

Youth Teaching Resources

March 11, 2018



Lent: Keeping Faith (February 18-March 25)

Exodus 20:1-17 – “A Covenant Nation”

Numbers 21:4-9 – “Covenant Breaking”

Psalm 51 (RCL 51:1-12) – “Covenant Renewal”

Psalm 40:1-17 (RCL 40:5-10) – “Covenant Celebration”

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Covenant Breaking

Numbers 21:4-9

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

PARENT PREP

As much as we would like, we can not take all the pitfalls away from our students. But, if our goals is to help them to grow into mature adults, should we take away all their pitfalls. In Numbers 21 the people pray for the snakes to be taken away but God doesn't take them away. Instead, God provides a way for the people to be healed after being bit. What can this tell us about our parenting? What if we didn't take away the pitfalls, but helped our students realize how they can overcome what has happened to them? Maybe next time they won't make the same mistake.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip "Why did it have to be snakes?" From *Indiana Jones*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) Would you be scared to drop into that pit with all the snakes in it?
- 2) Why are snakes so scary to people?
- 3) What other stories do you know of where snakes play a pivotal role?
- 4) Would you get rid of snakes if you could? Explain.

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Numbers 21:4-9. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) The people of God have been rescued out of Egypt but now complain. Why do you believe the people became restless with God?
- 2) How is God portrayed in this passage? Is this the view of God you normally hold?
- 3) What did it take for the people of God to stop complaining about God? Do you think they would have stopped if it weren't for the snakes?

Information *continued*

- 4) The people pray for God to get rid of the snakes, but God only provides a remedy for being healed. Why do you believe God does this? What might these snakes represent in our own lives?
- 5) Jesus recalls this story when talking to Nicodemus. How was Jesus' life like the how Moses lifted up the bronze snake?

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the "Digging Deeper" portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) Why would they have walked around Edom?
- 2) What word play is going on in this story?

You may also want your group to discuss "The Hardest Question" if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as "The Hardest Question": Why were snakes so significant?

Transformation

Conclude your time together with a debate. Transition from your time of discussion into the debate by creating two equal teams. Instruct Team #1 to defend the idea that all evil should be removed from the world and instruct Team #2 to defend the idea that we need evil in the world. Allow the teams 5 minutes to prep and then begin the debate. When the debate has finished, or the time allotted for this activity is complete, facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) Was it difficult to debate your position? Would you have rather been on the other side? Explain.
- 2) Is there merit to both sides? How can this be when they are opposite positions?
- 3) What do you believe would happen if all the evil suddenly disappeared?
- 4) How is it better to learn how to deal with the problem than removing the problem to begin with?
- 5) What scenarios do you need to spend some time learning how to get out of?

Close with a prayer thanking God for the tools that have been given to us so that we might redeem our lives when we have messed up.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Under the ban—The Hebrew verb translated as “utterly destroy” or “put under the ban” is *haram*. It is used in Israel’s making of the vow (v. 2), and in describing their action in putting the enemy towns under the ban. This is reflected in the name they gave to the area: “Hormah” is from the same root.

Edom—When the traveling horde of Israelites came near the territory known as Edom, they ran into an obstacle: though the Edomites were reportedly descended from Jacob’s brother Esau, they did not trust their distant cousins:

Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom: “Thus says your brother Israel: ‘You know all the hardships we have experienced, how our ancestors went down into Egypt, and we lived in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians treated us and our ancestors badly. So when we cried to the LORD, he heard our voice and sent a messenger, and has brought us up out of Egypt. Now we are here in Kadesh, a town on the edge of your country. Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through the fields or through the vineyards, nor will we drink water from any well. We will go by the King’s Highway; we will not turn to the right or the left until we have passed through your region.’”

But Edom said to him, “You will not pass through me, or I will come out against you with the sword.” Then the Israelites said to him, “We will go along the highway, and if we or our cattle drink any of your water, we will pay for it. We will only pass through on our feet, without doing anything else.”

But he said, “You may not pass through.” Then Edom came out against them with a large and powerful force. So Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border; therefore Israel turned away from him. (Num. 20:14-21, NET)

Nehushtan—The common word for serpent is *nahash*, while the basic word for copper or bronze (copper alloyed with a small amount of tin) is *nehoshet*. The adjectival form is *nahush*, as in “bronze pillar.” The name *Nahushtan* recalled both the bronze and serpentine aspects of the image, and was probably considered to be a divine name.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Again, or above?—In John 3:3, the Greek word behind the familiar King James translation “born again” can also mean “from above.” The word, *anōthen*, is an adverb that can have either meaning. It is used five times in the Fourth Gospel (3:3, 7, 31; 19:11, 23). In 3:31, 19:11, and 19:23, context shows that the intended meaning is “above,” and that is almost certainly the author’s intent in 3:3 and 3:7.

While Jesus meant “from above,” however, Nicodemus must have took it to mean “again,” otherwise he would not have asked “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4).

The “misunderstood question” is one of John’s favorite techniques in showing how Jesus taught: when someone misunderstood something, it gave him an opportunity to explain it more clearly.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Why were snakes so significant?

Numbers 21:4-9 is a particularly interesting story for a variety of reasons, one being the historical and cultural context: we should be aware that serpent gods were often worshiped in the ancient world. The Canaanites worshiped a serpent goddess who appeared on sacred plaques with a serpent coiled about her neck. Images of serpent gods have been found at Debir, Shechem, Hazor, and Gezer, along with several from the temples at Beth Shan.

The stand at left, probably an incense burner, was found at Beth She'an, and dates to about 1500 BCE.



The symbolic image of Asclepius at right marked the way to an infirmary in ancient Ephesus.

In Greek mythology, serpents were closely associated with healing, and there was an entire cult surrounding the worship of Asclepias, the serpent god. Even today, the most common symbol of the medical profession portrays two snakes wrapped around a pole. It is called a Caduceus, and it originated from the ancient belief that serpents were associated with healing.

Snakes do not appear often in the Bible, but when they show up, they are usually significant. The serpent of Genesis 3 quickly comes to mind, an ancient story of a beautiful and clever creature whose smooth speech persuaded Eve that God was holding out on humans by preserving secrets in the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. She and Adam disobeyed God by eating the tree's fruit, even though God had warned that it would mean death. Thus, the first biblical image of a serpent is one that results in rebellion and death – and in punishment for the serpent. The curse placed upon it, that “upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life” (Gen. 3:14) suggests a belief that the serpent originally had legs.

A serpent also appears in Exodus, where Moses meets God in a fiery, burning bush, and hears God's call to deliver his people from Egypt. When Moses asked for a sign to prove that God had sent him, the Lord gave Moses the ability to turn his shepherd's staff into a formidable snake, and back again (Exod. 4:1-5). Moses passed the staff-to-serpent demonstration on to Aaron.

The Hardest Question *continued*

When they performed it before the Pharaoh, the text says, royal sorcerers were able to perform a similar trick, but Aaron's snake swallowed theirs (Exod. 7:8-12).

Serpents appear often in the prophets as a symbol of evil or danger. Amos spoke of a judgement so sure that it would be like a man who escaped from a lion and a bear, only to be bitten by a snake (Amos. 5:19).

In the New Testament, snakes also appear as a sign of danger and potential harm: parents would not give their children a snake instead of a fish (Matt. 7:10, Luke 11:11). In the Apocalypse, the term "serpent" is synonymous with "dragon" as a metaphor for Satan (Rev. 12:9, 14, 15; 20:2).