

97-11-30b

Okay, we are back now from our break, and we find ourselves here in the latter portion of Genesis chapter 3, looking at God's pronouncements to the serpent, to the woman, and to Adam. And of course we began in the first session looking at Psalm 58 and seeing that the serpent is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. And there is a lot of highly significant imagery and symbolism in this entire section.

Everything resonates and serves as an archetype or a beginning point for a lot of what we see elsewhere in the Bible and in the Old Testament in particular. The serpent is no exception. And you may have wondered about this, as I have, about some of the uses of the serpent imagery.

You see God pronouncing the curse on the serpent, on thy belly thou shalt go, and thus shalt thou eat all the days of thy life, and so on. And the enmity that is between, specifically, the serpent and the woman. Why the woman and not Adam? People generalize from this, and it's amazing how often the conclusion is drawn from this passage that, well, there is a technical name for when you try to explain the source of something.

It's called etiology, or an etiological story. It's a story that tries to explain how something came to be named with its name, or how a certain condition came to be. A lot of the Greek and other myths try to explain how did man get fire, and one thing and another.

These are etiological. And so a lot of people have looked at this as an etiological story. This is why there's such a revulsion between people and snakes, or especially between women and snakes.

Well, there's a revulsion with a lot of things. Any kind of a creepy crawly tends to produce revulsion in anybody that has good sense. So that doesn't seem like a very satisfactory...this is such a pivotal place in the story, that to turn at this point to the shallow conclusion that, well, we just are explaining why snakes have no legs and why people don't like them, we can be fairly certain that we're missing the point if that's all we come away with.

And the same thing with God's pronouncement in verse 16 about conception and childbirth. A lot of people have concluded simply that, well, this explains why childbirth is considered to be one of the greatest types of pain that one can go through. And there is certainly no doubt of that, and the Bible itself uses the pains of childbirth as a representation of extreme pain.

But that's not all that's going on here. So we have to have our ears to hear tuned in and be thinking about the larger issues. And one of the ways we can do that is to work backward from the way the Bible uses the serpent, for example, to see what's going on

here in God's pronouncement of the curse on the serpent.

We have already observed from 2 Corinthians 11 that Satan is clearly in view here. He's not mentioned by name, and there have been those that try to argue that you're reading something into it to see Satan here. But I think after we see the serpent passages, there will be no doubt.

But 2 Corinthians 11, if you want a passage that more or less nails this down, you have two references by Paul in that chapter that confirm our analysis here. He says in the beginning of the chapter, he says at the beginning of 2 Corinthians 11, verse 3, I fear lest somehow as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. And then he talks about someone preaching a false Christ, a false gospel, someone who deceives, who presents a similar teaching that is not true.

And that, of course, is what the serpent does in the garden. The serpent deceived Eve by his cleverness, his craftiness. And then it's toward the last part of the chapter in verse 13, such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.

And no wonder, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel or messenger of light. That's what the serpent did in the garden. He pretended to be a messenger of good things.

Eat of the fruit and you will gain. You will be like God. And he presents a twisted truth.

Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. This is something we always need to keep in mind. A lot of people who appear to be or pass themselves off as messengers of light and ministers of righteousness are, in fact, doing a work of deceit.

And they may even be deceiving their own selves. This is common. The heart is deceitful above all things.

The primary characteristic of the human heart is deceit. And it's the thing we have to watch for. We deceive ourselves.

We justify ourselves. We justify our actions. And if we don't look closely, it can be false.

So that is one of the clearest references and links between the serpent and Satan. But here's a passage that may have caused you to scratch your head. It certainly did me.

And this is over in the story of Israel leaving Egypt and going to the Promised Land. You have the serpent cropping up numerous times in that story. Right at the outset, look at Exodus chapter 4 and verse 3. The very next book after Genesis.

Genesis leaves us with Joseph in a coffin in Egypt. Sort of a depressing picture of death there. But then in Exodus you have God's deliverance from bondage.

Look at Exodus chapter 4. Moses answered and said, suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice. He's talking to God about his task to go and lead the Israelites out of bondage. Suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice.

Suppose they say the Lord has not appeared to you. So the Lord said, what is that in your hand? He said, it's a rod. God says, cast it on the ground.

So he cast it on the ground and it became a serpent. And Moses fled from it. It didn't just look sort of like a snake.

It was a snake. And it was so lively that Moses ran away. You get the idea that it was squirming around in an active manner and Moses feared that he would get bitten.

Then the Lord said to Moses, reach out your hand and take it by the tail. Now remember Moses has just run away from this snake, which is your instinctive and prudent course of action. So Moses reached out his hand and caught it and it became a rod in his hand.

Now, first of all, what is going on here? What's the occasion for this rod turning into a serpent? Moses has said, what if they do not believe? I've come and say I'm from God. I'm going to lead you out of bondage. And they don't believe that I am from God.

So this God, first of all, demonstrates this for Moses. He doesn't say, well, Moses, if they question you at that time, throw down your rod and I'll turn it into a snake for you. God does this for Moses first.

And you get the idea that Moses himself has some element of doubt here. What if this is all a dream due to something I ate? How do I know that I'm not delusional here? And so God confirms this for Moses and he will do it again for Israel. But God didn't have to do this just for Moses' benefit, but he does.

And the one thing you'll notice here is that the occasion for trust here is brought about by a serpent. The serpent creates a crisis and also creates an opportunity for faith. When that rod hits the dust, which is the abode of the serpent, there's danger and there's the opportunity for faith because God says, reach out your hand and grab it by the tail.

And it's not so much the miracle of the stick turning into a living creature. It's the faith required by Moses, who has just run away from this snake at God's instruction to reach out and grab a hold of it. This is what Israel is going to need to do.

They are in bondage to the Egyptians. The Egyptians are the picture of the God of this world and the kingdom of this world, the slavery to sin that we are all born into. And to escape it requires faith.

To alleviate the danger of the serpent requires reaching out and grabbing that serpent by the tail. That's what Moses has to do here. This is what Israel is going to have to do, is turn on their captors by faith and march out at the instruction of God by faith.

It's not just a picture of God's miracle-working ability. You compare turning a stick into a snake with what God has done when he parts the Red Sea, when he shakes Mount Sinai. If he wanted to do a mighty wonder to impress them, he wouldn't just do what amounts to a parlor trick.

And this is a parlor trick that even the Egyptian sorcerers are going to be able to duplicate. This has a deeper meaning. The presence of the serpent creates the opportunity, indeed the necessity for faith.

And Moses demonstrates that here. He reached out his hand and caught it and it became a rod in his hand. And look at verse 5. So that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, that's the key, so that they may believe.

Not that they're impressed by a parlor trick, but this is the issue. They have got to believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has appeared to you. That this is a deliverance from bondage occasion and that God is going to deliver them.

They have to seize hold of that by faith because there's not going to be the occasion in the human realm. It's not going to be that Egypt has become weak and lax and they're all unable to maintain their hold over the Israelites. God is going to have to deliver them with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

And then he goes on and he's going to use another symbol for evil and death. You have the serpent linked with death. You shall not surely die.

And yet when they partake of the fruit at the serpent's behest, they do die in the garden. Look at verse 6 of Exodus 4. Furthermore the Lord said to him, now put your hand in your bosom. He put his hand in his bosom and when he took it out, behold his hand was leprous like snow.

Leprosy is living death. Any place you see leprosy in the Old Testament, you can just read living death. Lepers were treated like the dead.

To come in contact with one was the same as coming in contact with death. The wonderful picture in Leviticus 14 of the ritual of restoration for someone who was healed of leprosy or cured of leprosy is a resurrection picture. It is a new birth picture as we have seen in our other studies.

He says put your hand in your bosom again. Now think about this. You stick your hand inside your garment and you pull it out and it's diseased and leprous with these awful,

goosey, runny sores.

It is the worst contaminated, unclean thing you can imagine. Now God could have said wave it in the air and it will be healed but what does God say? Stick it back in your shirt. Put your hand back in there next to your body.

This is another act of faith that is required. Every time God does one of these things there is faith involved. Remember Jesus in the New Testament when he did the miracles your faith has made you whole? This is the issue.

God doesn't just do these things idly to impress people with his power. He is doing it to impress them with the occasion for faith and the necessity for faith. The serpent is involved in this.

There is death, there is life and it hinges on faith. So you can see that after Moses puts his hand back in his bosom and in verse 7, behold it is restored like his other flesh. Verse 8, then it will be if they do not believe you nor heed the message of the first sign that they may believe the message of the latter sign.

And it shall be if they do not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice then you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land. We'll have the occasion to study this in greater detail but our focus here is on the serpent and each of these is an occasion for faith.

Faith is the requirement. Remember Hebrews 11.6, without faith it is impossible to please God. You can't just be a good person.

You can't just live a relatively moral and nice life. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Hebrews 11.6 says he that comes to God must believe that he is and that he rewards those who diligently seek him.

Turn a few pages over in Exodus to chapter 7 verse 15. This actually begins back in verse 8. The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying when Pharaoh speaks to you saying show me a miracle for yourselves then you shall say to Aaron take your rod and cast it before Pharaoh and let it become a serpent. This is sort of like facing the serpent with the serpent, isn't it? Remember those little Egyptian headdresses that you always see? What's one of the major gods of Egypt? It's the snake.

I got a little trinket in the mail for purchasing a time-life book that talks about ancient history and so forth. It's a little round thing that looks like a small coaster. It's got a little Egyptian pictogram picture from a tomb or someplace.

It's got those typical Egyptians with the funny headdresses and a little pot belly and lotus blossoms and all this. There's a serpent on there because this was one of their major

gods. So take your rod and cast it before Pharaoh who's probably got one of these things right there on his little headdress and let it become a serpent.

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and they did so just as the Lord commanded. Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants and it became a serpent. Now there's a reason for this.

It could have become anything but it becomes a serpent. The serpent is the major symbol in the Egyptian religion and there's a reason for that because Egypt itself in this story, in history, stands for something. It's evil.

It's bondage. So when you get down to 711 here of Exodus, Pharaoh called the wise men and the sorcerers, the magicians of Egypt. They also did in like manner with their enchantments.

For every man threw down his rod and they became serpents. I find this very interesting that the Egyptians who worship the snake have their own little parlor trick here. Now whether this was actual metamorphosis, I seriously doubt that Satan or his demons have that ability, but they just had this program on Fox this past week how the magicians saw the lady in the two and all of that.

There are some great sleight of hand and there are some great illusion that can be created in the world of magicians and so forth. Pharaoh's magicians apparently turned their staffs into serpents also. And you would expect this because this is one of their gods.

What they did not expect is that Aaron's rod swallowed up the serpent and ate up their rods. The snake that came from the rod that Aaron cast down goes around and eats these other snakes. You wonder how long this took.

Each of these magicians, let's say there's 4 or 5 magicians, throw down their rods and they become snakes. Aaron's snake goes and eats these other snakes. So this probably took a few minutes.

Even if he's in a hurry, those snakes are gone now. And Pharaoh's heart grew hard and he did not heed them as the Lord had said. The authority of God over evil does not impress him, doesn't win him over.

So the Lord said to Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hard, he refuses to let the people go. And that of course is a story in itself. But at this juncture, this great picture of salvation that's being created in the history of Israel, deliverance from bondage in Egypt, you have the serpent literally rearing his ugly head again.

And you see victory over the serpent and the masters of the serpent in God's use of it. And God works evil together for good, if you will, in this regard. But it requires faith.

You see this cropping up again in the history of Israel. Look at Numbers, 4th of the books of Moses, Numbers chapter 21. The king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the south, Numbers 21, heard that Israel was coming on the road to Atharim.

Then he fought against Israel and took some of them prisoners. So Israel made a vow to the Lord and said, if you will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. The Lord listened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites and they utterly destroyed them and their cities.

So the name of that place was called Hormah. Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. How many times in scripture, how many times in life do we see defeat hard on the heels of victory? After a great success, we just reviewed Friday night, Gideon, after his great victory with the 300 men and the pots and the torches and so on, decides to collect a little reward from the people and winds up encouraging idolatry.

Here Israel has made a vow to the Lord, under the mighty hand of the Lord, they've achieved a victory, but now they're discouraged and weary. And a bad thing is about to happen. Look at verse 5 of Numbers 21.

The people spoke against God and against Moses. Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water and our soul loathes this worthless bread. That worthless bread they're talking about is manna from heaven.

Well, they're tired of the manna. It's kind of the same. It's not very stimulating, not very fresh and new and different.

We of course recognize the picture of our spiritual food, the study of the Word of God. It isn't always a stimulating breakthrough of understanding. Sometimes we review truths that we already know.

We have refreshed in our mind things that we learned long ago. And we may go for a long period where maybe we don't particularly have that stimulation of coming to a fresh understanding and a deeper knowledge or cracking some nut that has puzzled us for a long time. Well, that's something to watch out for.

Are we willing to grow tired of the manna that maintains our awareness of who we are and who God is and where we stand before Him? It's our very life. The Word of God is manna from heaven. It's the bread of life.

It's not a matter of how stimulated are we or how interesting does it seem. It's a matter of recognizing that it is the staple of our spiritual life. And without it, we wither and faint.

That's what happened to Israel here. Again, in the illustration, in the history as metaphor

here, they grow weary of the manna. It's no longer sufficient.

And this is a failure of faith. It's a failure of confidence in God and a failure of appreciation for God. Start to take it for granted.

Our soul loathes this worthless bread. So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people. If you don't like the bread, here's a taste of the alternative.

Fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people and many of the people of Israel died. To reject the bread of God is to choose the alternative and God sends it among them. Therefore the people came to Moses and said, we have sinned for we have spoken against the Lord and against you.

They understand what has happened here, don't they? They don't say, my goodness, Moses, look at all of these snakes. Let's get some sticks and some fire and let's see if we can stamp out this snake plague. They know that this is a spiritual issue, that this is a result of their disobedience and their hardness of heart.

And they come to Moses and they confess, they acknowledge their sin. And that is the key because repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. We have sinned for we have spoken against the Lord and against you.

Pray to the Lord that he take away the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people. Moses intercedes for the people based on their change of mind, their acknowledgement.

Then the Lord said to Moses, make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole and it shall be that everyone who is bitten when he looks at it shall live. Now think about God's options here. People have sinned, they've gotten bored, they've gotten tired and discouraged, they're grumbling and complaining.

We loathe this lousy bread that we get every day, this manna that tastes the same. God sends the fiery serpents among them and it's a wake up call. They're bitten and they realize that they have taken for granted the protection and the provision and the sustaining grace of God.

And so they repent and they go to Moses and say we have sinned. Pray to the Lord that he takes this painful plague away. What are God's options at this point? Snakes can disappear.

They can go as easily as they have come. Some little animal could come along and gobble them all up. Aaron could throw down his rod and they could gobble up all these serpents like they did before Pharaoh.

But God tells Moses to do something. He doesn't take away the snakes. He says you

make a snake and put it up on a pole so that it can be visible.

Put it up high where people can look from a distance and see it. And here's the condition for healing. Here's the condition for solving this problem.

They've got to look at the snake on the pole. So in verse 9, Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. And so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

Remember the ideas of life and death and the serpent in the garden? Here the serpent, the symbol of that which is not God, that which is the opposition and the enemy, that which is enmity to the seed of the woman, is put up on a pole. They have to acknowledge the presence of that evil in the camp. They have to look at it.

And they have to trust that when they look, they're going to be healed. A lot of them don't want to look. So that's ridiculous.

You mean I'm going to glance up at a little bronze statue and I'm going to be made well? If they don't look, they die. Every time this conflict arises, faith becomes an issue. Every time a decision point is created by God, He doesn't just take away the pain.

He doesn't just take away the serpents. They are required to look. They're required to trust.

And that's what happens here. So if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. And of course you will remember that Jesus is going to make a point of this over in John.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. The death of Christ on the cross, literally lifted up between heaven and earth, is a decision point. We have to look to the cross and we have to trust for that plague introduced by the serpent to be resolved.

This is mentioned again in 1 Corinthians 10. We have many times remarked on the significance of the history of Israel in the Old Testament for our instruction. 1 Corinthians 10 is the chapter that brings this out most clearly perhaps in the whole New Testament.

Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 10, Moreover brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, that bread that their soul loathed. That was spiritual food, Paul says. All drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.

But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not

desire evil things as they also desired or lusted. Do not become idolaters as were some of them, as it is written the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

Remember that eating and drinking, they sit down to eat and drink, they take advantage of what God has provided in that spiritual food and that spiritual drink, but when they get up from the table they go to play, and this means to play in the sense of sin. Nor let us commit sexual immorality as did some of them, and in one day 23,000 fell. Nor let us tempt Christ as some of them also tempted and were destroyed by serpents.

Nor complain as some of them also complained and were destroyed by the destroyer. All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written down for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. We are in the culminating phase of God's plan in this life and in this age, and we're supposed to look at these things and draw conclusions, and the presence of the serpent is significant.

It means something. It reminds us of the requirement for faith. The venom of the serpent, what he can do to spread his poison, the harm that he can inflict, is mentioned in many places in Scripture, such as Deuteronomy 32, 24.

This is a fascinating section of Scripture. This is the Song of Moses, and one of these days I'm just going to spend several lessons on the Song of Moses. There is a complete theology just in this song, but look down in the middle of this song in Deuteronomy 32.

You can see in verse 15 and following how Israel becomes complacent, grows fat, grows obese, and forsakes the God who made him in verse 15. Deuteronomy 32, 15. Jeshurun, this is one of the terms used for Israel, grew fat and kicked.

You grew fat, you grew thick, you are obese. Then he forsook the God who made him and scornfully esteemed the rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with foreign gods, with abominations.

They provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons not to God, to gods they did not know, to new gods, new arrivals that your fathers did not fear. Of the rock who begot you, you are unmindful and have forgotten the God who fathered you.

Now notice, this is the God who begot them, the God who fathered them. What does this say about the relationship of these people to God? They're his children. He is their father.

Is that a picture of believers or unbelievers? It's a picture of believers. Critically important. When the Lord saw it, he spurned them because of the provocation of who in verse 19? Because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters.

He said, I will hide my face from them. I will see what their end will be for they are a perverse generation, children in whom there is no faith. They have provoked me to jealousy by what is not God.

They have moved me to anger by their foolish idols, but I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation. You can see the wonderful symbolism and turnabout here that God employs. They provoke me with what is not a God.

I will provoke them with what is not a nation. That's a reference to us, to the Gentiles, to the Goyim that Israel looked down on. I will move them to anger by a foolish nation for a fire is kindled in my anger and shall burn to the lowest hell.

It shall consume the earth with her increase and set on fire the foundation of the mountains. I will heap disasters on them. God can heap disasters on believers who fail to respond, who grow complacent, who reject their Father in Heaven.

I will spend my arrows on them. They shall be wasted with hunger, devoured by pestilence and bitter destruction. I will also send against them the teeth of beasts with the poison of serpents of the dust.

It's exactly what we just saw, isn't it? That's exactly what happened to Israel in the wilderness. The sword shall destroy outside. There shall be terror within for the young man and virgin, the nursing child with the man of gray hairs.

He goes on to say in the next several verses that he would have destroyed them all together except for his name's sake. They are his people and his name is on the line. His glory is reflected in them.

To destroy his people utterly would send the wrong message. They're going to suffer defeat at the hands of their enemies. He says in verse 28, they are a nation void of counsel nor is there any understanding in them.

This is their crime. They don't pay attention to the plan of God, to the knowledge of God. There's no understanding in them.

They've grown tired of that spiritual food. Oh, that they were wise, that they understood, that they would consider their latter end. There's a judgment both now and future.

How could one chase a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight? Two enemies can make ten thousand Israelites run at this point because they're under judgment from God. That could only happen if their rock had sold them and the Lord had surrendered them. So this is pictured as falling victim to the bite of the serpent.

What does God mean when he says, thou shalt bruise or crush his heel? There is pain involved in the conflict with the serpent. To the extent that we give in, to the extent that we are deceived, to the extent that we are led astray, he is able to bite the heel and inflict pain and sorrow. And the pain and sorrow that we experience in this life is largely a result of the bite of the serpent.

And it's our fault that we are deceived. And that's the message of the garden. That's the message of the tree.

But that venom is poisonous. You can see this again in verse 33. The enemies whom God is using to judge Israel, their vine is the vine of Sodom and of the fields of Gomorrah.

Their grapes are grapes of gall. Their clusters are bitter. Their wine is the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of cobras.

I'll mention a few other passages. We don't have time to turn to. Job 20, verse 16, talks about the venom of the serpent.

Talking about cobra venom in that whole chapter. These are the words of Zophar, the Nehemiathite, and the presence of evil in the world. Though evil is sweet in his mouth, in verse 12, and he hides it under his tongue, though he spares it and does not forsake it, but keeps it in his mouth, yet his food in his stomach turns sour.

It becomes cobra venom within him. He swallows down riches and vomits them up again. God casts them out of his belly.

He will suck the poison of cobras. The viper's tongue will slay him. He will not see the streams and the rivers flowing with honey and cream.

He will restore that for which he labored and will not swallow it down. Talking about the futility of life when evil is embraced and taken in. The venom of the cobra.

Psalms 58 that we read at the outset this morning is another example. You can see this also in Psalm 140, verse 3. Preserve me from violent men who plan evil things in their hearts. They continually gather together for war.

They sharpen their tongues like a serpent. The poison of asps is under their lips. It's a reminder of the damage and the evil that can be done by the tongue.

It's compared to the poison of asps being under the lips. Proverbs 23. You have the same idea.

Proverbs 23, verse 31 and 32. Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions and complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Lots of times people ask themselves these questions. Why has calamity come on me? Why am I getting such a tough break? Why do I get the short end of the stick? Well, Proverbs asks and answers that question.

Who has woe, sorrow, contentions, complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine. Those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly, when it entices, in other words.

At the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things and your heart will utter perverse things. You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea or like one who lies at the top of a mast saying, they have struck me but I was not hurt.

They have beaten me but I did not feel it. When shall I awake that I may seek another drink? The stupor and the poisoning effect of evil, abiding with evil, even seeking out evil, is pictured here in the wine which bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. You'll recall the incident with Paul on his way to Rome in the shipwreck and they come ashore on the island and the gathering firewood and the asp bites him and he shakes it off and the venom doesn't have an effect and it astonishes the sailors.

That's in Acts 28 verses 5 and 6. And once again, there's a reason why that little episode took place and there's a reason why it's included in the scriptures. The Apostle Paul is at the opposite end of the spectrum, isn't he? He is actively embracing and seeking the truth of God and proclaiming the truth of God and the venom has no effect on him. He's bitten by the asp and he just shakes his arm and the snake falls away and no harm follows.

Paul had gathered in Acts 28 verse 3 a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire. A viper came out because of the heat and fastened onto his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, no doubt this man is a murderer who even though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.

But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

We mentioned charming of the snake that we saw there in Psalm 58. You can see this also in Ecclesiastes 10 verse 11. He who digs a pit will fall into it in Ecclesiastes 10 8. Whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.

He who quarries stones may be hurt by them and he who splits wood may be endangered by it. If the axe is dull and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength. But wisdom brings success.

In verse 11, a serpent may bite when it is not charmed. The babbler is no different. The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up.

So once again, you have the serpent and his bite associated with foolishness and evil, with rejection of wisdom. And the same thing in Jeremiah chapter 8 verse 17. God says to the Israelites, I will consume them, says the Lord in verse 13 of Jeremiah 8. No grapes shall be on the vine, no figs on the fig tree.

The leaf will fade. The things I have given them shall pass away from them. Verse 15.

We looked for peace, but no good came. And for a time of health, but there was trouble. The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan.

The whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones. For they have come and devoured the land and all that is in it, the city and those who dwell in it. God's discipline on the apathetic, indifferent Israelites.

For behold, I will send serpents among you, God says in verse 17. Vipers, which cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you, says the Lord. So just like Romans chapter 1, if we choose against God, choose the things that are a part of the evil side of life, God will turn us over to those things and we sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.

In Revelation chapter 9, God says, I will send serpents among you. Verse 19. Even here at the close of history, you see the serpent reappearing.

The plagues that come in this chapter, verse 18 of Revelation 9. Three plagues kill a third of mankind by the fire of the smoke and the brimstone, which come out of their mouths, the mouths of these horses who have heads like lions. Out of their mouths come fire, smoke, and brimstone. Their power is in their mouths and in their tails.

Their tails are like serpents having heads, and with them they do harm. This is God's judgment on the earth for rejection of himself, for rebellion, for following the evil one. They get the bite of the serpent.

This is one of the last times that the serpent can rear his ugly head, because here in Revelation, the end of all things has come. Jesus gave his disciples power over serpents. You remember when he sent out the 70 in Luke chapter 10, verse 19? He gave them authority over serpents, and that means something.

It symbolizes something. It's like the apostle Paul there on the island. Evil cannot make its fangs felt.

It can't inject its poison and do harm when they are pursuing and performing the work of the Lord. That power is given to them in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and it's a power that we have as well. Here in the garden, many of these things resonate.

You have those features of the garden that represent the tabernacle and the presence of God. You have the presence of the serpent and the choice that he represents. You have the response to the call of God in the garden, and the curse on the serpent, and the promise that even though he will inflict pain and has that ability, his head is going to be crushed.

His presence in history, the presence of evil in history, is an occasion for faith. It's faith

that's necessary to please God. Why is there evil in the world? Why does God tolerate it and permit it? It makes people come to the point of decision.

We have to choose, and we're responsible for that choice. Let's close in prayer.