifically noted that God commanded them to rise and cross the Brook Zered. At that time, the stream had dried up, and they crossed through the valley and camped there. Moses recalled that exactly thirty-eight years had elapsed from their initial departure from Kadesh until they crossed the Brook Zered. This was the duration of wandering decreed by God because of the unbelief of the older generation. Throughout those thirty-eight years, that generation continually rebelled against God, constantly grumbled, and repeatedly threatened to return to Egypt. Because they lacked faith to enter the good land promised by God, He decreed that all of them would perish in the wilderness. Thirty-eight years later, every single numbered warrior of that first generation, with the sole exceptions of Joshua and Caleb, had died in the wilderness.

Numbers 1:46 records that the original census of fighting men totaled 603,550. Moses explicitly wrote that the hand of the Lord was against them to destroy them from the midst of the camp. Thus, aside from natural attrition, the entire first numbered generation was systematically wiped out by the hand of the Lord. At every recurring instance of complaint, God sent judgment: some were swallowed up alive by the earth, some were consumed by fire, some died under plagues, and others were struck down by fiery serpents. All of these were manifestations of the hand of the Lord against them to consume them. From the solemn history of that older generation, we see that God is not to be trifled with. He removed the old generation so that the new generation could follow His leading in faith and march into the good land.

Dear brothers and sisters, the very same spiritual principle applies to our own lives today. If our old self does not die, our new self can never follow God with true freedom. Therefore, the daily lesson set before us is what Paul declared in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man was lifted up, that whoever believes into Him may have eternal life. Dear Lord Jesus, You bore the judgment of God for our sins, like the bronze serpent raised upon the pole. All who look upon You in faith receive

divine life. Thank You for giving us the wisdom of salvation, that through faith we may be regenerated. We pray that You preserve our daily walk, that in genuine thanksgiving we may remember all You have accomplished for us and willingly walk in Your pattern, declaring that we have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. Empower us to live the life of the new man. In the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.