

STUDY ON THE SERPENT

Genesis 3; Exodus 4; Numbers 21; John 3; Acts 28; Revelation 12,20

The serpent first appears on this earth in the Garden of Eden. We read of his created beauty (Ezekiel 28), of his pride and desire to be like the most High (Isaiah 14), but he first appears on earth as a serpent in the garden. The serpent has always been a symbol of sin, deceit, cunning craftiness, and anti-God. This is revealed in 2 Corinthians 11:3, 13-15; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:13, etc. The first subtle thing the serpent does is mis-quote what God had said to Eve, then Eve adds to what God said, and then the serpent again falsely states what God said. This serpent who appeared to Eve as an angel of light begins his evil practices through cunning craftiness and sleight of men, and these practices are continued to this day by his ministers who are transformed into ministers of righteousness.

Eve committed each of the sins mentioned in 1 John 2:16. She saw the tree was good for food, i.e. the lust of the flesh (coarse sin). That it was pleasant to the eyes, i.e. the lust of the eyes (pretty sin). That it was desirable to make one wise, i.e. the pride of life (innocent sin). Sin cannot be improved, but always remains sin in any form.

In the following references we will look at the doctrinal, the dispensational, and the practical application of truth which we can learn from the types and instructions given.

A. Doctrinal truth.

1. (Exodus 4:1-7)

The serpent represents Satan and his power. Moses is a type of Christ the Mediator. Moses was the mediator between God and Israel and he only was qualified to deliver from the serpent. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5), and He only is qualified to deliver us from Satan's power (Colossians 1:13). Moses would learn that the Divine power which was to fit him for his mission could make Satan as helpless as the rod in his hand, and make him useful in the accomplishments of God's counsels. Pharaoh had turned the rod of government into the serpent of oppression from which Moses had himself fled to Midian (Exodus 2:15).

Moses' rod became a serpent. The serpent is inseparably connected with the curse (Genesis 3:14). The Lord Jesus Christ was "made a curse" for His people (Galatians 3:13). Moses was to pick it up by the tail (the time for bruising it's head was not yet), and it became nothing, i.e. it disappeared when it became a rod again. By this we also learn that Satan is no "free agent," but is completely under God's control to be used by Him in fulfillment of His counsels as He sees fit (Amos 8:11,12; 2 Thess. 2:10-12, God is sending it, but is using Satan to do it). God would assure Moses at the outset of his ministry that the enemy which would rage against him was unable to withstand him. God would assure us that through the Lord Jesus Christ He has triumphed over all principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15), and is the Head over them (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 2:10).

The leprosy represents sin introduced by Satan. Only Divine power could cleanse away sin which is as loathsome and incurable as leprosy. At God's command Moses puts his leprous hand back into his bosom and it becomes clean flesh again. We learn that God's power alone can cleanse the sinner and restore that which sin has defiled. The Israelites in Egypt had become leprous and polluted by sin (namely idolatry), and by being taken into the bosom of Moses (type of Christ) they should be cleansed and delivered.

2. (Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14,15)

The Israelites spake against God and Moses complaining they had been brought out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. They had been fed with manna, but loathed it.

Because of their sin against God and Moses, God sent fiery serpents among them which bit and stung many to death. The bite of this fiery serpent represents sin which is both painful and deadly poisonous. The manna represents the Word of God, but it did not satisfy them. Those whom the manna will not satisfy perish (John 6:66-69). These fiery serpents were a reminder of the father of sin. The fiery serpents had poison in their bite, just as the perverted Bibles and false gospels do today (Proverbs 5:3-6).

When the people came to Moses, confessed their sin, and requested that the fiery serpents be taken away, Moses prayed for the people as their intercessor and mediator. It appears they would not have owned their sin without the fiery serpents and the smarting of the bite. Does it not take the smarting of sin's bite before we will see our need as well? Moses interceded for them, just as Christ intercedes for us before the Father, who have despitefully used Him. The people asked for the fiery serpents to be taken away, but God saw fit not to do that, for He would give effectual relief in the best way. Moses was to make a serpent of brass and put it on a pole, which seemed a very unlikely method of cure, but God devised this way of healing. Salvation is of the Lord. The serpent of brass signified Christ who was made in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3), yet without sin, as the brazen serpent has the outward shape, but not the inward poison of the other serpents, and it was a type of Christ being made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). That which cured was shaped in the likeness of that which wounded. Christ though perfectly free from sin Himself was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). The brazen serpent was lifted up on a pole symbolic of the cross of Christ (John 3:14,15; 12:33,34), who was lifted up on a cross, and made a spectacle to the world. Prophecy must be fulfilled and only Christ's death could expiate sin.

Any Israelite who had been bitten, and who would be healed, must look to the brazen serpent on the pole to live. They did not have to touch it, or pray to it, but only to look at it. Faith must be involved in any healing and forgiveness from sin. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22). This is a beautiful type of the Cross of Christ to which we look by faith to be forgiven of our sin. They looked to the serpent on the pole, and we look by faith to the Cross of Christ, for salvation is not of works but of grace (Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:8,9). The Israelite who looked by faith was delivered from death, and cured from his disease. Whoever looked to this healing sign though through a weak and weeping eye was healed. So whoever believes in Christ's death and shed blood, burial, and resurrection, though it be through a weak and weeping eye shall be healed. It is not the amount of faith one has, but what his faith is in.

It is to be noted that only those looked who knew they were bitten and death was imminent. It is only those who know they are without hope and their sin is on their account that will look to the Cross of Christ. To all others that are perishing the preaching of the cross is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18).

2. Dispensational truth.

The rod in Moses hand signifies several things dispensationally. It prefigured Israel's position of authority in the land of Canaan. This portion Judah (the ruling tribe), retained until Shiloh came (Genesis 49:10). Following the rejection of their Messiah the "rod" was cast down to the ground, and for 19 centuries Israel has been the prey of the serpent. Yet there remains a greater than Moses for the Lord Jesus Christ (typified in Joshua) shall be made the head of the nations. "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1). "The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies" (Psalm 110:2). Christ's governmental authority and power shall be fully displayed. All that Christ suffered for their sin is past, and the Lord Jesus Christ (the Rod of Jesse) is now

seated at the right hand of the Father on high, and will soon take to Himself power and reign over the earth which is now ruled by the serpent "the prince of this world." Christ reigning with a rod of iron and Satan destroyed (Revelation 20), are the actual end results of the types in Exodus 3.

The fact that a viper of all noxious creatures should figure in the closing miracles of the book Acts is of itself suggestive. Genesis 3 introduces the Serpent with his enmity, and Revelation 20 sees his doom. When Moses received the call to leadership he was given power over a serpent. At the close of the kingdom testimony Paul picks up the creature which is a symbol of Satan, and throws it into the fire remaining unhurt. Paul (Acts 28:4-9) was bitten by a viper, and also afterward healed the chief of the island along with many others. The first sign to Israel involved Moses and a serpent, as did the last sign to Israel. The second sign to Israel was the healing of Moses leprosy, and the last sign to Israel was the healing done by Paul. To my knowledge Israel did not ever see the significance of either of the signs even though the Jews seek after a sign. This would bring to a close the preaching of the kingdom of heaven as in a short time Paul would be God's instrument in Rome to bring the judgment on the nation of Israel. Also Paul would no longer be able to heal as he had done in the past dispensation of the sign gifts. (Christ had told them there would be no sign given except the sign of the prophet Jonah).

3. Practical truth.

Now Christ through His cross has bruised the serpent's head, and Satan is a defeated foe. "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15). "And hath put all things under his feet, . . ." (Ephesians 1:22). The believer is healed from his sin sickness (leprosy), having been justified by the blood and resurrection of Christ (Romans 4:25; 5:9). Paul, in shaking off the viper without harm, represents the believer in his standing before God in Christ, in which any bite of the serpent is harmless. Paul, in shaking off the viper without harm, also represents the believer in Christ who through the power of God by faith can quench all the fiery darts of Satan without harm (Ephesians 6:16). Satan cannot get to a believer, he only makes us think he can.

Christ as the Captain of our salvation has given us a perfect righteousness, and every blessing needful (to be claimed by faith), just as Israel through Joshua were given every place the sole of their foot shall tread upon (Joshua 1:3). We are raised up together in heavenly places far above all, and complete in Christ who is the Head of all.

The rod speaks to us of the support of God's grace. When we trust God all is well, but when we fail to trust God and the rod becomes a serpent, we find ourselves as Moses fleeing from it (Exodus 2:15, Pharaoh type of the serpent). We are helpless in coping with Satan apart from God's grace. Our strength in overcoming the devil lies in Christ's power, our weakness, and our dependency on Him. We must lean upon the rod or staff for strength and victory.

The sinner is completely under Satan's power, and is taken captive by him at his will (2 Timothy 2:26). Israel represents this truth while in Egypt. They were in bondage to the Egyptians, and far worse in bondage to sin. Only Divine power could free them from both. Man is in bondage to sin and self, and only Divine power and grace can free him from both of them.

"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Ephesians 6:10).