

Poisoning the well was the tactic of armies in ancient times. When driven in defeat or retreat, armies would sometimes go to wells and water sources and pour poison into the drinking water. Then when the opposing army would come in and drink of the contaminated water, they would become weakened or sickened or even die. Among many historical examples we share only two:

- In 586 BC the Athenians used this tactic. They diverted the river that supplied water to a city they were attacking. Their victims dug wells, so the Athenians poisoned the water with hellebore (Many hellebore species are poisonous, and the word is a Greek a compound word meaning poisons food.) The inhabitants begin drinking the better tasting river water but developed persistent diarrhea. When the guards deserted their posts the Athenians attacked and took the city.
- In 1802 in Haiti, the enslaved women pretended to fetch water for the French soldiers during the Haitian revolution. They dumped copper utensils into the wells, which when the soldiers drank the water they began to vomit blood, fell into comas and some died. All this was made more alarming because no one knew where the sickness was coming from.

In most of these cases, people partook of that which they thought was harmless, even helpful, but it brought suffering and even death.

In modern terminology, “poisoning the well” has become common to refer to poisoning relationships. There are three levels to this poisoning process.

1. To plant negative insinuations into a conversation to raise doubt about the character or intention of a third party, which would color the thinking of the hearer and turn them against any good the person referred to might have intended. (This definition is the one most commonly used.)

Example Ruth has come with her mother-in-law back to Bethlehem:

- I wonder what she did to Mahlon so that he died?
- Ever wonder how it is that she is so happy when her mother-in-law is grieving so? Makes you wonder what is going on.
- I heard she is determined to get a wealthy husband

here, and that she comes early and works late just so she can earn the trust of some wealthy man.

- Look how she keeps showing up in Boaz’s field. It is so obvious that she’s trying to get into his pockets.
2. To color a speech with untruths and half-truths to confuse the audience with lies in order to get the listeners to carry out the selfish wishes of the speaker. (Often used by politicians, as is witnessed in our day).
  3. (Where Def #1 and 2 begin) To become so influenced by one’s own suspicions to the extent that a toxic bias negative thinking colors every aspect of how you see the other person.

In 1Sam 22, Saul implied:

- v7 That David was enticing men with bribes.
- v8 That everyone had turned against him.
- v8 That Jonathan had entered into a deceitful alliance with David, and was the mastermind working against him.
- v8 That no one was sympathetic to him.

As a summary, Saul convinced himself that he was a victim of unfair manipulations. In reality, Saul was a terrorist planning unfair revenge upon a loyal ally.

The results?

- vv 9,18 Doeg fell for it - murder was the result.
- 23:16 Jonathan was alienated
- 28:5-7 Saul’s depression grew worse and worse. Finally he turned to the occult for help.
- Saul lost his ability to relate to life objectively – (diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic.)
- 31:3-6 Eventually Saul lost his way into suicide.
- He went out into eternity, lost forever!! Still suffering because of his own poisoned well.

In most of our relationships the stakes are nowhere as high as this. But in small, sinister ways but selfish goals create mythical enemies and/or bogus crises and catastrophes that are not even realistic. Because of toxic thinking we give up our personal peace and destroy brotherhood relationships.

I. The **Source** (of the Poison)

Revelation 12:10 identifies that Satan is the Accuser of the brethren. Satan wants to have God see the worst in us (example Job), and likewise, that we would disbelieve God’s goodness toward us (example Eve)

God even allows evil spirits to test relationships. Judges 9:23 “Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem... “Gaal, “Who is Abimelech?” God used toxic attitudes to discipline both Abimelech and the men of Shechem because of their selfish ways.

Paul warned Titus to be on guard against this curse coming into the church through (of all sources) the older women. (Titus 2:3 “the older women...not false accusers”) the Greek word here is “diablos” and is often translated devil. There is no phase of life that brings us exemption from being tempted with Satan’s criticisms of other saints.

And so the source of poisonous thinking is always Satan, devils or hell. Thinking evil of our brethren, planting doubts in other’s minds and raising attitudes of suspicions does not come from God. It comes as Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, as someone who really wants to help.

At its source, suspicious thinking starts in the counsel rooms of hell with demons discussing how to activate this poison and make it spread. Carnal church members incubate this poison, and soon...

II. The **Course** (of poisoning wells) - lets see how it jumps from hell to human hearts.

Poison in human relations often begins with a grudge. Read Lev 19:16-18. When a person is hurt or disappointed, he will mull over the offence. Instead of going to his neighbor and talking out his hurt, he becomes a talebearer, a scandalmonger and tells others what he has suffered.

We are made in the image of God and know when we are mistreated. We are given the ability to sense right and wrong, plus we are extra sensitive to other’s faults when we believe we have been wronged.

Esau (as recorded in Genesis 25 and Hebrews 12:7-8) would have known that he had been wronged by both his mother and his brother. This hurt grew into a grudge. The grudge led Esau to fail the grace of God. There was nothing wrong with God’s grace, and it could have healed Esau of his bitterness. But Esau refused to see God as a loving Father and chose to drink of his poison which in turn defiled other people..