



The chapter begins with a description of a great victory against the Canaanites. The nation of Israel showed initiative, and relied upon God to give them the victory, but it was God who enabled the triumph, and the utter destruction as verse 3 makes quite clear. But flushed with this success, the nation were very disappointed having to travel around the land of Edom- *discouraged because of the way*.

The way these two events – the victory and the disappointment are placed together is typical with the ups and downs of life, but how Israel reacted is also typical, as successes and triumphs are quickly forgotten and doom and depression submerges when things do not go so smoothly.

Israel, once again turned against Moses: *And the people spoke against God, and against Moses, Why 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 loathes this light bread.*

This reaction showed the shallow nature of the people. Pretty nasty really.

*6 And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.*

Why have you brought us up out of Egypt? they accused Moses. No mention of God at all. If they really didn't want to follow Moses, no one made them, if they liked Egypt so much, they could have easily gone back. But we see how the blame game works. How the twisted reasoning of irrational people works. They had no bread they said, when clearly there was as in the next breath, they moaned about the manna that was delivered to their front doors every morning. They *loathed this light bread* they said, utterly hated it...spiteful, ungrateful, hateful, again just plain nasty... Proverbs 15:16,17: *Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith....* their discontentment with the dinner of herbs – the light bread ,and water from the Rock, given to them with love, instead the constant lusting of what they remembered from Egypt; the fish, the melons, the cucumbers, the leeks, the onions and garlic deemed a great treasure to their greedy appetites. But conveniently the trouble and hatred that came with it - the Egyptian whips and the cruel taskmasters. They showed their contempt for the bread of heaven. This *light bread* – the word for light is *kelokale*... meaning insubstantial - fit for children but not for men. Not for victorious soldiers they saw themselves as: they deserved more, they thought.

But the manna was not insubstantial or flimsy but instead described as angels' food in Psalm 78:2. But Deuteronomy 32:15 explains that it was God, in fact that they lightly esteemed. This became a signature of the faithless and unbelieving – Malachi 1:7 saying *the table of the Lord is contemptible*... they were lightly esteeming God's grace, and showing contempt at God's Word. *The Lord Jesus took bread and broke it and said take heed this is my body which is broken for you- this do in remembrance of me.* The Apostle said *whoever*

*shall eat this bread unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, not discerning the Lord's body. ...So let a man examine himself... for if we would judge ourselves we would not be judged...* (1 Corinthians 11). The partaking of the table unworthily is equivalent to the leaven [or yeast] of malice and wickedness (1 Corinthians 5:8)...

This reaction so typical of human nature seen in Israel is simply down to discontentment, which leads to resentment, to covetousness, and the serpent nature within escapes its cage and is ready to strike. This human nature is described in Psalms 140:3: *They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips.* The apostle adds: *their throat is an open sepulchre, with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of vipers is under their lips.* (Romans 3:13).

How appropriate then, that God sent snakes. Described as *fiery* serpents, they bit the people and made many people of Israel die. The serpent was the source of their discontent and their condition. When bitten by the serpent it was well calculated to reveal to them the true character of their discontent. Israel then was made to taste the bitter fruits of their murmuring.

As a nation, they were not going to be relieved of this nasty hazard: Amos 9:3: *And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out...and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them:* Jeremiah 8:17: For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the Lord.

The serpent nature of the people became even more agitated when they were bitten by these snakes. The snakes were described as fiery no doubt fiery to match the colour of the serpent biting them from within rage. Fiery red, from rage, anger, sin, and hate. Now they were suffering, their anger was halted...

Moses was before, their worst enemy... now they turned to him, now he was their best friend! Pray for us!

The value of affliction and chastisement to get people back into line can be seen. It is the grace of God, that though we at times lightly esteem God, we are only likely afflicted. This light affliction only endures for a moment, (2 Corinthians 4:17) is often enough to reinvigorate our conscience.

Once they confessed their sins, they were heard in that Moses prayed for them. The serpents were not taken away! - they had to learn to live with them...8,9: *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 looks at it, shall live. 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.*

Again, the remedy was not instant. It would have taken a while to make this bronze serpent, which would have been cast in the soil and moulded, and the manufacturing process would have taken several days at least. It also had to be big enough to see from a distance. While this was being made, people continued to be bitten. God did not take away the suffering, or the cause of it, but he gave them an antidote.. He showed them how to kill the serpent within.

The serpent on the pole was inert, it was in effect dead. It was bronze, it had passed through the fire of judgement, it had no power to bite or to harm. Even though someone who had been bitten was some distance away from the serpent on the pole, all they had to do was to find a position where they could stand and get a line of sight of it, and gaze upon it. That was all they had to do. They had no power over the healing, the salvation belonged to God. All they had to do was to believe in the grace of God, and make their way to where they could see and look upon and behold the representation of a dead snake wrapped around a pole.

But it was the representation that they were being taught, and it was what it represents which was doing the real healing within them.

*John 3:13-17: And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

The serpent on the pole represented the Son of God - the Saviour who He would send, the antidote and the cure. All men have the poison of the serpents bite flowing through their veins, - sin. Sin is the killer. The temptations of sin are all around, they do not go away. But God has devised the way of salvation. No need to look down and around in the dark in fear and loathing, paranoid trying to find every last wriggling reptile. Instead, acknowledging the bite – confessing the sin, to look up, direct and obvious the remedy is there. The Lord Jesus was lifted up, after a life of fighting the serpent within. He crushed the serpent in the head, killed the carnal mind, but in resisting it, he was bitten on the heel by it – Genesis 3:15 but he killed the serpent in his own death. He was lifted up inert, dead upon a stake, and became the only single answer and way of escape from certain eternal death.

*Ephesians 2:1 -2 And you has he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, ... the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our way of life in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath made us alive together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)*

To look upon the serpent on the pole: Hebrews 12: 2,3 *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

Looking means seeing, understanding, recognising, exercising our senses, suffocating the serpent of sin ready to bite. Not being arrogant or secure in our own abilities or confident in our own victory, as Israel were, but being humble to accept the simple and straightforward Truth – the Grace of God.

Brother Terry