

THE "SNAKE ON A POLE" ISSUE

The center and focus of Christianity is the Cross of Jesus Christ. We "lift high the Cross." With the Apostle Paul, we should seek nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). Today, as the result of a variety of movements, many offer a cross-less Christianity, which, in essence, is not Christianity at all.

In John 3:14, Jesus compares his being lifted up on the Cross with Moses lifting up the snake on a pole in the wilderness.

In Numbers 21:4-9 we read the account of the snake on a pole. The people had grumbled against God and God sent fiery serpents into their midst. Many who were bitten died. The people repented and complained to Moses. The Lord God told Moses to make a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole. Those looking at the snake on a pole would be rescued from the fiery serpents.

There were about 1 million people in the camp. They occupied a large area. As far as we know, there was only one "snake on a pole." The idea of looking at this "snake on a pole" in order to be saved must have caused some interesting discussions and responses among the various elders of the people. These were, according to Scripture, a stiff-necked people.

Some probably entered into the time-honored philosophic discussion of why these bad things were happening to such seemingly good people.

The more sensitive folks led by Elder Schuller felt it was not a good practice to inform the people that these fiery serpents were the result of God's judgment on their bad behavior. This would be injurious to their sensitive self-esteem and undoubtedly inflict irreparable damage on their wounded inner-child. Instead of directing people to the "snake on a pole," they established support groups for those who had been bitten and had also lost loved-ones as a result of these damnable serpents. They made the people feel good about themselves in the midst of a bad situation.

The more mystical among the group led by the New Age Elders felt that the fiery serpents were not reality. "Reality," they suggested, "is found in the inner self." They set up seminars and taught the people to meditate and to visualize peace in the midst of the camp. They actually put bumper stickers on their wagons that read "Visualize No Snakes."

While others were not against the idea of a "snake on a pole," they felt that the real issue was a moral issue. "We have these snakes," Elder Dobson reasoned, "because we have lost our moral sense – our Judeo ethic." Rather than focusing on the "snake on a pole," Dobson focused on the family. Some, led by Elder Robertson, felt that they needed a more conservative leadership that would call the nation back to their Pre-Wilderness morality. Others felt the problem was with the family – namely, the men. Men were not doing their spiritual jobs. Elder McCartney formed a Covenant Keepers Movement among the men. The men liked the idea because it focused on them, not on some

"snake on a pole." After all they reasoned, "would a snake dare bite a man of integrity?"

The more spiritual elders in the group believed that the real issue was the lack of faith on the part of the people. "We need to speak faith into this situation," Elder Roberts proclaimed, "and take authority by binding these fiery serpents." These spiritual folks were not against the idea of a "snake on a pole," but it was for the spiritually immature.

A major issue became the inspiration of Moses. Had he really heard from God about this "snake on a pole" thing. One group led by Elder Spong felt that this was merely Moses opinion. Any healings that had taken place were readily explained by natural causes. A large group of the older elders formed a Snake Seminar in which they voted on which words God had actually spoken to Moses.

Some of the women in this group were angered by the fact that Moses, a man, was not sharing the responsibility of lifting up the pole with the women. One woman was heard to say, "I'm not going to look at any 'snake on a pole' held up by a man." Shortly thereafter she died of snakebite. A candlelight vigil was held in her honor.

The "liberals" in the camp were opposed by another group who fiercely defended the divine inspiration of Moses, but they felt that Moses was doing an injustice to the whole of divine revelation. Elder Falwell wanted to see the tablets of stone, the jar of manna, and Aaron's rod also lifted up on poles. He claimed that Moses was reducing divine revelation to the "snake on a pole."

The Johnny-come-lately elders, known as the post-liberals, felt that their reasoning had advanced beyond the mentality of the liberals and conservatives. They simply smiled at all the combatants. "People, please," they begged, "if a snake on a pole works for some people, why argue. Let them have their snake on pole. It is their truth, but it should not be imposed upon everyone. Can't we just all get along?"

Those who sought to faithfully direct people to the "snake on a pole" also had their problems and contentions. "Are these snakes a part of the perfect will of God or merely the permissive will of God," they asked. The real issue among them was why some were willing to look at the "snake on a pole" while others were not. One element felt that it was all predestined. God chooses some to look and others not to look. The other element felt that it was up to the person to make a decision whether or not to look. Elder Graham, an emotional public speaker, started crusades in which he would first decry the horror of fiery serpents and later invite the people to come forward and decide to look at the "snake on a pole." As the people contemplated their decision, they sang, "Just as I am without one plea but that the snake was raised for me."

There was one group that was exceptionally strange. They agreed that the situation was drastic and that Moses had indeed heard from God, but they felt that the idea of immediately directing people to a "snake on a pole" while the snakes were threatening them was bad marketing. "We should find out what people are looking for," they suggested. Elder Hybels stated that it might take

up to six months of working with seekers before they would be willing to look at the "snake on a poll." So instead, they took a poll to find out what the people wanted. Some wanted aerobics so that they would be able to more effectively run away from the snakes. Others wanted to learn principles for living in a camp where there were snakes on the loose. Others wanted to merely get together and sing some sappy, emotional songs and forget about the snakes. So while they waited for people to be willing to hear about the "snake on a pole," many died.

And God said, "You people need more fiery serpents." And he continually increased the number of fiery serpents until every eye was willing to behold the "snake on a pole."

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