

**Venom: Cobras: Biblical Taxonomy & Herpetology, Jeremiah 2:21; Deuteronomy 32:32-35; Psalm 140:3**

[NOTE: No Bible class, Tuesday, 23 September 1997, due to pastor's trip to Houston.]

From this commentary we can deduce the following analysis of the passage.

Keil and Delitzsch correctly analyze the vine as Israel whose people are like a vine gone corrupt, aptly described by Jeremiah in:

**Jeremiah 2:21** - I planted you a choice vine, a completely faithful seed. How then have you turned yourself before Me into the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine?

Figuratively, the degenerate shoots contain degenerate thoughts. Thus the “*vine of Sodom*” describes the Exodus generation as a people whose neural networks contain only wheel-tracks of wickedness.

From this vine's inventory of ideas must eventually come forth fruit: grapes of poison whose clusters are bitter. The word for “*poison*” in Deuteronomy 32:32 is the Hebrew *merora*: snake venom.

This snake venom is figuratively compared in the next line to bitterness but it's the same word: *merora*: snake venom.

Thus, what kind of wine is made from such grapes? Deuteronomy 32:33 says, “*The venom of serpents.*”

Here we have a different word for venom. *Merora* is the general term; here we have content indicated by the term *hema*.

The definition of *hema* gives us a number of applications:

**Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament; p. 860**

*It is used to indicate physical heat in the sense of a fever or of poison. [This reminds us of the word saraph which is translated “fiery” in Numbers 21:6.] However, the term is used as a rule to convey the concept of an inner, emotional heat which rises. It is translated as “hot displeasure,” “indignation,” “anger,” “wrath,” and “poison.”*

Thus, what is the content of this wine? Anger, wrath, and hot displeasure.

It goes on to describe it as the deadly venom of asps but again we have another word for venom: *ro'sh*. It means venom alright but it also means “*a bitter poison.*”

The snake is again identified as the *peten*, which is the family Elapidae, specifically, the Egyptian cobra!

The Israelites have similar behavior patterns and character traits to the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. The fruit they produce is a mental attitude which contains impulsive and chronic sins.

They have the simmering embers of bitterness which produce a venom of bitterness.

When under pressure this bitterness is expressed by explosions of rage and anger, injecting the venom of their souls towards Moses, Aaron, and even God Himself.

God must eventually execute justice to the recalcitrant who will not utilize the first problem-solving device of rebound.

We see in the next verse that the books of justice must eventually be balanced:

**Deuteronomy 32:34** - Is it not laid up in store with Me, sealed up in My treasuries?

God has decreed in eternity past how long He would delay judgment to the Exodus generation. Once that limit is reached, discipline and punishment follow.

However, as in all cases, the timing of the punishment, its intensity, and its form must be left to the wisdom of the Justices Who sit on the Supreme Court of Heaven.

**Deuteronomy 32:35** - Vengeance is Mine and retribution. In due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near and the impending things are hastening upon them [the cycles of national discipline].

This verse is quoted in Romans 12:19 as a warning against revenge motivation and in Hebrews 10:30 as a warning of God's punishment to those who refuse to recover from carnality and reversionism.

And the manner by which God chooses to display His vengeance and retribution is a perfect counterbalancing of the books of justice.

The Israelites have bitter venom in their souls.

The Scripture compares the venom and the bite of the Egyptian cobra with the mental attitude and verbal sins of the reversionist.

God's punishment of the latter is the literal venom and bite of the former:

**Numbers 21:6** - And the Lord sent venomous snakes among the people and they bit the people so that many of them died.

There is another passage in Psalms describing this event which along with a passage in Romans will complete our research into biblical taxonomy and herpetology.

**Psalms 140:3** - They sharpen their tongues as a serpent. The poison of a viper is under their lips.

The word "*serpent*" is *nachash*, the suborder Serpentes, and is best translated "*snake*." "*Poison*" is our old adversary *hema* which has to do with venom and explosive anger.

And the snake which delivers the venom? *Akshub*, one of the Hebrew words for the Egyptian cobra.

We know this because of the word used in the Septuagint, the third-century B.C. Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible: *aspis* often translated *asp*, it refers to the Egyptian cobra.

Paul realized this as well when he quoted Psalm 140:3 in:

**Romans 3:13** - Their throat is an open grave; with their tongues they keep deceiving. The poison of asps is under their lips.

**Romans 3:14** - Whose mouth is full of cursing from the source of bitterness.