

This Nahashic World
Rev. George M. Schwab, Ph.D.
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Gen 3:1a

(BHS)	(NCV)
וְהַנָּחָשׁ הָיָה עָרוּם	Now the snake was the most clever
מִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה	of all the wild animals
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים	the LORD God had made.

“Snake” is *nahash*. See 2 Kgs 18:4. Its characteristic is ‘*arum*, glossed “clever” in NCV. Also, “subtle” (ESV); “crafty” (NIV); “shrewdest” (NLT); “cunning” (NKJV). Sometimes in Scripture ‘*arum* is positive (Prov 13:16), sometimes negative (Job 5:12). Obviously here, the slyness of the serpent is malevolent and ruinous. The serpent is a “beast of the field” (line 2).

Temptation slithers from a reptile supposedly subject to human domination.

Josh 9:4 is the only other place where a specific someone is called ‘*arum*. The “crafty” Gibeonites deceived Israel. Thus Genesis 3 connects with an event near the start of Israel’s national history—perhaps to foreshadow its disastrous dénouement. (Want another connection? Like a new Adam, the first act of the first King of Israel was to judge the serpent. See 1 Samuel 11.)

Adam and Eve were told to subdue the world. They were to bear the image of God. The way I teach the first semester of OT, virtually every book from Genesis to 1 Kings explores what this means. For example, in Exodus, Moses visibly shone. Aaron’s vestments and the cult also emulated the glory of God. In Leviticus the image is, “Be holy as I am holy.” In Numbers, the camp’s organization mirrors John’s beatific vision (Revelation 4 – 5). While anointed

with the Spirit, the extraordinary potency of the judges likened the heavenly court. Similarly, the first Parents in history were intended to reflect God's glory.

But then they encountered the *'arum* serpent. Listening to his seductive hiss, they violated the explicit command of God, and the immediate result was that they "knew that they were naked" (3:7). The word for "naked" is *'erom*. The words *'arum* and *'erom* sound the same (and look alike in Hebrew script), and thus form a pun. They listened to the *'arum* snake and became *'erom*.

In other words, the wordplay suggests that they took on the likeness of the serpent. They began to "look" like it. They became its image bearers. This is how human history started: writhed and constricted into a *nahashic* character. And this includes all of us engulfed in the same anguine story.

The *'arum nahash* still insinuates itself to further its likeness. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:1 – 2). "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4). A pythonic spirit even stalked Paul's ministry (Acts 16:16).

What does his twisted influence look like? *Nahashic* "wisdom" is "earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice" (Jms 3:15 – 16). Has this ever described you? Don't squirm out of it. When was the last time you viperously acted out of jealousy? How pure are your motives when it comes to your life ambitions? Do you follow a serpentine path? Christians can be lovers of money too. Like the

sons of disobedience, Christians also can writhe and contort to impress other people. Believers can be maliciously clever. Paul warns, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil” (Eph 4:26 – 27). This is a constant struggle.

But remember that “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8b). Today we are called to self-consciously choose to put off the *nahash*, and “put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24). Although it takes daily effort, we can have victory.

And now for some hope. The fight will not last forever. The days of the serpent are numbered. One part of the great climax of history as envisioned by John is when the devil is cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10). It is in that hope we press on. Amen, Come Lord Jesus!