

The Antivenom to the Fake Snake on a Stake

Every story in Scripture teaches us either what to do or what not to do—and sometimes both. These history lessons were recorded, so we can glean wisdom from them.

Why fall into the same trap they fell into? Why not avoid their mistakes? The ancient account of the venomous vipers infesting Israel's camp is mentioned five times in Scripture by four different authors (Num. 21:4-9, Deut. 8:15, 2 Kings 18:4, Jogn 3:14, 1 Cor. 10:9) adding weight to its importance and credibility.

Paul explained why these stories are still relevant to us: "Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not ... tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents ... Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:6, 9-11; NKJV).

Israel had just come through a tough time of national mourning. Both Miriam and Aaron died a few months apart in the previous chapter, so they were emotionally low (Num. 20:1, 22-29). They couldn't find water again, but when God used Moses to miraculously bring water out of a rock, they were happy temporarily (Num. 20:8-11).

Plus, the king of Edom denied them passage through his land, so they had to take the long route around (Num. 20:14-21). Then they won a battle against the King of Arad's army (Num. 21:1-3). They were on a roller coaster ride of ups and downs, highs and lows. Sound familiar? Don't be a yo-yo Christian—up and down, flying high one day, then dragging bottom the next. Our emotions will fluctuate but our devotion must remain constant.

“And the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way” (Num. 21:4).

Discouragement is one of the biggest tools in the devil’s bag of dirty tricks. To discourage means “to deprive of courage, hope or confidence; to dishearten, dissuade or to lose enthusiasm.” We all battle discouragement when we feel like we’re on a spiritual treadmill and not making progress.

When the future seems hopeless, we start feeling helpless. Remember, “Life without Jesus is a hopeless end; life with Jesus is endless hope!” Keep fighting the good fight of faith. Press on and pray through negative thoughts and emotions. Surround yourself with positive friends. Feed your faith and starve your doubts. Sometimes it’s the last key on the ring that opens the lock. So keep asking, seeking and knocking because eventually you will receive a breakthrough.

Israel used their same old playbook when they faced problems:

- The people complained.
- The people spoke favorably about Egypt.
- The people blamed Moses.

They fondly remembered the plentiful food of Egypt but conveniently forgot the downside (slavery). When we speak negativity and unbelief, we open the door to demonic influences—“For whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23, KJV). The snakes crawled into the camp on the heels of their complaining.

The Crisis: God sent fiery serpents (poisonous snakes) to chasten His people. Like a scene in a horror movie, snakes bit people, victims convulsed in pain and slowly died in agony. Chaos ensued as people ran, screamed and killed snakes with shovels and sticks. Imagine the panic when these slithery critters crawled in people’s tents.

Numerous graves were dug, bodies were buried and funerals were held. Serpents are symbolic of demons, and venom represents the poison of sin with which we've all been infected (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). The people begged Moses to pray for God to "take away" the serpents. Notice God didn't remove them immediately, but He did provide a way of salvation.

The Cure: God told Moses to "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" (Num. 21:8). Brass or bronze speaks of judgment in Scripture. The altars and lavers of Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple were made of brass or bronze. They were placed in the outer courts where sin was dealt with before the priests entered the holy place where all the furniture was golden.

Moses probably learned to forge metal from his brother-in-law, Hobab, or his father-in-law, Jethro (Num. 10:29, Judg. 4:11). They were Kenites, a clan of metalsmiths known for their craftsmanship. Remember, Aaron fashioned the golden calf from smelted jewelry (Ex. 32:1-4). Both brothers were skilled metalsmiths. When the bitten Israelites looked at the brazen serpent, the venom lost its potency.

Christ's Comment: Jesus told Nicodemus about 1,400 years later, "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." Why did Jesus compare Himself to a vile snake—the epitome of evil. Because He became sin on the cross for us. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Like a sponge, He absorbed our lust, pride, greed, hate, selfishness, jealousy and bitterness. The poison of sin has infected us all, but Jesus provided the antidote! When we look with faith and repentance to the cross, the venom of sin loses its power.

Recently, a hiker was bitten by a rattlesnake. He was out in

the middle of nowhere, but fortunately, he had an antivenom kit in his backpack. It saved his life. A doctor estimated by the fang marks that it was a mature snake, and he would have never survived without it. The blood of Jesus is our antivenom to sin! Keep your eyes on Jesus, keep your focus on the cross—that's your source of salvation and victory!

Hezekiah's Crusade: Hezekiah, the 13th king of Judah, led a spiritual revival and a crusade against idolatry about 680 years after Moses made the brazen serpent. People started burning incense to and worshipping the old relic as an idol. Hezekiah destroyed it—"He ... 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" (2 Kings 18:4). Nehushtan simply means "a piece of brass."

Hezekiah was saying, "You're worshipping a piece of brass, it has no supernatural powers. It was merely an instrument God used."

Lesson: Don't worship the instruments God uses; worship the God who uses the instruments. He has the real power! We often put people on an idolatrous pedestal by adoring celebrities, movie stars, singers, musicians, athletes, politicians and even ministers. They are human vessels just like us. If you look to people, you will be disappointed. Keep your focus on Christ (Heb. 12:2).

A sculpture combining the brazen serpent and the cross by Italian artist Giovanni Fantoni stands on Mount Nebo, the site where Moses viewed Canaan before he died. Indeed, the cross is our passport to the promised land. There are also two icons used for medicine: the caduceus symbol (two snakes intertwined on a winged pole, often used on pins for medical school graduations) and the Rod of Asclepius (one snake wrapped around a pole, used as logos on ambulances and hospitals).

While they originate from Greek mythology, they still point

back to Moses' brazen serpent, which points us to the cross. Now, we don't look to a fake snake on a stake for help and healing; we look to the living Son of God. Look and live! {eoa}

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