

The First Gospel...Genesis 3:14ff

Genesis 3¹⁴ The Lord God said to the serpent,

¹⁴ Because you have done this,
Cursed are you more than all cattle,
And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly you will go,
And dust you will eat
All the days of your life;
¹⁵ And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Introduction

“In Genesis 3:16-19, God pronounced judgment on Eve and Adam. In Genesis 3:14,15 we see God’s judgment upon the serpent...and Satan as well.

Punishment is primarily retribution; only in a subordinate sense is it directed toward the reformation of the offender or the protection of others. Many people today regard punishment as having no other purpose than the reformation of the offender and the protection of society. Hence, the aspect of judgment and punishment as required by justice is set aside...When this denial of the existence of justice infiltrates and infects the Church, the result is that religious teachers come to deny that man is guilty before God and that Christ’s atonement is a substitutionary bearing of the penalty of sin. The denial of the orthodox doctrine of the atonement, which is so prevalent today, is rooted in the denial of the existence of such a thing as justice anywhere, in heaven or on earth.

Punishment of sin is required by the nature of God. By His nature, God is righteous. God is almighty, but there is one thing that even God cannot do: He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). If God were to leave sin unpunished, He would be denying Himself. Since it is impossible for God to deny Himself, it follows that it is impossible for God to leave sin unpunished...Accordingly, God, in His perfect justice, pronounced a judicial sentence.”

Source...J G Vos, Genesis . Crown & Covenant Publications.

The Curse Upon the Serpent (Genesis 3:14,15)

“God made no remedial gesture to the serpent. There was only a curse.

The curse had two objects, first the reptile itself (v. 14) and then Satan who controlled the reptile (v. 15). The curse is typical of prophetic language that addresses an object or person and then moves beyond the object to the source.

Reptile cursed...

Genesis 3¹⁴ “Because you have done this,
Cursed are you more than all cattle,
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On your belly you will go,
And dust you will eat
All the days of your life”

The cursing of the snake is consistent with the fate of other animals in Scripture that caused injury to humans ...Exodus 21:28 states, “When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned.” Beasts used for immoral purposes were also put to death, not because they were accountable, but because they were used to abuse men and women made in the image of God (cf. Leviticus 20:15, 16). ***Every animal was made for man and was subject to him as its head. Thus any abuse or perversion of the order called for strict judgment.***

This is one of the two places in the Bible where God himself verbalized a curse. The other is in Genesis 4:11, where we read that God cursed Cain for the murder of Abel. In all other instances men invoke curses in God’s name. Here the fact that God made the curse means that the curse was completely certain. The idea of this curse is banishment from the place of blessing, the garden. All of animate creation would be banished from the fertility and harmony of the garden, but the serpent was cursed “above all” the rest of the animals.

The curse upon the serpent is stated in physical terms—the snake crawling on its belly and eating dust. Does this suggest a new way of travel for the serpent, say, from an upright posture to its belly? Possibly, but probably not. Derek Kidner argues “that the crawling is henceforth symbolic (cf. Isaiah 65:25)—just as in 9:13 a new significance, not a new existence will be decreed for the rainbow.”

Thus through God’s curse, a new significance was given to the serpent’s distinctive posture. Eating dust variously signifies abject humiliation in Scripture. “May . . . his enemies lick the dust” (Psalm 72:9). “They shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their strongholds” (Micah 7:17; cf. Isaiah 49:23). The image was so fitting. The snake had exalted itself above man. Therefore it would go upon its belly.

Isaiah 65 pictures the whole of creation delivered from the effects of the fall, except for the serpent, which lives in perpetual degradation, fulfilling the sentence “all the days of your life”—and therefore prophesying the fate of the ultimate serpent for whom there will be no deliverance!”

Satan cursed...

As God addressed the reptile, his speech moved beyond the snake, and the referent became Satan himself:

Genesis 3¹⁵ “And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Here is an astounding gospel prophecy...because God’s curse upon the serpent turned into a word of grace, giving what has been recognized from the second century A.D. as the “first gospel,” the protevangelium, when the post-apostolic fathers Justin Martyr and Irenaeus preached that the woman’s offspring (literally, “seed”) here refers to Christ who would crush Satan’s head. This has been the church’s historic position, with little variation.

In 250 B.C. when Jewish scholars translated the Bible into Greek, giving the world the Septuagint translation, they interpreted the word “seed” (“offspring” in the ESV) as a single individual—“he will crush your head.” ***The Septuagint translators, who could not possibly have had any Christian presuppositions, understood the seed of the woman to be a future individual who would deal a deathblow to the serpent.*** Later rabbinic commentators saw it otherwise, but not the original Septuagint translators.

Recently Hebrew scholar Jack Collins examined every use of the word “seed” when it means offspring and found that ***when the word “seed” is singular (as it is here in Genesis 3:15) it always denotes a specific descendant and that when it is an individual, the pronoun will be masculine. Thus, in the broader context of Genesis Collins argues that “it would be fair to read this as God’s threat to the snake, of an individual who will engage the snake in combat and win.”***

This view is sustained by the fact that in Galatians 3:16 Paul argues, on the basis of the use of the singular “seed” in God’s promise to Abraham, that the word “seed” refers to Christ: “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ.” ***Here in Genesis 3:15 we have a prophecy of the cross when Satan would strike the heel of Christ (the suffering on the cross), but Christ would strike Satan’s head (through his death and glorious resurrection)...***

Amazing! Here is the gospel in paradise just lost. God cursed Satan and in the process proclaimed grace through his Son, the second Adam, who crushed Satan by his great work on the cross.

And there is more, because when Christ came, he understood the “first gospel” in Genesis. He understood that he himself was the antidote to the serpent’s venom. In fact just prior to declaring “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16) Jesus said, “And 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” (vv. 14, 15). His reference, of course, was to Numbers 21, where due to Israel’s sin God sent venomous snakes into the camp so that many people died and were dying. As Moses prayed amidst the death, “the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live” (vv. 8, 9).

The details of the event are remarkable. The snakes were the result of sin—in fact, the perfect expression of sin because it was a serpent who tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, thereby bringing sin into the world. Our very natures have been polluted by the serpent’s venom. Paul says, “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one’” (Romans 3:10).

Above the dying people we see the likeness of a serpent lifted up on a pole, foreshadowing Christ who was “made . . . to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). ...Our Lord became sin (or a serpent) for us. Romans 8:3 says, “God . . . [sent] his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin.” Second Corinthians 5:21 adds, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Galatians 3:13 states, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” With all the animal realm from which to choose, God chose the perfect representation—the serpent. On the cross our Lord took the sins of the world upon himself as symbolized by the writhing serpent.

We must not miss the importance of the gaze of faith. Numbers 21:9 says, “If a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.” The command to look to that uplifted serpent was a gracious foreshadowing of looking to the crucified Christ for our salvation. No wonder our Lord said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14).

Moses raised that serpent up high in the camp, and all the dying Israelites had to do was look to that pole and be saved. No matter how horribly they were bitten, no matter how many times they had been bitten or how sick they were, the opportunity for salvation was there. Even the most degraded and miserable sinner who looks to Christ alone for salvation will be saved. This great grace had its origins and image in the “first gospel” in the garden. There was hope in paradise lost!

God’s curse upon Satan meant that his own Son would one day become a curse for us. Satan would strike his heel, but the wound received would mean that the Son would strike a deathblow to Satan. Grace is rooted in Christ’s victory.

Genesis 3¹⁵ “And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

If you see this “first gospel,” you will understand Jesus’ words: “And 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 “For God so loved the world, that

he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14-16).

Adam names his wife...

In verse 20 mitigating grace begins to glow as Adam exhibits faith by renaming his wife. “The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living” (v. 20). “Eve” means “life” or “life-giver.” Adam named his wife Life because she would become the mother of all the living! Adam was able to do this because he had a very precise awareness of the overall significance of God’s words to his wife.

Adam had listened closely to God’s speech to his spouse. He understood that one of her offspring would crush the head of the snake (v. 15). He knew that his wife’s pain in childbearing meant that a people would follow. Indeed, the tense Adam used to declare his faith is the prophetic perfect, indicating that her becoming the mother of all the living “is as good as done.” Adam’s declaration was an overwhelming shout of hope.

The name Eve celebrates the survival of the human race and victory over death. The reformer Philip Melancthon called Eve “the seal of grace.” Certainly Adam’s hope yielded a prophetic glimpse of grace.

Graced garments...

Now God performed an act of mitigating grace: “And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them” (v. 21). It is clear that this is a sovereign work of God, conceived and executed by God alone. It is a work that Adam and Eve would never have conceived of because it involved the unprecedented taking of life.

Their self-made attempts to cover themselves in inadequate fig-leaf loin cloths were replaced by clothing made by God. They had attempted to cover themselves, but this covering was from God—a tunic that reached to their knees or ankles. God’s provision here of robes of animal skin both recognized their sin and was an act of grace.

A noted nineteenth-century Scottish preacher and scholar, and principal of New College, Edinburgh University, made these remarkably penetrating observations:

It is also to be remarked that the clothing which God provided was in itself different from what man had thought of. Adam took leaves from an inanimate, unfeeling tree; ***God deprived an animal of life, that the shame of His creature might be relieved. This was the last thing Adam would have thought of doing.***

To us life is cheap and death familiar, but ***Adam recognized death as the punishment of sin. Death was to early man a sign of God's anger. And he had to learn that sin could be covered...not by a bunch of leaves snatched from a bush as he passed by...but only by pain and blood.*** Sin cannot be atoned for by any mechanical action nor without expenditure of feeling. ***Suffering must ever follow wrongdoing. From the first sin to the last, the track of the sinner is marked with blood. . . . It was made apparent that sin was a real and deep evil, and that by no easy and cheap process could the sinner be restored.***

Men have found that their sin reaches beyond their own life and person, that it inflicts injury and involves disturbance and distress, that it changes utterly our relation to life and to God, and that we cannot rise above its consequences save by the intervention of God Himself, by an intervention which tells us of the sorrow He suffers on our account.

God's action here in primeval history was a gracious foreshadowing of his ultimate sovereign provision for sin. Certainly the first couple would have only understood this in faint principle. But the foundation was mightily laid. Later no Levitical priest could read this passage without making the connection with atonement because the skins of the animals slain in sacrifice were given to the priests for their use (cf. Leviticus 7:8).

The divine provision was a telling illustration of the method of grace in response to sin and its consequences. God covers sin and its degradation. The biblical picture of justification is the gift of the robe of righteousness (cf. Zechariah 3:4ff.; Matthew 22:11; Luke 15:22). Believers are described as clothed with Christ (cf. Galatians 3:27).

In a passage on the wedding of the Lamb and his bride, we read how God's righteousness produces the saints' righteousness:

“It was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Revelation 19:8)

Here we see clearly the gospel in Genesis.”

Source...Richard Phillips, Genesis

Adam's embrace of the Gospel...

“And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living” (3:20). Eve means “life.” ***In naming his wife “Life,” Adam evidenced his faith in the promise of God to provide salvation, by which the highest kind of life would finally become man's possession. Just as death, in its fullest sense, comes through sin, so life, in its fullest sense, comes through the fulfillment of the promise about the seed of the woman.***

This does not mean that Adam understood this as fully and clearly as we can today, but it implies that Adam had true faith that man's real life would come through the seed of the woman. This is the essence of what is called “saving faith.” And it implies that Adam had truly repented of his sin of disobedience to God, for without repentance there can be no true faith.

Some people have raised the question as to whether Adam and Eve were saved... ***It would seem that Adam's act of naming his wife “Life” involved real repentance and true faith.***

The sentence that God pronounced upon the serpent, Adam, and Eve involved not only elements of judgment, but also elements of grace. Intertwined with the penalties were expressed or implied promises, namely: (1) The seed of the woman would finally destroy the serpent; (2) It would be possible for the woman to bring forth children, thus making possible the birth of one who would destroy the serpent; (3) It would be possible for man, by arduous toil, to produce bread from the soil, thus rendering the continuous support of human life possible.

To these elements of grace Adam's faith attached itself, as is evidenced by his act of naming his wife "Eve" or "Life." This would seem to be a sufficient answer to the question of whether Adam was saved."

Source...J G Vos, *Genesis* . Crown & Covenant Publications

The Divine Preservation of the Messianic Line: The True Meaning of the Holidays

Dr. Andy Woods

The holiday season comes and goes very quickly. Sometimes the hectic nature of the Christmas season provides us little time to adequately reflect upon the true meaning of Christmas. What then is the true meaning of Christmas? The true meaning of the holiday is the celebration of the superintendence of a sovereign God that allowed His prophesied redeemer, God the Son, to be born into the world.

A seldom considered Christmas passage is Rev 12:4, which says,

"And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child."

Here, the dragon or Satan (Rev 12:9) is pictured as standing before the woman or Israel (Rev 12:1; Gen 37:9-10) so that he might preempt the birth of Jesus Christ (Rev 12:5; Ps 2:9; Acts 1:9). This passage represents the angelic perspective on Herod's attempt to prevent the birth of the Messiah by murdering all of the male infants in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1-8, 16). Although Matt 2 depicts this event from the human perspective of Herod's insecurity over his own throne, Rev 12:4 describes the same event from the point of view of the fallen angelic realm. In actuality, it was Satan who used Herod's insecurity in an effort to prevent the birth of the Messiah.

Such a preemptive effort was not Satan's first attempt to prevent the birth of the Messiah. All the way back in Gen 3:15, we find the first biblical, messianic prophecy. It is often referred to as the "protoevangelium". Here, Satan was put on notice of a coming redeemer. This critical verse says,

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

Not only does this verse predict a coming one who would crush the serpent's (or Satan's) head, but it also predicts the serpent's bruising of the heel of this coming redeemer. Much of this bruising occurred through Satan's attempt to prevent the Messiah from being born. Thus, ***Rev 12:4 and Gen 3:15 when taken together furnish an angelic commentary or perspective on the repeated near extinction and jeopardy experienced by the messianic lineage as recorded throughout the pages of the Old Testament.***

- For example, because Abel's sacrifice was accepted, Satan figured that the messianic lineage would come through him. Thus, Satan prompted Cain to murder Abel (Gen 4; 1 John 3:12). Yet, God circumvented Satan's effort through the continuation of the messianic line through the birth of Seth (Gen 4:25-26; 5:1-32).
- Satan again sought to prevent the birth of the Messiah through the contamination of humanity's pre-flood gene pool (Gen 6:1-4) so that the human race could never give birth to a Messiah who must not only be fully God but also fully human. God again got around this Satanic attempt through the preservation of Noah and his sons (Gen 6:9; 1 Pet 3:19-20). Through this line, the Messiah would ultimately come (Gen 9:26; 11:10-26).
- In the days of Moses, Satan again tried to thwart the birth of the Messiah by enslaving the nation through which the anticipated redeemer would come from (Exod 1). Yet, God again circumvented Satan's effort through the Exodus event.
- The same pattern again repeated itself when the usurping queen Athaliah sought to exterminate all of the royal offspring of the house of Judah. Yet, God again thwarted this Satanic attack through the preservation of baby Joash, the sole surviving Davidic descendant, in the temple throughout the duration of Athaliah's rampage (2 Chron 22).
- This pattern again emerged when wicked Haman developed a plot to exterminate all the Jews. Yet, God again circumvented this Satanic effort to preempt the birth of Christ by sovereignly working through Mordecai and Esther in order to preserve the Jewish race from annihilation as recorded in the Book of Esther.
- Thus, Herod's ambition to kill all of the male Bethlehem infants (Matt 2) is yet another chapter in the ongoing attempt by Satan to preempt the birth of the Messiah. Once again, God sovereignly intervened by causing the royal family to flee to Egypt until Herod's death.

Despite these numerous attempts to thwart the Messiah's mission by preventing His birth, God sovereignly protected the messianic line thereby allowing the redeemer to be born and eventually fulfill His earthly mission of paying the world's sin debt. God's faithful protection of the messianic line leading to the birth of Christ is what we are to remember and celebrate at Christmas time. During this holiday season let us continually praise God for how He has worked faithfully and sovereignly in history so as to allow the redeemer to come into the world so that He could accomplish His great mission on humanity's behalf.

<https://www.bibleprophecyblog.com/2011/12/divine-preservation-of-messianic-line.htm>