

LOOK AND LIVE: A BIBLICAL ANALOGY FOR FAITH

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Soli Deo Gloria!

"... and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." (**Numbers 21:8**)

"That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (**John 3:15**)

CALVINISM'S UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH. Scripture asserts that the unregenerate man is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph2:1). Calvinists understand this assertion to mean that "the sinner is so spiritually bankrupt that *he can do nothing pertaining to his salvation*"¹; he cannot even respond to God by exercising the personal faith required for salvation (Act16:30-31) without first being sovereignly regenerated by God². From Paul's use of the word "dead" in Ephesians 2:1, Calvinists construct a metaphor of the unregenerate man as a corpse (R.C. Sproul) or a cadaver (John MacArthur); since a literal corpse would not be able to respond to God in any way, they conclude an unregenerate man cannot either. This is Calvinism's doctrine of Total Depravity. But is the analogy of a corpse/cadaver for an unregenerate man accurate? Actually, **the Bible uses a very different analogy.**

NUMBERS 21:5-9. This passage records Israel's 10th and final episode of murmuring in the wilderness (cf. Num14:22). Especially heinous was the fact that Israel's sin on this occasion was to despise God's supernatural provision of "bread" (i.e., manna; v5), without which they would have died. The LORD sent a plague of "fiery serpents" among the people, causing those bitten to die. Israel repented, and Moses interceded on behalf of the congregation (v6). Although the people's petition was for God to "take away the serpents" (v6), God did not grant this request; instead, the LORD provided a procedure to access His mercy and be healed once bitten.

The LORD instructed Moses to "make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole" (v7). Moses set a serpent made of bronze (v9; Cp., 2Kgs18:4) atop a pole, and in so doing presented the people with a profound and prophetic type. Typologically, the serpent represents sin (Gen3:1-6), and bronze, being the metal commonly associated with fire, connotes judgment (Exod27:1-2); the type portrays sin being judged on a pole. Any Israelite who was bitten simply had to look upon the bronze serpent lifted atop a pole (presumably so that all could see), and immediately upon doing so "he lived" (v9). Note that this procedure did not prevent one from being bitten, normally a certain death sentence, but it provided healing once bitten. All Israelites possessed the natural ability to obey the LORD and look upon the bronze serpent; no preceding supernatural work of God was necessary to provide (natural) sight to the afflicted people.

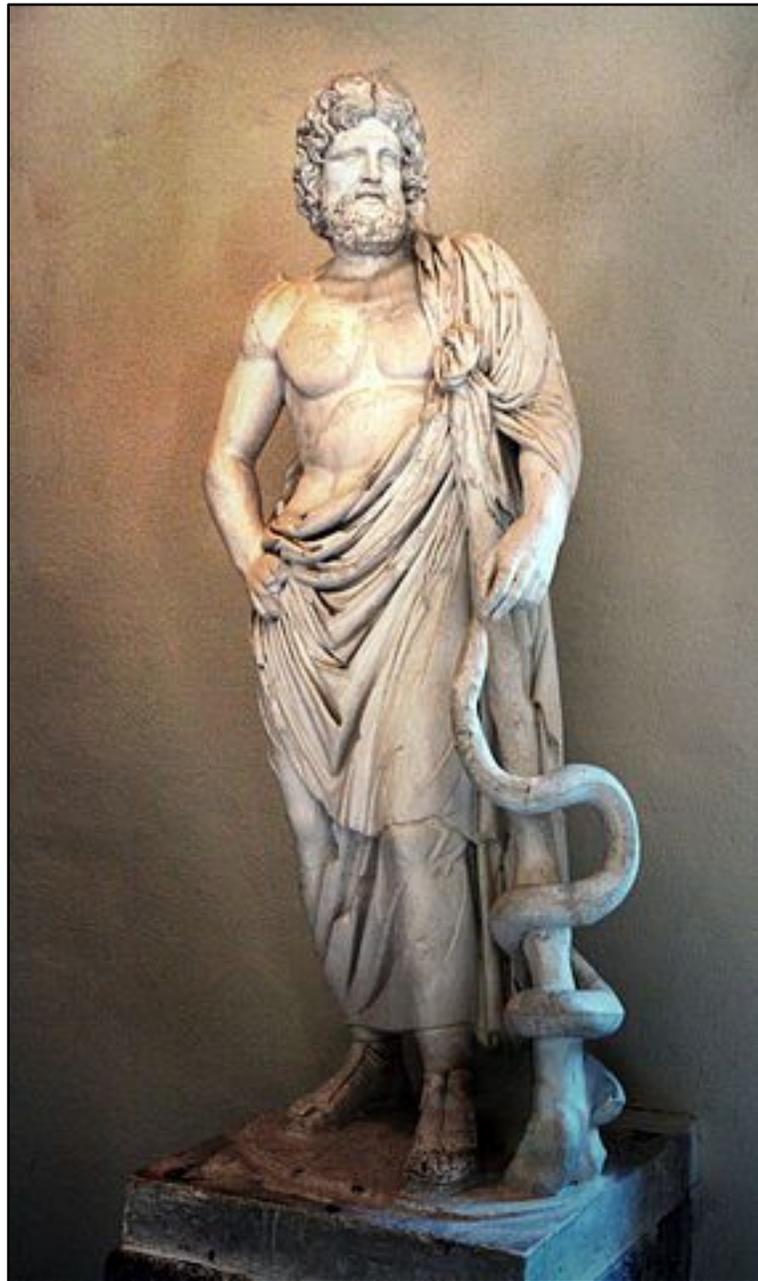
JOHN 3:14-16. Jesus Himself revealed that the historical occasion of Moses "lift[ing] up the serpent in the wilderness" was a type of His own crucifixion (v14) in which He was made "sin for us" and judged (2Cor5:21). When Jesus, in the very next verse, asserts "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (v15), He points to the Numbers 21:5-9 event as the proper (Biblical) analogy for understanding faith. Sinful man who is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph2:1) is not a corpse/cadaver, but one afflicted with a fatal disease having no natural cure. The sinner can access God's mercy, offered to all on the condition of faith. Just as the Israelites needed no preceding supernatural work of God to provide natural vision, so also no

¹ Steele and Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 25.

² An axiom of Calvinism is that regeneration precedes faith.

preceding supernatural work of God (i.e., regeneration) is necessary for a sinner to believe in the "only begotten Son" of God (v16).

FOOTNOTE ON PAGAN PERVERSION. Most pagan mythologies can be linked to perversions of genuine Biblical truth (Rom1:21-23). Such is the case with the bronze serpent on a pole. The modern medical community has adopted a serpent on a pole as the emblem of its profession, an emblem they believe to be associated with Aesculapius, the "god" of healing in the Greek pantheon. But clearly, the pagan Greek tradition has its roots in the historical event of Israel in the wilderness recorded in Numbers 21:5-9, which itself is a type of the cure for sin provided by Jesus Christ in His work on the cross. In its choice of a serpent on a pole as its professional emblem, modern physicians have unwittingly acknowledged that genuine healing of the fatal disease that matters above all others (i.e., sin) comes only by believing in Jesus Christ!



Depiction of Aesculapius holding his staff of healing.