

Genesis 3.14-24: Divine Sentence

Divine Sentence [vv.14-19]

God sentences the individuals in the order of the crimes committed – the devil, the woman, *then* the man. Sadly, three *blessings* of earlier chapters (1.22, 28; 2.3) are matched by three subsequent *curses* (3.13, 17; 4.11). Only the serpent (as an animal) and the ground were *cursed*, not Adam or Eve.

The Serpent [vv.14-15]

v.14: The first sentence concerned the serpent, as an animal, for its part in tempting the woman. Animals were created for the benefit of man; if this is violated, judgment follows (cf. Genesis 9.5; Exodus 21.28). The serpent was “cursed above all cattle”. A curse is defined as ‘banishment from the place of blessing’ – this would be the experience of all creation, the serpent more than the rest (cf. Romans 8.20). It was probably degraded from the *highest* to the *lowest* place in the scale of creation. The serpent would henceforth move “upon its belly” and “eat dust” all the days of its life. This is a symbolic figure of *humiliation* and *defeat* which will not change even in the millennium (Isaiah 65.25). The language could also imply that the serpent moved in an upright position before the fall, but this does not necessarily mean it had legs. Eating dust was also a figure of *total defeat* (Isaiah 25.12; Micah 7.17). Incidentally, snakes do deliberately eat (lick) dust as a form of ‘smell’ (sense).

v.15: This verse is often called “The Protoevangelium” being a first glimmer of the gospel. The verse describes the sentence on the serpent *three* ways: **personally** (“thee” and “the woman”); **collectively** (“thy seed” and “her seed”); and **prophetically** (bruising “head” and “heel”). First, God would put “enmity” (hostility) between the serpent and the woman. Eve had transferred her trust and obedience to the serpent and become the willing servant of Satan. That friendship must be broken – it was not a permanent alliance. Second, there would be ongoing conflict between “thy seed” and “her seed”. The word “seed” refers to physical *or* spiritual descendants (posterity). The latter is more likely as Satan cannot father physical descendants, but he is the “father” of those who take character from him in rebellion against God and unbelief (cf. John 8.44). The seed of the woman are the *godly* seed, the believers of every age. Such hostility would soon be evident in Cain, who was “of the evil one” (1 John 3.12) and Abel who was “righteous” (Hebrews 11.3). It will continue in the tribulation when the “dragon” will persecute the “woman” (Israel) and seek to “make war” with the rest of her “children” (seed), Revelation 12.13-17. The whole concept is well illustrated in the *Parable of the Tares* which describes true “children of the kingdom” and counterfeit “children of the wicked one” (Matthew 13.38). The two ‘grow’ together and are separated at the end of the age harvest.

Third, the *singular* pronouns “it” and “his” suggest the collective seed is represented in *single individuals* in which the conflict will reach its climax. The primary seed of the serpent is the “man of sin” (2 Thessalonians 2.3), to whom the Dragon gives his power and throne and authority (Revelation 13.2). The primary seed of the woman is the Lord Jesus who will “bruise” (crush) the head of the serpent, a picture of *fatal* and *final* destruction. This was *initially* accomplished at the cross (Hebrews 2.14-18), but will be completed when Christ comes in glory and the Devil and his minions are cast into the Lake of Fire (cf. Romans 16.20, Revelation 20.2-3, 10). Fruchtenbaum writes, “*The figure is based upon the way one kills a poisonous serpent in the Middle East and in Israel. The way to kill a poisonous serpent is not to step on its tail or the main part of his body, but to step on his head and crush the head against the ground.*” The bruising of the heel is painful, but not terminal, and a clear reference to the sufferings of Christ as Calvary. He was “wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.”

In Scripture, the word “seed” almost *always* refers to the offspring of the male (but cf. Genesis 4.25). Therefore, in referring to the “seed of the woman” there is a possible inference of the virgin birth (Isaiah 7.14). No taint of the fall attached to Christ; He is holy humanity. So, just as the Devil introduced sin through the woman *without* the man, so God will introduce salvation through a woman *without* a man. Christ is the seed of the *woman* (humanly), the seed of *Abraham* (nationally) and the seed of *David* (royally).

The Woman [v.16]

v.16: The first two clauses form a *hendiadys* (two statements expressing a single idea) describing the “sorrow” involved in the whole process of childbirth from conception to birth. The first word translated “sorrow” emphasises general *emotional anxiety*. The second “sorrow” translates a different word expressing *strenuous work* and *physical pain*. Walton has paraphrased, “*I will greatly increase the anguish you will experience in the birth process, from the anxiety surrounding conception to the strenuous work of giving birth.*” In terms of relationship, her “desire” would be towards her husband, but he would “rule” over her. The word “desire” means ‘to seek control over’ or ‘possession of’ (as sin

with Cain, cf. 4.7). Thus, the woman would seek to usurp the man's authority (headship) and subdue her husband. In turn, he would "rule" her – a strong word describing dominion, mastery and lordship – to retain his position. Thus, sin had damaged their relationship, bringing conflict and tension to the marriage. This is far from the NT ideal of Christian marriage, where a husband sacrificially loves his wife, and she willingly submits to his leadership.

The Man [vv.17-19]

v.17: Because Adam abdicated his headship and violated God's commandment, he too must be sentenced. It includes a "curse" on the ground, "sorrow", "thorns", "sweat" and "dust". The Lord Jesus, in His sufferings, partook of *all* these (cf. Psalm 22.15; Matthew 26.38; Mark 15.17; Luke 22.44; Galatians 3.13). In bearing the curse Himself, He has assured an eternity for us where there will be no more death, sorrow, pain or curse (Revelation 21.4; 22.3). In cursing the ground, God 'removed it from His favour' – the fruitfulness of the soil was blighted. Adam would no longer enjoy the garden's abundance but would have to work the ground in "sorrow" (painful toil) in order to eat. The curse did not lie in the work itself, which is good for man (cf. 2.15), but the uncooperative nature of the soil. **v.18:** It would easily produce "thorns" and "thistles", but through hard labour he would eat of the "herb" (grain) of the field – a contrast to the fruit-bearing trees of Eden's orchard. Man would continue to be a vegetarian. **v.19:** "Sweat" would be the result of man's labour in the field – something that would continue *until* the day of his death. Sin had subjected Adam to physical death. His body, ultimately, would die, decay and return to the dust from which it was made.

In summary, creation has been "*subjected to futility [vanity] – not willingly but because of God who subjected it – in hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of decay into the glorious freedom of God's children*", Romans 8.20-21 [NET]. Creation has been subjected to a curse by God because Adam could not be a fallen head over an unfallen creation. But, when man is restored at the manifestation of the Last Adam, so will creation.

A Demonstration of Faith [vv.20-21]

v.20: In a wonderful response to the divine sentence, we are told Adam "called his wife's name Eve". Initially, he had given her a *generic* name 'woman' (2.23), but "Eve" was her new *personal* name, meaning 'living' or 'life-giver' hence the "mother of all living". Adam was clearly responding in faith to God's promise of a seed. Though God had pronounced *death* (v.19), Adam speaks of *life* – clearly believing that not only would they have children, but through this means God would send a deliverer to bring salvation, and life out of death. **v.21:** As soon as Adam had expressed faith, God responded by producing garments to cover their guilty shame. Making "coats" of animal skins required the shedding of blood. The death of the animals taught Adam and Eve the cost of sin, and the principle that without the shedding of blood there could be no "remission" (forgiveness). The word "coat" signifies a robe-like garment (complete covering), the same word being used of the white "linen coat" worn by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16.4). Through sacrifice, God had restored the alienated couple to fellowship with Him and one another.

Dismissal from the Garden [vv.22-24]

v.22: Once again, the reader is privileged to listen to a conversation within the Godhead (cf. 1.26; 2.18). "One of us" indicates *compound unity* and *plurality*. Sin brought Adam and Eve into an *experiential* knowledge of "evil". As sinners they were now inclined to evil without the power to overcome it and do good. Adam must therefore be prevented from taking of the "tree of life" and living forever on earth in his sinful state. "*He would have perpetuated his condition of sin and misery, making himself a deathless creature in a hell of his own devising*" (FB Hole). **v.23:** As such, the LORD God "sent him forth" (to *dismiss*) from the garden to "till" the ground. **v.24:** The language is stronger here. Adam was, in fact, "driven out" of the garden, meaning a forceful expulsion. Perhaps there was a reticence on the part of the man to leave. No longer would sinful man, apart from in exceptional circumstances (cf. Genesis 5.22, 24), enjoy daily walking and communing with God in paradise. To ensure man could not return to the garden, "cherubim" with a "flaming sword" were placed at the "east" facing gate. The word "placed" is related (by root) to *Shecinah* (glory), suggesting this was a visible manifestation of God's presence. It is possible Cain, Abel and others brought their sacrifices to this location before the flood. Note the entrance to the Tabernacle was east-facing and dominated by the brazen altar within the gate. "Cherubim" are angelic beings associated with the *presence* of God (Exodus 25.22; Ezekiel 10), representing His *righteous* and *holy* judicial actions (Psalm 89.14). It seems that Lucifer, before he sinned, was the "anointed" (chief) cherub. These cherubim wielded a "flaming sword". The Hebrew literally reads 'the flame of the sword that turns round and round'. It was a whirling sword of justice to prevent access to the divine presence and tree of life. But Christ is "the Way" (John 14.6) and has opened for us a "new and living way" to God which could only be accomplished by awakening the sword of divine justice against Him (Zechariah 13.7).

This verse supplies a glimmer of hope that the way to the "tree of life" would one day be opened again, as confirmed by Revelation 22.2. But in the paradise of God above, there will be no tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Probation will be over. Any future fall will be impossible for eternity.