



## The Sojourn of the Snake

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There have been many popular movie series in recent years - every summer there is a new *Shrek* or *Sideman* movie. And the Lord of the Rings trilogy was quite spectacular. But the movie series that I grew up with was the Indiana Jones with Harrison Ford as the bullwhip-toting archeologist.

Do you remember what he was afraid of? Snakes! In the movie “Raiders of the Lost Ark” you might recall Jones just escaped impossible dangers and is in the getaway airplane of his friend, Jock. He says to Jock: “There’s a big snake in the plane, Jock!” Jock replies, “ Oh that’s just my pet snake Reggie!” Jones says with panic, “I hate snakes, Jock, I hate ‘em!” Jock says, “Come on – show a little backbone, will ya?”

Whether you love them or hate them, today, as we continue our sermon series, God’s Barnyard Theology – we turn our attention to the slithering serpent. The snake is one of the most powerful symbolic animals in the ancient world and plays a very important role in the Bible. For example, who could forget...

- ... the story of Mary riding to Bethlehem on the snake?
- Or when Noah sent the snake out of the ark to find an olive branch?
- Or how about the famous story of the man who had 100 snakes, but lost one and searched all day to find it?

You are right – the snake was not in those stories. The snake is usually not such a nice creature in the Bible – it often represents evil, and Satan and temptation and punishment. And so like Indiana Jones we need to show some backbone this morning as we follow the Sojourn of the Snake.

We are going to start with the most famous snake Bible story - the Garden of Eden in Then we will travel to see Israel wandering in the wilderness where they met some angry snakes and finally we will follow the snake to Calvary. The snake – like the lamb we looked at last week, and like the lion we looked at the week before, will eventually lead us to Jesus Christ.

## I. Truths of Temptation – Genesis 3:1-6

Let's get started with Genesis chapter 3 – we start please turn there with me. Genesis 3: 1-6. Our focus here is to better understand some truths about temptation, by studying the Tempter, Satan, in the form of a serpent.

**Let's start with verse one:** Gen. 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. **(1) The first truth of temptation is that Satan tempts us, not God.** This is important for us to realize, because sometimes we hear people say that God tempts us in order to test our faith. God does indeed test our faith, but not through temptation. Rather - *Temptation is the bait that Satan uses to persuade us to do evil.* Jesus does not get us into temptation, but he gets us out of it! A second observation from verse one is that **(2) temptation comes in disguise.** The snake is described as being crafty or shrewd. That is not evil in itself – believers are called to be as shrewd as a serpent (Matt 10:16). However, Satan uses his cunning for evil to disguise himself. Satan does not arrive and say – “Here I am the Dark One – and I seek to ruin you're life.” No – he comes as in a tricky way – as an animal – a creature for whom Adam and Eve had responsibility – they were not afraid of him.

Now, look at the end of verse one. “And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” Here we see that **(3) that temptation says “Something good is being kept from you.”** The implication is that God is mean and withholding a blessing. We also see this in verse 5: “God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and

you will be like God.” Temptations argues – you are missing out on something you should have – so come get it!

Now look at verses two and three. Gen. 3:2 And the woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden **we may eat**; Gen. 3:3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it **or touch it, lest you die.**’” Here we see that **(4) Temptation can lead to rationalization.** We see the rationalization in three subtle ways that Eve changes God’s word. First, God earlier said to Adam and Eve – “Eat freely from the other trees” – There is great freedom in the Lord, but Eve only says – “we may eat.” Suddenly, God is not so generous. Second, God did not prohibit touching the tree, but Eve adds this. Suddenly God is rather strict, perhaps too strict? And third, the punishment is minimized. God said, if you eat the fruit – you will surely die. Eve said, “Lest you die” – like death might be optional here. Subtle changes, but the when faced with temptation – we begin to rationalize.

Continue on – Look at verse 4 – the serpent speaks, “You shall not surely die!” A direct contraction to God – and therefore untrue. All temptation is **(4) ultimately based on a lie.** Temptation lies to us about what God has said or has not said.

Verse 5, again, says “For God knows that in the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil.” Here we observe that **(6) temptation often appeals to a higher good.** It is not just – “Hey wouldn’t it be cool to disobey God?” But the central argument of the snake is that you will be accomplishing something greater apart from God – Eat and you will gain knowledge – a higher good.

Verse 6 – “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes...” **(7) Temptation often appeals to the senses** – and by that I mean it is attractive –It is the bright fly hiding the fishhook. Satan is crafty and temptation is packaged in such a way that you desire it. Finally **(8) Temptation demands a decision.**” Eve is faced with temptation – but that

does not mean she has to give into it, but it does mean she has to make a decision – to follow the hiss of the snake or to follow God.

And so, in summary, we see that Satan tempts us, not God – temptation often comes in disguise – it argues that something good is being withheld from you something you deserve – it compels us to rationalize appeals to a higher good, to the senses and demands we make a decision.

What temptations are you facing in your life? Adults – on what issue is the snake tickling your ear? Kids – youth – what temptations do you have? To disobey mom or dad? To steal? To lie? There is nothing more natural than temptation. At least that was what this ad said for Sun-Maid raisins. I don't know if that will sell more raisins, but it is true. Temptation is natural, and it is powerful, and it is evil and it is devastating.

Sam was the Grounds Manager in the physical plant where I worked. He was a Christian man, a family man, he would fit in well here, in our church. He is just like you, and me.

One day there had been some rough joking by some Sam's employees – not uncommon in that environment. An animal poster was put up in one of the worker's lockers and the names of some female employees were written above the animals. Some inappropriate jokes were made about the women and the poster and the animals. "Hey Sam – check this out," one of the men laughed. Sam laughed nervously, "Hey, you guys get back to work." He knew it wasn't right – but he wanted to be liked by his subordinates. It was crude, he thought – but no real harm done. No need to make a big deal out of it – you had to expect some ribbing in a place like the physical plant.

A few weeks went by and the Human Resources department knocked on Sam's door. There came to conduct an investigation. It seemed that some women in the department filed a harassment complaints – something about a poster and animals and inappropriate jokes.

The temptation became clear when the HR investigator asked bluntly: "Sam, did you know about the poster? Who put the poster? Why was it allowed to remain up for so long?" All of the

sudden Sam had a sick feeling in his stomach – He realized his job was on the line. He realized that he didn't handle things the way he should have, back then. The temptation was there – to lie about the poster and the animals and the jokes.

He started to rationalize in his mind: “I didn't really see it very long – I didn't get actually a close look at it.” “It's not my fault” He thought of the higher good – “If I lie - just a small lie – I keep my job. I have a wife and children.” The serpent was hissing in his ear, and Sam said, “*No, I never saw that poster. I don't know anything about it.*”

### **Punishment – Numbers 21:4-9**

What happens when we give into temptation? When we make the choice Eve made – when we make the choice Sam made? Follow the sojourn of the Snake with me from the Garden of Eden to the Wilderness – to Israel and Moses. Turn to Numbers 21:4-9. Verses 4

Num. 21:4 Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey.

Here is the context – it is almost 40 years after the previous generation rejected the Promised Land on the word of 10 spies. And now the next generation is on the cusp of entering the Promised Land. They are close. But Moses did not want to battle Edomites. He tried to negotiate a peace with them – but it did not work. To fight them would have been disastrous. And so he made a wise by very unpopular decision to take the people not to the north and west, but to the south and East.

It was a little like a few weeks ago, I was going north on 635 and needed to get off at Oates – it was late, the kids were tired, I was tired, we just wanted to get home. But they are doing construction at night – Oates exit was closed. How frustrating. I'll go up to Centerville – Centerville was closed! Because of the closed ramps – the 635 was like parking lot and we were heading in the absolute wrong direction. The kids had to go the bathroom, and I began to grumble – my usual tact

was set aside as I grumbled about what incompetent person would approve closing two exits in a row on a busy Friday night. Home was this way – we were going the opposite way!

Well...Moses said – Yes I know the Promised Land is this way but we are going that way. Would the people of Israel trust God and say, “it’s OK Moses, I know this is frustrating for you too but we are with you – God is in control? Or would they, like I did on 635, and begin to grumble? You know what happened – verse 5

Num. 21:5 And the people spoke against God and 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.”

Like Eve, like Sam, like myself, like you – Israel gave into temptation – and fell into sin. What happens when temptation leads us to sin? You know kids – right? Punishment – a time out, loss of privilege, spanking. And so god punishes Israel with angry snakes.

Num. 21:6 And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

And so punishment is a deterrent to sin - Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:9:

1Cor. 10:9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 1Cor. 10:11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

God uses the snake as punishment to give us motivation to avoid giving into temptation – the first temptation coming from that snake, the Devil. But the journey does not end here. Follow now the sojourn of the snake to Calvary – to the cross.

### **III. Forgiveness and Healing – John 3:14-17**

We continue the story in Numbers 7-9. The people respond properly to the punishment with repentance:

Num. 21:7 So the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.” And Moses interceded for the people.

Num. 21:8 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he shall live.”

Num. 21:9 And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

This is just awesome. God is able to take the very creature inflicting the punishment – the snake and turn it into a way to healing a path to forgiveness. All that is required is what one commentator called “a look of faith.” To look up and believe that what God said is true. There is life and forgiveness. Not just then, but today, turn to our last passage: John 3:14-17.

John 3:14 “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;

John 3:15 that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

When you think of John 3:16 from this day on – the most famous verse in the Bible, think about the snake. John 3:16 is linked to Numbers chapter 21. Just as Moses lifted up that serpent in the wilderness – and a look of faith led to forgiveness and healing so it is today. A look of faith at Jesus Christ. The people made a decision to sin, and now they had to make a decision of faith to believe. So it is with you and I. Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

### **Application:**

Application just falls out of our texts today. First is this:

- 1) **Fight Temptation** – visualize that temptation you know you will face this week – Maybe it is food, maybe it is a lie, or some strong desire. How will you fight it? First flee - Eve listened to the snake too long. Paul says Flee from the evil desires of youth 2 Tim 2:22. Sometimes we need to run away. Second, by prayer – Jesus said, ‘keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation’ (Matt 26:41). Third, look to God for a way

of escape 1 Cor 10:13 – not temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man, and God is faithful – who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able – but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

- 2) **Fess up. When you fail.** The Israelites were a good example – the punishment led to repentance. The natural tendency is to do like Adam and Eve and to hide the sin, cover it up, pretend like it didn't happen. James 5:16 says “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.”
- 3) **Find Forgiveness in Jesus** – When you look to Christ by faith you have forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” And if you do not know Christ, let me share with you the good news – you can have forgiveness of sins and assurance of eternal life, by looking up to him with faith – believing in Him that He did die on that cross for your sins Just as the people looked up at that snake on the pole for healing – we look up to Jesus who died on the cross for healing Remember John 3:16 – whosoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Do you want eternal life? Do you desire forgiveness? Look to Christ – tell him that you believe in Him – give him your life today.

### **Conclusion:**

Some of the grounds supervisors were terminated from their jobs, and there was a grievance (an appeal hearing) that because I worked in HR, I helped to run and coordinate. There was one issue of particular dispute – the supervisor's kept claiming that Sam the manager knew about the poster, but he denied it. Back and forth the accusations went - until the last day of the proceedings.

Sam looked like a broken man. He said to the room full of people: “I need to confess that I have been lying. I said that I did not know about the poster. I am ashamed to say that I did see the poster the very first day it went up, and I did not do anything about it. I’m sorry.”

You could have heard a pin drop as he explained: “I was reading the Bible last night to my children you see I’m a Christian. I read them the story of Shadrach, Meshac and Abendego and how they faced the temptation to bow down to an idol, but did not compromise. He said as he read that story to his children he began to cry. He said, “I have been a hypocrite. I cannot lie any longer I have to confess. I gave into the temptation to lie and I was wrong.”

The whole course of the appeal was changes – some of the supervisors were reinstated with a lesser punishment, and Sam took a severe punishment – but he did the right thing – he fessed up, and he found forgiveness in His Lord, Jesus Christ.