

The Bible refers to a fiery colored bronze snake on a pole used for a good, Godly purpose that eventually was worshipped, and given the name Nehushtan. This bronze snake on a pole is mentioned by Jesus as a comparison to the salvation from God that comes through him.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness



serpent symbol on Mount Nebo

3:14

WHY THE FIERY SNAKE ON A POLE?

On the years long trek from Egypt through the almost barren desert of Sinai to the promised land, many of the Israelites began to complain about God and Moses of the difficult conditions of the journey. Their lack of appreciation resulted in Yahweh sending vey

aggressive poisonous snakes into their very large entourage to eliminate the ungrateful complainers. The sick and dying victims realized their sin, repented, and begged their leader Moses to intercede with God on their behalf.

“Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against 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.’ So Yahweh sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people so that many people of Israel died. Then the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned because we have spoken against Yahweh and against you; pray to Yahweh, that He may remove the serpents from us.” And Moses prayed for the people. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery *serpent* and set it on a standard; and it will be that everyone who is bitten and looks at it, will live.’ And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it happened, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.”—Numbers 21:1-9 LSB

Yahweh responded to Moses’ intercession with instructions for a solution, resulting in a bronzed serpent being put up on a pole for the victims to gaze at to recover from their terminal snakebites.

HOW IS JESUS LIKE THE BRONZE SERPENT?

“These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Colossians 2:17 NIV). Jesus is comparable to the bronze serpent that people gazed at to get well and live.

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man must be lifted up” (John 3:14 LSB). Jesus is comparable to the bronze serpent that people gazed at

to get well and live. While the Nehushtan bronze serpent was a temporary, physical symbol, Jesus is the ultimate, spiritual reality!

“All are justified freely by his grace that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood” (Romans 3:24-25 NIV). Just as the fiery snake (Numbers 21) was the only way to live after being bitten by deadly snakes; Jesus is the only way for sinful humans to be forgiven of their sins, and to receive eternal life.

“Lifted Up”: Jesus explicitly compares His crucifixion to Moses lifting the snake, stating that whoever believes in him will not perish (John 3:14).

The Object of Faith: Both require looking past the means (*i.e.*; *the bronze serpent on a pole*) **“There is one God and ONE MEDIATOR between God and mankind, CHRIST JESUS, who gave himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Timothy 2:5-6 NIV)** , to the giver of **“every good and perfect gift . . . the Father” (James 1:17 NIV).**

THE BRONZE SERPENT BECAME AN IDOL NAMED NEHUSHTAN

The bronze serpent put on a pole made by Moses in the desert hundreds of years earlier was no longer needed, but apparently was retained as a historic relic.

“Hezekiah . . . became king . . . he did what was right in the sight of Yahweh . . . He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those the sons of Israel were burning incense to it, and it was called Nehushtan. He trusted in Yahweh” (2 Kings 18:1-5 LSB). The Israelites eventually turned Yahweh’s means of salvation into an idol they worshipped, the Nehushtan bronze serpent. I, thus breaking the first and second commandments (Exodus 20:3-5), so good king Hezekiah destroyed it.

By destroying it, Hezekiah was removing a stumbling block to true worship, emphasizing that even objects with a godly origin can become idols if misused. Hezekiah's reform was a return to monotheistic worship, focusing solely on Yahweh, and it prefigures the cleansing work of Christ, who calls for worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24).—Bible Hub Study Bible

HOW HAS JESUS BECOME LIKE NEHUSHTAN?

Many Christians fervently regularly worship Jesus as God.

“Depend on it, my hearer, you never will go to heaven unless you are prepared to worship Jesus Christ as God.” — Charles H. Spurgeon, famous 19th century theologian

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us” (1 Corinthians 10:11 NIV). Jesus is also comparable to the bronze serpent named Nehushtan, which was turned into an idol.

Worshipping Jesus is similar to Nehushtan worship (Numbers 21:4-9, 2 Kings 18:4) because both represent a God-provided means of salvation that required faith to look to for healing. Just as the bronze snake was a physical, lifted-up instrument of God's healing snake bitten people, Jesus was “lifted up” at his execution to save people from sin's deleterious effects (John 3:14).

“Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were” (1 Corinthians

10:6-7 NIV). Warning Against Idolatry: The comparison serves as a warning not to turn the means of salvation (Jesus, like Nehushtan) into an idol, but to always remember, that, according to the Bible, **“the true worshippers will worship the Father” (John 4:23).**

CONCLUSION

The danger, as highlighted by Hezekiah’s actions, is focusing on the “Nehustan” (the relic), rather than on the Almighty God who provided it. **“Yahweh . . . Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit” (Psalm 103:2-4 LSB).**

“Guard yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21 LSB) applies to Christians at all times, in every situation. There is no Biblical directive or authorization to worship anyone other than “the Father” **(John 4:23)**, not even “the mediator . . . Christ Jesus” **(1 Timothy 2:5-6 NIV).** To worship anything or anyone other than Yahweh God the Father is idolatry **(Exodus 20:3-5; John 4:23).**

Worshipping Jesus is like worshipping Nehushtan.