As Moses Lifted Up the Serpent

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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

Introduction:

1. It is communion Sunday, the first of each month, and we want to remember our Lord's death.
2. While we study John's first epistle and the glorious Word of life there, He was lifted up for us.
3. Jesus Himself drew this comparison to Moses' brass serpent to expose Nicodemus's ignorance.
4. This very short outline and sermon is greatly condensed for maximum focus on Christ's death.
5. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, did not understand very simple doctrinal concepts that we love.
6. In the verse before the two we have selected, Jesus confounded him and modern Bible versions.
7. Jesus came from heaven to reveal the truth (Pr 30:4; Jn 3:31) but was still there in His deity!
8. There is much more to be learned or studied about this section of the Bible preached before.

Suggested Links for Deeper Study:

1. Exposition of John 3 (2016).
2. Restoring John 3:14-21 (2006).
3. John 3:16 Revisited (2000).
4. About the Brass Serpent (2009).
5. God's Will or Free Will (2003).
6. Questions for Arminians (2013).

Moses Lifted Up a Serpent

A. The context and recorded details of this event are in the O.T. (Numbers 21:1-9).
   1. The only other reference to it is when Hezekiah destroyed it (II Kings 18:4).
   2. Foolish and superstitious Israel had been worshipping it for 800 years or so.
   3. Good king Hezekiah called it *Nehushtan!* Nothing but a mere piece of brass!
   4. Hezekiah's descendants later married a woman, *Nehushta* (II Kings 24:8)!

B. God told Moses to create and elevate a brass serpent to save living Israelites.
   1. This foolish and rebellious church easily forgot a great victory (Num 21:1-3).
   2. They then chose to be discouraged and blame God and Moses (Num 21:4-5).
   3. So God justly punished these wicked persons by fiery serpents (Num 21:6).
   4. Those God had chosen to die for their wickedness did die – *many* (Num 21:6).

5. After many died, the rest repented to ask Moses to pray for them (Num 21:7).
6. God told Moses to make a similar fiery snake and put it on a pole (Num 21:8).
7. If a bitten person looked at Moses' serpent, then he would not die (Num 21:8).
8. That is exactly what happened with the brass serpent Moses made (Num 21:9).

C. Let us make sure we know and remember the exact role that Moses' serpent had.
1. The serpent did no good for those God already judged and killed (Num 21:6).
2. The serpent did not bring any back to life, for it was far too late (Num 21:8).
3. The brass serpent only helped the repentant living to stay alive (Num 21:7-9).
4. Looking was not a source of life but a way to maintain life a man already had.
5. Moses' serpent did not help any Israelites that died of serpents before or after.
6. Moses' serpent did not help any Gentiles that died of serpents at any time.
7. By it, Jesus taught (a) death on a tree and (b) faith to lay hold of eternal life.

Jesus Compared Moses' Serpent

A. Our text is two verses in Jesus' secret discussion with Nicodemus of the Jews.

B. The grammar of *as … even so* expressly states a strong similarity of two events.
1. **As**. With the clauses transposed for emphasis; as…so: a. In what manner…(in that manner).
2. **So**. As…So: Denoting more or less exact correspondence, similarity, or proportion.
3. **Even**. Exactly, precisely, just. A. of manner; often followed by as, thus, so.
4. See this emphatic construction in John 5:21; 10:15; I Cor 15:22; Rom 5:18.

C. The comparison being made is primarily of being *lifted up* for it is stated twice.
1. Lifted up is a phrase of the Bible that indicates the form of death of a person.
2. Jesus used it at least three times in this gospel alone (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32).
3. John, by the Spirit, explained Jesus intended death by crucifixion (Jn 12:33).
4. John, by the Spirit, explained how Roman limits on Israel fulfilled prophecy.
5. Israel's capital punishment was stoning (John 18:31-32), but that would have violated a number of prophecies (Ps 22:16; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). Hallelujah!
6. Like the brass serpent, Jesus would be suspended on a pole off the ground.
7. He hung between heaven and earth as Mediator and Daysman of His people.

D. His prophecy, consistent with previous doctrine, surely confounded Nicodemus.
1. Jesus had hit this man up with things He had never considered (John 3:1-13).
2. Jews did not see that Messiah had to die (Jn 12:34; Matt 16:21-23; Acts 1:6).
3. They rather expected Messiah to liberate them from the oppression of Rome.
4. They further presumed that the Messiah was only for Israel, not the Gentiles.
5. They further presumed that salvation was by Moses' Law only, not by faith.

Jesus Was Lifted Up for US

A. The gospel is good news of God's plan from eternity of eternal life by His Son!
   1. God had promised eternal life in eternity, but it was always and only by Jesus Christ's death (Titus 1:2; II Tim 1:9-10; Heb 9:11-15; 13:20; Eph 1:3-14).
   2. Never was there any place or room for Moses' Law (Ga 3:21; Rom 3:20-22).
   3. The kingdom is a spiritual one far transcending little Israel (Heb 12:22-24).
   4. By far the greatest number of saved would be Gentiles (John 12:20-24,31-32).

B. This sacrificial death was to secure eternal life for all believers in Jesus Christ.
   1. The primary point is Messiah's crucifixion – *lifted up* – to secure eternal life.
   2. The second point – John's purpose – is evidence of life (I John 5:13; Jn 20:31).
   3. The reason for 3:14's comparison is Jesus *lifted up,* not an offer to get saved.
   4. Jesus prophesied to Nicodemus He must die a Roman death, not a Jewish one.
   5. His death was necessary to guarantee eternal life for the worshippers of God.

C. Jesus was lifted up – He was suspended on a cross between heaven and earth.
   1. Note verses from John about lifted up (Jn 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34; 18:31-32).
   2. He died a horrible death on a tree with nails (I Pet 2:24; Gal 3:13; Ps 22:16).
   3. Read all of Psalm 22 for the most graphic description of Jesus' sufferings.
   4. He was nailed to the cross on the ground and then dropped into its stand!
   5. He was lifted up so that His body weight became a terrible, tearing burden!
   6. He was lifted up on that cross fully nude to be fully exposed to any nearby!
   7. He was lifted up with arms outstretched and could not find relief for joints.
   8. He was lifted up with arms fastened unable to wipe his bloody, sweaty face.
   9. He was lifted up and found it very difficult to breathe by the pulling weight.
   10. He was lifted up so that His battered face beyond recognition could be seen.
   11. He was lifted up so all could see the contradiction with the sign overhead.
   12. He was lifted up so His scourged and torn back could rub against the cross.
   13. He was lifted up so His naked face from His beard ripped could be viewed.
   14. He was lifted up without a chance to sleep after a night of grief and torture.
   15. He was lifted up to fully endure crucifixion pain by rejecting the sedative.

D. Lest you think the physical sufferings of Jesus were all, think again carefully!
   1. The *physical* aspects of crucifixion are what most read about and consider.
   2. There were also the *nonphysical* elements of His sufferings often neglected.
   3. There was a *spiritual conflict* He had extensively with Satan and his angels.
   4. There were *divine consequences* for taking our sins; His Father forsook Him.

E. There is no offer, invitation, possibility, or potentiality in this verse whatsoever.

1. God's necessary work for believing on Jesus Christ had already been stated very clearly as requiring God's supernatural work first (John 1:5,10,13; 3:3,8).
2. John used the rest of his gospel and first epistle that faith follows regeneration (John 5:24; 6:37,44,47,65; 8:47; 10:26-28; 17:2-3; I John 4:15; 5:1).
3. Faith by a man, requiring regenerative creation, proves election (Acts 13:48).
4. The preaching of the cross, no matter how well done, moves none but the elect and regenerate (Luke 16:30-31; I Cor 1:18-31; 2:1-5,14; II Cor 2:14-17; etc.).

F. How eternal life was gained and those that get it was entirely new to Nicodemus.
   1. The Jews were sure they were saved by birth and/or keeping Moses' Law.
   2. Paul had to write both Romans and Galatians to counteract Jewish legalism.
   3. But Jesus came for us; He had other sheep He had to save – us (John 10:16).
   4. And He was lifted up – cruelly nailed to a Roman cross – for us (Rom 5:7-8).