

# Recovering from the sin of tempting Christ

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Jesus declared that as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. Joh 3:14-15. Making this point, Jesus drew from Moses' account of the fiery serpents that the Lord sent among the people of Israel when they spoke against God and Moses, saying, '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.' Num 21:5.

The apostle Paul said that this incident and the other wilderness journey experiences of the children of Israel were examples that were written for our admonition. 1Co 10:6,11. Concerning the fiery serpents, Paul said, 'Let us not *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.' 1Co 10:9-11. It is sobering to consider that, through their spiteful words, the Israelites tempted Christ in the manner of Satan himself. Mat 4:1.

The venom of fiery serpents causes inflammation and death. The Scriptures use the picture of a *fiery* serpent to describe the intent and effect of the backbiting tongue. Quoting the psalms of King David, the apostle Paul wrote, 'Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; *the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness*'. Rom 3:13-14. The apostle James described the backbiting tongue, which has the deadly poison of an adder within it, as 'a fire, a world of iniquity'. He said that it is 'so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature'. Jas 3:6.

The effect of a backbiting tongue is death and destruction. Those who speak in this manner personify Satan's endeavours to poison and destroy the elect. Remember, the Scriptures describe Satan as 'the serpent of old'. Rev 12:9. The backbiting tongue is more than just the conversation sourced from the other law. It has a poisonous, destructive intent toward others.

When Israel grumbled against Moses and God, the Lord sent fiery serpents among them to torment and kill them. To bring an end to this destruction, the Lord directed Moses to make a fiery serpent and to set it on a pole. He said that 'everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live'. Num 21:8. When Moses lifted the fiery serpent up on a pole, it was symbolically cursed with Christ. What had bitten an Israelite was being lifted up and killed. As the fiery serpent died with Christ, it was emptied of its power to cause pain and death.

As a person looked in faith upon the symbol of Christ crucified, and mourned for Him whom they pierced and against whom they had sinned, healing came to their lives. The inflammation and indignation that they were experiencing as the effect of the serpent's bite was removed from them.

Through this action, the Israelites repented and made apology to the Lord because they had complained against Moses and God. Their faith was that they were being delivered from being a grumbling, backbiting, fiery serpent that was causing others to become

inflamed, then to suffer, and to spiritually die from the poison of their grumbling accusations. They accepted that as the serpent was co-crucified and cursed with Christ, they too needed to be lifted up and crucified with Christ so that the sin within them, which was causing grief to others, could be done away with.

The Spirit is addressing the backbiting tongue in our midst. We must give sober consideration to what is 'biting' us as we give our ear to the poisonous conversation of those who grumble and complain against the Lord and His messengers. We must also receive the conviction of the Spirit as He addresses our discontented speech through which others have been bitten and poisoned. Our deliverance from the destructive consequences of this conversation will be to look on Christ whom we have pierced and to begin to mourn. We will find deliverance only as we accept our need to be co-crucified with Him.