

# The Serpent on a Pole

by Dr. A.E. Wilder-Smith

---

*The sermon draws parallels between the Israelites' experience with the bronze serpent and the necessity of looking to Jesus for salvation from sin.*

**Duration:** 29:40

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1-3, Exodus 1:14, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Jesus Christ"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of teaching children about the word of God. He starts by explaining the story of the Israelites, who were slaves in Egypt for 400 years. The speaker and his wife made a commitment to raise their children to love God's word, and they did this by telling them Bible stories every evening before bed. The children loved hearing stories about David and Goliath, Daniel, Joseph, Samson, and Delilah. The speaker emphasizes the significance of incorporating the word of God into daily family life.

---

## Transcript

Wilder Smith is my name, and when we were considering getting engaged, we made a policy that if we should have children, we would bring them up to love God's Word. And that needs a definite engagement to do that in the, between the two partners. And that means collaboration from your wife, and this is my wife, Beate, here, and she'll tell you how we set about doing it.

It was our habit every evening, before our four children went to bed, to tell them a gripping Bible story from the Old Testament or from the New Testament. If they heard the Word of God as the last thing of the day, we thought it would sink better into their minds. And how they loved the Bible stories.

They loved David and Goliath. They loved the Daniel stories. They loved Joseph, Samson, and Delilah.

They just couldn't go to bed without their Bible story, and they lived in it. So when, in the evening, the call rang through the house, the story, the Bible story, everybody ran and came and gathered together in the children's, in one of the children's bedroom, and father and mother came, the children came, even our au pair girls came. And sometimes if we had guests, they also came, and they listened to the Word of God.

And this was the daily family hour, the family event. And the moment was, this was the great moment of the day. The stories we told were after this sort of style.

Once upon a time, there was a people known as the Israelites. Now you all know who the Israelites were, don't you? They were the sons and daughters of Israel. Okay? And they lived in an awful captivity.

They were slaves for 400 years. You know, as the people died off, grandfather died off in slavery, and they remained slaves in that country, Egypt, 400 years. What they had to do was go out and collect straw, reeds from the riverside, the Nile, you see, and with the soil, adobe sort of soil like you have here, they made bricks.

And they had to deliver so many bricks every day, and they worked until they couldn't pick up one foot after another. And they got very little to eat, but they did get something to eat. They had onions.

You all like onions, don't you? And they had steaks to eat. They did get a little bit of that, but not very much. And if they didn't deliver enough bricks every day to help build the pyramids and things like that, and houses, what they had to do was to bend over and get whacked with the overseers.

And they were the Egyptians who did that. And they stood it until they got thinner and thinner and thinner and more depressed every day. And then one day there turned up two men.

One was called Moses. You all know about Moses, don't you? And the other one was called his brother, the elder brother, Aaron. And God spoke to them and said, you're to take the people out of Egypt because they can't live like this.

This is awful. He says, God heard their crying and their groaning as the people whacked them with big whips because they didn't produce enough bricks. Now, when they got out into the wilderness, they had first of all to go through the Red Sea.

Now, the Red Sea wasn't very deep, but they could get through it. It was very muddy on the bottom. And while they were going through the Red Sea, Pharaoh, the king of that country, found that they'd run away.

And he came after them with his chariots and horses, because he had lots of chariots and horses. And he said, if the children of Israel can go through the Red Sea, I can too. And he drove his chariots into the Red Sea after the children of Israel.

And they were on the other side, and he was coming in the middle. And just as the last Israelite got out of the Red Sea, the wind stopped blowing, which had blown the water back in both directions so they could go through on dry land. The wind stopped blowing, and all the water came in.

And Pharaoh and his horses were engulfed with mud and water and drowned. You know, some years ago, they were looking for the remains of this Egyptian army, and they found the king of Egypt, Pharaoh, who'd been drowned in the Red Sea, trying to follow the Jews. The Israelites had got through free, no trouble at all.

Now, after that experience, they'd seen all the armies of Egypt drowned in the Red Sea, which they'd just gone through, because God blew on the Red Sea and blew the water back. When they got into the wilderness, they weren't very organized. They'd been a band of slaves, you see, for years, and they weren't much of soldiers or anything like that.

So they got out into the wilderness, and there was no water and no food, nothing to eat. And so they started to grumble. And when they started to grumble, God heard their grumbling, and they'd seen what

he'd done to the Egyptians, and that he'd taken them out of captivity.

So they listened to God again, and God said, if you don't stop grumbling, you'll have trouble. And so he sent them little fiery serpents about that long, and they looked like brass. They reflected in the sun.

You know, snakes often do have a skin that reflects. And these little snakes were very, very poisonous. When they bit you, you had just a little tiny mark on your leg or wherever they bit you, and then that little tiny mark swelled up, and you got a red stripe right down your leg.

And when that red stripe started to grow right down to your foot, you suddenly couldn't breathe anymore, and you died. Now, thousands often died from the bites of these awful little snakes. So the people went to Moses and Aaron, and they said, we won't grumble any more about our food, because God gave them every day manna every morning, which was like bread.

It was like Swiss rolls, you know, really nice to eat. And he also gave them, because they needed a bit of protein, he also gave them quails. Now, you know what quails are, don't you? They're little birds.

And they came up over the camp every night and settled on the camp, because they wanted to be near human beings, so birds are like that sometimes. And the Jews could just go out and take as many as they like and put them in their pots and cook them. So they had Swiss rolls, manna, and quails every day.

Now, it's very nice if it's nicely cooked, isn't it? A bird like that, like chicken, just breast of chicken, you say, but tastes nicer than chicken. And they said, after two or three months of Swiss rolls and quails, they said, we don't want to eat this miserable food anymore. We've had enough.

So when that happened, the Lord said, okay, now what should we do about these snakes which are killing so many of you? So Moses said, yes, what shall I do? Will you take them away? The Lord said, no, I won't take them away, but I'll tell you what to do. You'll make a snake out of bronze, because this was in the Bronze Age when they worked with bronze. So he made a little snake, just like these little terrors that were biting them, and he put it on a pole, and he stuck up the pole in the middle of the camp, and he said, if anybody's got bitten, and that red stripe starts to go down his leg, if anybody's bitten, all he's got to do is look at the snake on the pole, and that will heal him.

He won't die. Now, people didn't know what that meant, why they had to do that. It sounds like black magic, doesn't it? Just to look at a snake, and you're cured of the snake bite.

It sounds like homeopathy, you know, but it was God's method of dealing with the snake plague. So everybody who got bitten had to look personally at the snake on the pole, because you see, if you stick a snake through behind its head with a pole, it's dead, isn't it? You kill it that way. Or when you get a rattler, you get a sort of a stick with two branches on it, don't you? You stick it into the ground over the rattler, so the rattler can't get away.

Now, the people didn't know what that meant, and they didn't know why you should have to look at the snake. Why should I have to look at a snake to get healed? They didn't know. It was only Jesus, thousands of years later, who told them what it meant.

Do you know what he said? He said, as Moses, in the wilderness, put up a snake in the wilderness, so that anybody who looked at the snake to get healed from his disease, he was cured. And that was the first time the Jews ever learned what that meant, in the wilderness, to look at a snake, to be cured of snakebite.

Now, why do you think that he did that, put the snake up? Any ideas? Yes? Jesus, who's crucified, if anyone comes to him, he'll be saved.

Yes, but why did he connect him with a snake? It means that Jesus is connecting himself to be compared with a snake. Do you think we ought to compare the Son of God with a snake? I don't. I mean, he was the most beautiful among ten thousand, it says in the Holy Scripture, doesn't it? Do you think a snake is beautiful? And a snake that's being killed on a pole, I don't think that's very beautiful.

Yes? Do you think that God did it so that they would, like, trust him? So, like, if they looked at it, that they would be told so God would know that they trusted? Oh, certainly, that's perfectly right, that they had to trust the snake would do it, because God said so. If he said so, that's it, isn't it? That they had to do that, you're right there. But why did he compare himself to a snake? Because he said, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that all who trust in him should be cured of the snake bite sin.

That was what he said. Now, why do you think he did that? Think about it just a minute. Well, sin is like a snake bite, it kills you slowly, doesn't it? It runs down your leg, and in the end you can't breathe, and you're dead.

You're right there. Okay? Any more comments? Thought about it? Why did he do that? It's rather a funny thing to do, isn't it? To make a snake and stick it up on a pole in the middle of the camp so that all who've been bitten shouldn't die. Why did he do that? Any ideas? Has anybody done any zoology here? Do you study zoology at all? You will, being a teacher.

I'm not sure, but in the Garden of Eden, the Satan was a snake, and he could have used a snake so he could show that he was greater than... Yeah, he was a snake, and that's why the snake is always a symbol of sin. That's quite true. But why did he use a snake? Now, I'm going to tell you, if you learn this, you'll have no trouble with your biology when you get to doing your biology for teaching little kids, you see, at school.

The snake in the Garden of Eden, if you look at the old pictures of the temptation of Eve, because it was Eve who was tempted, wasn't it? The lady who got the temptation. And what did she do? She brought her man down too, didn't she? Her husband down too. So you've got to be careful about you ladies, okay? Oh yes.

So you think of the snake, if you look at the old pictures of the snake tempting Eve under the apple tree, you know, remember? It shows, the old picture shows Satan, the snake, with four limbs, that is legs and two arms, and a beautiful creature he was. Beautiful to look at. One of the most intelligent animals on the field, he says, of the field.

Now, do you think a snake is one of the most intelligent animals in the field? Do you think so? How intelligent is a snake? Is it intelligent as a monkey? A monkey is quite intelligent, you know. You get a gorilla, and a gorilla will soon show you where you ought to be if you're not careful. Well, the thing was this, when Satan brought Eve down, it says, Cursed shalt thou be, and on thy belly shalt thou walk, and with dust shalt thou eat thy food.

Because you see, a snake hasn't any limbs. It hasn't any arms, and it hasn't any legs. Now, is that quite true? You all know about the DNA molecule, don't you? That contains the program to make me and you

what you are.

Now, the snake, even the python today, is programmed in his DNA molecule to have legs. And under his skin, you will find little tiny legs that aren't, that aren't to be used. They're too small to be used, and they're under the skin.

So he's programmed, he once was programmed to have limbs. And he's also got little tiny remnants of arms under his skin. The bigger ones, the bigger remnants are in his legs.

But he's programmed to have four limbs, just like any other big animal that we know. But when he sinned, and brought people down, he degenerate. He became degenerate.

He degenerated and lost his limbs. And that's why he had to walk on his belly then, and eat the dust of the earth. Because you see, he hadn't got the arms to put food in his fingers, or to put his food into his mouth.

So he had to take it, pick it up from the ground, dirty as it was. And that was the result of having done wrong. God let him degenerate, but he was originally programmed to have four limbs.

He still is programmed to have four limbs on his DNA molecule. Now, you think what that means? It means that sin brought him down, and even made him physically degenerate. Okay? Now, he also was the most intelligent animal of the beasts of the field, it says, before he tempted Eve.

So he lost his intelligence, too. He became dumb. Now, if you look at the brain of the snake, you'll find... Can I use a hard word on you? You don't mind, do you? You're going to be teachers, the two girls, so they won't mind if I use a hard word.

He became secondarily degenerate. That is, originally, he was much better than he is now. He's gone downhill.

You understand what I mean? And that was a result of sin. If anybody starts to tell lies, you know, say little boys do, little girls don't do that, not really. If anybody starts to tell lies, do you know what happens to them? If you look at their eyes, you can see they're not telling you the truth, in most cases.

They get a sort of a funny covering over their eyes, and you can't see what they're really thinking. They're sort of veiled, their eyes. You know what I mean, don't you? A person who isn't telling you the truth.

If you look at him very carefully, you soon find out, don't you? And that's what happened to Satan. He degenerated, the sin took his limbs away. And the old pictures, if you look in the galleries, the art galleries, you'll find the old pictures of Satan was a beautiful animal which deceived Eve, but the sin brought him down.

Now why did Jesus then compare himself to the snake when he was put up in the camp? That's right, and it degenerated him. You see, Jesus was one of the most beautiful creatures, well he wasn't a creature, he was one of the most beautiful organizations, organisms, in the universe. He was the fairest among ten thousand, it says, doesn't it? But on the cross, it says, we turned our face away from him because we couldn't look at him, because he was so ugly and hateful.

You see, a man who's been put on the cross has huge gaping wounds in his hands, all bloody, and he can't breathe because his arms are out like this all the time, and in the end he suffocates because he can't breathe. And you know, when a man's like that, suffocating, he's not very, or a woman, not very pretty to

look at, is he? Horrible sight, to see a man, how they could sit there six hours and see Jesus on the cross, is a terrible thing, isn't it? The most horrible sight, to crucify the God of life on a cross is the most terrible thing you can do, to crucify anybody is terrible, but to crucify God himself is a terrible thing. And just as the snake became degenerate, lost his limbs because he sinned, or was the means of bringing sin into the world, so Jesus, the son of God, the most beautiful of all beings in the universe, on the cross he was the most hateful and ugly sight you could see, because he took the sin of the world on himself.

It had the same effect on him as it did on the snake at the beginning. It degenerated him, and the most beautiful among 10,000 became the most ugly among 10,000, because he took our sin upon himself. And that's why he said, as Moses raised up the serpent in the wilderness upon a pole, so that all who trusted in him should not perish, but live and have eternal life.

That's why he compared himself with a snake, because he's the one who really took all the things I've done wrong on himself, and it had the same effect on him as it had on the snake, and on any man or any woman who does it today. That's the reason why he took that particular example to use, as Moses in the So that all who trust in him should not perish, but have eternal life. Think of what that means.

Now, listen here. This is one that I have talked to my children about very often. The four of them, just like the four of my kids, you see, they were two years apart, so we had them two years upwards, two, four, six, and eight, and all the girls in the house, and all the guests who came along.

Now, there was once in the camp of the Israelites an old grandfather, grandpa. You call them grandpas, don't you? And he was a bit dodderly. You know what dodderly means, don't you? Well, he was a bit frail, a bit weak, and they were just setting the picnic they were going to have, a barbecue, outside their tent, when grandfather sat down on what he thought was a log of wood, and under the log of wood was one of these wretched little snakes, these, you know, the brazen, the red fiery snakes.

And just as grandfather sat down, he bit him, just here, you see. And grandfather stood up immediately. He couldn't stand up very quickly because his bones all creaked, you see, he was rheumatic.

And he stood up as quickly as he could and called grandma. And do you know what grandma did? She said, where was it, dear? And he showed her where it was, just on, just here, you see. And so do you know what she did? She put her mouth to it and sucked out the wound.

That's the only way to do it. You see, snake poison in your mouth, if you haven't got any wounds in your mouth, is not poisonous if you eat it. So she sucked it out for him.

And she got the wound as clean as she could and put him to bed. And he was all trembling, you know, and the red line started to go down his leg, the infection going from the bite. And so they put him to bed.

And little Johnny came home from school. You see, they took care that they went to school, even in the wilderness. They had to learn the Jewish, you know.

They had to learn the language and learn to write and read and things like that, which they did very well. Just as he came to school, grandma said to him, don't disturb grandpa. He's very ill in bed.

He's been bitten by one of these fiery snakes. But you go and go and see him when he wakes up. So when he woke up, Johnny went in and he'd heard what Moses said.

So he said, Grandpa, I see that's got down to your calf of your leg, that red line after the bite. Have you looked? Have you looked at the snake that Moses has set up in the middle of the camp? Because if you do, you won't die. But if you don't, you will.

So, Grandpa, do you know what he said? He said, No, I sent grandma to do it. And she looked at the snake for me. But it didn't work.

Well, Johnny said, Of course it won't work. You have to look yourself. Now, he said, I'll open the flap of the tent so that you can look out in bed just as you're lying there and see the snake.

If I open the flap of the tent, you'll see. So Grandpa said, That's not necessary. Grandma's done it for me.

No, said Johnny. You've got to do it yourself. You've got to trust yourself.

Otherwise it won't work. Well, you know, Grandpa was rather pig-headed. Some grandpas are.

You know what pig-headed means, don't you? He was a bit stubborn. You do use the word here, don't you? If I say any word you don't know, you tell me. So he sank back into a coma.

And he went quite blue. You know, his lips became blue. And he couldn't breathe.

And Johnny asked Grandma what he should do. So Grandma said, Get a cold towel with cold water and wipe his face off with it. Wipe his forehead off with it to cool him down.

He's in high fever. So Johnny was a willing little boy. He was a good little boy.

He rushed out and got some cold water out of the reservoir they always took with them on their desert journeys and came into Grandpa. Johnny wiped him off with his cold water and he opened his eyes again to Grandpa. Johnny said, Quick, Grandpa, you're not dead yet.

Let me open the flap of the tent. So he opened the flap of the tent and Grandpa looked out. Grandpa shut his eyes and went to sleep.

Now, that was the sign that Grandpa was healed, because if you go to sleep, you're going to get better. Okay? So when he came round again, Johnny went in and said, Grandpa, you see, I did what I told you to do. And it worked immediately because Grandpa was quite sprightly now and he wasn't so rheumatic as he was before.

So they started to go about their daily work. And Grandpa's job was to prepare the cups and saucers, you see, for the table for the barbecue they were going to have. And he was out doing that.

And while he was doing it, he picked up a cup and a saucer. A little snake was underneath them and the snake bit him here on the hand, right good and drooly. And he shook the snake off.

And Grandma came and she sucked out the wound and pressed it, you see, to get everything out of it. But she didn't get everything out. They washed it, but it didn't do much good.

And then the red line started to come out from the bite and go up his arm. So they put him into bed again. And Grandpa sank into a coma.

Johnny came back and said, Grandpa, every time you get bitten, there's only one thing to do. You know what it is. And what was it? Go and look at the snake.

And then you'll be all right every time that that happens. So they opened the flap of the tent and Grandpa, after they put some water in his face again to bring him round, looked at the snake and he said, I feel better. He went to sleep.

So they let him sleep it out, you see, and he slept for two or three hours. And when he got up again, he went out to get some firewood to do the cooking for the barbecue, because then they didn't have any stoves like you do, you see, they just cooked on wood. And while he was picking up some wood and he bent down his head to find out a nice big block, one of those rashy little snakes darted out of the wood pile and bit him right on the cheek here.

So he came in rather shaky after this one because he had to pull it off, you see, and it opened the flesh a bit, the teeth, you see, pulled it off. And Grandma came and she gave him what they thought was a kiss, you see, to pull it out of his cheek. And she got out a lot of the poison, but she didn't get it all out.

And the little red line started to go down his face here. In the end, very quickly, his mouth was paralyzed and he couldn't speak. So they put him to bed and he went into a coma.

And little Johnny came along and put some cold water over his face and brought him round. And when he'd come round, they said to Grandpa, now you be careful, Grandpa. If you go out there, you're sure to get bitten.

You will. What shall I do then? He said. Well, little Johnny knew immediately.

He said, Grandpa, don't put yourself in any position where you can't see the snake on the pole. If you don't do anything which takes away your sight of the snake, the snake will bite you and it won't do anything to you because you'll get healed immediately. So Grandpa, always be in a position to look at the snake.

So it means in our life, we've always got to be in a position where we can look to Jesus. And if we can look to Jesus all the time, the snake doesn't have any power over us. He can bite.

He'll bite too. But it doesn't do anything to us. We get healed right away.

You got it? That's the story that I wanted to tell you today.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/0/SID0540.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/dr-ae-wilder-smith/the-serpent-on-a-pole/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**