

What Is Your Standard?

By Steve and Carol Ryerson

It glistened in the sun so brilliantly. Micah and his soldier friend Andrew had worked hard to make the snake shine in the desert sun. It seemed a strange thing for the God of Jacob to do...telling His people to put an image of a snake on a pole and raise it in the midst of the camp so the plague of snakes would go away. Yet, it wasn't the first time He had told them to do something strange.

Think about the word standard for a moment. What comes to mind first? Do you think of other individual words such as comparison or strict or follow? Do you think of a person from your past who was very rigid about holding you to some kind of standard? Do you think of a particular thing that you have committed to doing or not doing in connection with your faithfulness to God? What do you think about?

In the Scripture the word standard is commonly used to refer to the widely visible banner or symbol of a tribe or family around which they rallied. It was a reference point. It marked a place, both in the literal and figurative senses. That is, when the people saw the standard, they knew where to go to be with their people. They also felt a sense of identity with that group. When the tribes were moving in the wilderness, the standard gave them direction. They didn't fear wandering off by themselves as long as they kept their eyes on the banner. The exact nature of those standards (colors, materials, symbols, etc.) is uncertain, but their function is clear.

The word standard is used eighteen times in the KJV. Ten times the Hebrew word means "banner, standard." Seven times it comes from a word that is a little more specific. It still means a standard, but the word emphasizes the idea of a signal or sign. One time a different word is used that is very interesting:

Isaiah 59:19 ~ So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.

Here, the word translated as standard means something that will cause the enemy to flee when it is lifted up. This passage in Isaiah is clearly a messianic prophecy. The Messiah will come when the enemy is attacking. Many believe that the Messiah will come into Jerusalem through the now closed eastern gate that leads from the old city down into the Kidron valley and up to the Mt. of Olives. In the Isaiah passage, clearly the Spirit of the Lord is the One lifting the standard to defend His people.

"Micah, are you sure that we were supposed to do this?" Andrew nervously blurted.

"What do you mean 'are you sure'?"

"Well, you know what the law said. 'Make no graven images!'"

"Of course I know that Andrew, but the Lawgiver himself told us that God said to do this. Then he put it up himself. And, you saw the results. When people just looked on this brass image, they were healed! All they had to do was look. Doesn't that tell you that there is power in this thing?"

Numbers chapter twenty-one tells the story of a time ~ one of several ~ when the Israelites were murmuring against Moses. They had been having trouble defeating some Canaanites, and they cried out to God for help. He gave them a victory, and right after that they were back to the complaining. God sent a judgment in the form of poisonous snakes among the people, killing many. At God's command, Moses set up a pole with the image of a snake on it (v.9). The word translated as pole is elsewhere translated as standard. This word emphasizes the idea of a signal of some kind. In this case the snake on the pole was there to remind them that they needed to listen to and obey the word of God. They needed to look to the Lord as their Savior (Exodus 15:2). The snake was not to be an object of worship, but they made it so, and it became a stumbling block for them (II Kings 18:4, John 3:14, 15).

A standard is supposed to help us keep focused on what is right. A standard is supposed to help us to have direction. A standard should help us to resist distractions from whatever direction they come; it should not become a source of problems itself. But, we must have the right standard, and we must use it correctly.

In pensive moments when you are asking yourself how things are going in your home education program, what is your standard? To what do you compare your efforts to do your best for your children? Is it your local public school? Is it your concept of an ideal public school? Is it a particular Christian school you visited once that seemed to be so well-run? Is it the program described by the last home school conference speaker you heard...you know, the one whose children all seemed so respectful, and, well, uh, perfect?

Most of us were educated in the public school. Our Savior spoke to our hearts about the need to rear our children to serve Him. By His Grace, we saw that we couldn't do that in the public school. Some of us had some contact with Christian schools and saw that there were problems there too. So, we ventured into the unfamiliar waters of home schooling, and the Lord has helped us through the shark-infested regions. But, sometimes the sharks find some flesh to nibble on.

When we are talking about our home schooling with people who do not understand what we are doing, how do we describe our successes? Do we say things like "Johnny is getting all A's" or "Mary scored in the 98th percentile on her last achievement test"? Do we say things like "Heather got a blue ribbon for her lamb at this year's county fair" or "Sammy played beautifully at his last piano recital"? These things wouldn't always be wrong necessarily, but contrast them with this set of comments: "Johnny is learning to be more thorough...Mary is seeing that the Lord can help her overcome her fear of taking tests...Heather is learning so many things about God's creation as she cares for her lamb...Sammy is learning to be systematic in his practice."

The best home education is discipleship at home not school at home. We should be teaching our children to follow the Master. That means He is the standard. He is the place to be. He is the One we follow. He is the One Who gives us our identity. He is the basis for comparison, not any institutional school or well-known family. When we are asking the Lord to show us how we are doing, we should be asking ourselves how well His character traits are being developed in our families. We should be confirming that we have the right standard, and that we are following Him.

Our soldier friend Micah had correctly observed that when the people looked upon the snake, they were healed. He had incorrectly concluded that the power was in the image of the snake. The power was in the One Who told them to look.

Our standard is not any church organization, curriculum publisher, educational technique, or mentor. It is Jesus Himself, the Creator of the universe Who came to earth Himself as a man and made abundant life possible.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by
me.
John 14:6