

What in the world is the Lord God Almighty doing?

Sure, the people were extremely whiny. . . .

Sure, they were complaining about what God was – or wasn't – doing.

But did that warrant God's response? Sending poisonous snakes to kill them?

What is going on here?

...

You and I – we're reasonable people.

What parent among you, if your child asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if she asks for an egg, will give her a scorpion?

We wouldn't. But God did.

Why?

...

To understand God's response, we need to look beneath the surface of the people's complaints.

We need to look at what those complaints mean in their relationship to God.

The key is not the food or water, but **the accusation that God intended to abandon them to death.**

This is no ordinary complaint – no common lament.

This is an expression of unbelief – the lack of trust in God's love and favor toward them.

Even though they had seen God's power at work

- in the plagues that led Pharaoh to beg them to leave
- in the Passover of the angel of death,
- The parting of the red Sea that gave them escape
- The destruction of the Egyptian army
- The pillar of cloud and fire that led them

Even though they were in fact *not* dead, and were sustained daily with manna,

They did not trust God to care for them.

In their unbelief, they were blind to God's presence with them in the wilderness.

Because things were not what they wanted, they thought God had abandoned them and they turned their hearts away from God.

They accused God of wanting them to die.

...

So how does God build trust?

How does God regain the heart of the beloved?

One thing is for sure – God does it God's way!

First, the Lord shows the Israelites what it truly means to be given into the hands of death.

That's why he sent the poisonous snakes.

The snakes are symbols of lies and deceit

– and in this case, they represent the lie the people did believe:

that God did not in fact love them.

The manna was not killing them, as they complained – but the snakes were.

Lies always lead to death. They are always destructive.

But these snakes served another purpose

– they made the people realize that their trivial, whiny complaints were false, and that their only hope was in the mercy of God.

The snakes compelled them to turn their hearts back to God – who alone could save them from death.

“we have sinned.... – their confession was the first step.

They asked Moses to pray on their behalf, asking for mercy.

The accusers of God became the beggars of God.

And that put God in the best position to rebuild trust in the hearts of his people.

And again – God did it God’s way – not by simply removing the snakes, but by calling forth faith.

To be delivered from death by snakebite, the people had to look at the bronze serpent.

The dead thing

– the bronze serpent on the pole

– **was the means of defeating the living enemy nipping at their heels.**

And God provided this deliverance –
so the people had a choice:

to trust God and look at the bronze serpent, or
or not trust God and die.

**Those who trust the Lord discover his love and mercy giving them
life.**

...

We recognize ourselves in these Israelites, don't we?

We know what it is to turn our hearts away from God because life turns
sour and things don't go the way we want them to.

We know what it is to blame God for the setbacks and difficulties we
face.

We also know what it is like to be bitten by poisonous snakes.

I don't mean rattlesnakes, copperheads, or water moccasins

I mean the poisonous snakes of lies we believe –

- That God doesn't love us when things go wrong
- That we aren't good enough
- That more is better
- That what we have is ours to control

And the poisonous snakes of the evil and brokenness of the world

- Cancer and other diseases
- Corruption

- Scams
- Fake news and suppression of truth
- All the “-isms”
- Murder and mayhem
- Addictions

When these snakes bite us, we become the walking dead.

And we cannot overcome our emptiness.

Is there hope for us and for all who are bitten?

Yes! But it is not within us.

Our only hope for deliverance from these – and many other – purveyors of poison **is for God to intervene.**

To defeat all the snakes

- In our lives,
- the world,
- the galaxy,
- yes, the entire universe
-

– God sent his Son, Jesus, to walk with us among the snakes

And himself to become poisoned.

He takes all the venom of all the snakes into his own body and suffers death.

Death on the cross.

Thus, Jesus crucified became for us Deliverance on a pole that calls for our faith in him.

As Jesus told Nicodemus:

just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Say it with me: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

...

So dear people of God – children of the Most High

– do not despair when you see the news,

or read the paper, or check your social media,

or find yourself bitten by the snakes of this life.

Confess your sin and humbly approach the throne of mercy in prayer.

Turn your eyes to Jesus on the cross.

- There you see who takes away the sting of death.
- There you see your deliverance so that you do not perish in your sins.
- There you see the proof of God's love for you.
- There you see the destruction of the snakes' power to kill you.

To call Jesus “my Lord” is to follow his lead.

To call Jesus “my Savior” is to trust his death
as giving us life in the dry wilderness
and to trust his resurrection as giving us life in the blooming desert
filled with streams of water and trees of healing.

When we look up in faith at our crucified Savior,
When we share his body and blood of healing life
one thing is sure:

We are no longer the walking dead

But the living walking with Jesus,

Fearless among the snakes.

And so we continue the journey – giving thanks for Jesus

And preparing to participate with him in the Great Easter.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.