

Nehushtan

A few years ago I was sitting in church when my friend Donnie approached me with a Bible trivia book. He asked if I was willing to answer some questions, and since I felt pretty confident about my knowledge of the Bible I agreed. The very first question he asked me was this: what is nehushtan? I had absolutely no idea – in fact, I didn’t even have a guess. That’s when I knew I was in trouble.

As it turns out, there is an interesting story behind “nehushtan”. Back when Moses was leading the nation of Israel through the wilderness, the Israelites sinned yet again. This brought down God’s judgment upon them:

Numbers 21:5: “And **the people spake against God**, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.
6 And **the Lord sent fiery serpents** among the people, and they bit the people; and **much people of Israel died.**”

Israel asked Moses to pray for them so that God would get rid of the fiery serpents. However, when Moses interceded on their behalf God did something unexpected:

Numbers 21:7: “Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And **Moses prayed for the people.**
8 And the Lord said unto Moses, **Make thee a**

fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

9 And **Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole,** and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.”

Instead of removing the serpents, God had Moses make a replica of the serpent and put it on a pole. Whenever a person was bitten, all they had to do was look at the serpent that Moses had made and they would be saved. (You can see the clear parallel between the serpent on the pole and Christ on the cross.)

The next time the serpent on the pole is mentioned is in the book of 2 Kings. There we find out that the Israelites had turned the serpent into an object of worship:

2 Kings 18:4: “He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and **brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made:** for unto those days the children of Israel did **burn incense to it:** and he called it **Nehushtan.**”

There it is – the word “nehushtan”! Don't blink, because if you do you'll miss it.

It is a shame that Hezekiah had to destroy the bronze serpent, but the Israelites gave him no other choice. They had turned God's symbol of salvation into an idol, and it was now a source of paganism. Just as the Israelites once misused the Ark of the Covenant as a good luck charm to win battles, so the Israelites missed the entire point of the bronze serpent.

This tendency to turn good into evil is not limited to just the Israelites. For example, take a look at the rainbow. God gave the rainbow to mankind as a sign that He would never again flood the entire world:

Genesis 9:13: “I do **set my bow in the cloud**, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

14 And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud:

15 And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and **the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.**

16 And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.”

The beautiful rainbow was a gift from God Himself – a reminder of the covenant that He made with Noah. However, that's not what the rainbow means in our generation, is it? In our time the homosexual movement has taken the rainbow and turned it into a symbol that promotes homosexuality. Now people associate the rainbow with *sodomy* – a terrible sin that invites God's wrath. It's difficult to profane a symbol more thoroughly than that.

