

Act Two: The Curse

I. INTRODUCTION

The Storyline

The biblical story begins by introducing the setting, main characters, and initial plot. In the first act of the biblical narrative, the reader learns that...

Through the act of creation, God establishes his kingdom over all things and appoints human beings to rule on his behalf as his image bearers, to fill the earth and develop his creation into a glorious civilization.

Like most every other story, the biblical narrative quickly runs into the conflict that needs to be overcome. The introduction of this conflict makes up the second act of the biblical story.

Tragically, human beings rebel against God as they seek to rule God's creation their own way, resulting in the curse of evil and death upon the world, which infects every aspect of God's good creation.

The Place of Act Two in the Bible

Genesis 3–11 raise a number of puzzling issues for readers: the identity of Cain's wife, the longevity of life spans, the identity of the "sons of God," and the nature of the flood, to name a few. The danger contemporary readers face is to allow these issues to sidetrack one from the main thrust of what God wants to communicate in these chapters about the curse and how it thwarts his kingdom-purposes for creation.

II. ACT TWO: THE CURSE

The Event of the Fall (Gen 3:1–7)

Human Freedom. The development of God's creation into a glorious civilization requires cooperation, for humankind to exercise freedom under God's reign. However, this freedom also entails that humankind has the ability to rebel against God by ruling his creation their own way instead.

The Tree. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents the temptation for humankind to be autonomous. By eating the fruit from this tree, humanity seeks to make their own rules rather than follow God's. In other words, they attempt to rule creation outright instead of ruling under God's authority.

The Temptation. The serpent tempts Adam and Eve to disobey God by eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their rebellion brings sin and death into God's good creation.

The Effects of the Fall (Gen 3:8–24)

The Nature of Sin. At one level, sin consists of rebellious acts against God and his character, illustrated by Adam and Eve’s eating of the fruit. However, on another level, sin is described like a disease that results from Adam and Eve’s rebellion and infects all of God’s creation.

*“Adam and Eve’s fall into sin was not
just an isolated act of disobedience
but an event of catastrophic significance
for creation as a whole.”*

Albert Wolters
Creation Regained

Broken Relationships. Before the Fall, humanity enjoys fellowship with God, communion with one another, harmony with the world, and peace with oneself. After the Fall, each of these four relationships is severely damaged.

- **Human and God**—Adam and Eve hide from God and then they are removed from the garden, losing the close access they had to God’s presence.
- **Human and Human**—enmity arises between Adam and Eve; they blame each other, and Adam now attempts to control Eve.
- **Human and Creation**—the ground is cursed making it arduous for humanity to cultivate and develop creation.
- **Human and Oneself**—Adam and Eve both feel shame and suffer the personal and inward and physical consequences of death itself.

The Expansion of the Fall (Gen 4–11)

From Bad to Worse. After the Fall of Adam and Eve, the Genesis narrative describes how the curse fills the earth and spreads throughout all dimensions of life.

- **Individuals**—Adam and Eve disobey God (3:1–7).
- **Family**—Cain murders his brother Abel (4:1–16).
- **Societal Structures**—government rulers (“sons of God”) oppress their subjects (6:1–4).
- **All People**—humanity’s sinfulness spirals to the point that God is grieved and so decides to send a flood (6:5–8).

Starting Over. The flood not only reveals God’s judgment against sin, but his continued commitment to his creation. God demonstrates his commitment to his creation by saving a righteous family, the earth’s animals, and the earth itself. After the flood, God renews his covenant with creation, commissioning Noah in the same way Adam had been: *be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth* (9:1).

The Climax of Sin. God's new start does not remedy the problem of a sinful world. The Tower of Babel is a repeat of Adam and Eve's attempt to be autonomous, except that this time, it's performed on a grand social scale.

- From Noah's family the world's nations begin to emerge. They appear to be fulfilling God's mandate to fill the earth and develop it into a glorious civilization (10:1–32).
- The Tower of Babel, however, shows that humanity's desire is not to fill the earth and make a name for God, but rather to stay in one place and make a name for themselves (11:1–9); they want to build their own kingdom apart from God.

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STORY

From Where Does Sin Come?

Sin is not inherent to creation; it is not the result of God's hand. Sin came into the world through the free decision of humankind to rebel against God.

- Human nature is now universally corrupted because of sin. People are born depraved, a condition inherited from Adam. Though humankind is still inherently created good, they are now born infected with a disease. The result is that all human beings are sinners even before they commit conscious acts of disobedience (Rom 5:12–21).
- The Christian worldview offers a compelling explanation for the current state of the world. The evil in this world is not because of God, but because humankind brought and continues to bring sin and death into the world.

What Does Sin Do to the Goodness of Creation?

Sin infects every area of God's creation, distorting all that is good. However, this does not mean that creation is no longer good; rather God's good creation is now simply misdirected and perverted.

- Adultery is sin perverting the goodness of sex.
- Corporate corruption is sin perverting the goodness of business.
- Conflict is sin perverting the goodness of relationships.
- Greed is sin perverting the goodness of stewardship.
- Gluttony is sin perverting the goodness of enjoying food.

The problem with the world is not the world itself or its physical dimension; the problem with the world is sin. The world does not need to be thrown away; it needs to be restored.

*“Evil is not inherent in the human condition:
there once was a completely good creation
and there will be again;
hence, the restoration of creation is not impossible.”*

Albert Wolters
Creation Regained

What Does Sin Do to the Development of Creation?

Sin does not nullify God’s commission to humanity to continue developing God’s creation into a glorious civilization. Even after the Fall, alongside the expansion of sin is the appropriate cultivation of God’s creation.

- Cain builds a city (4:17).
- Jabal and his family raise livestock and domesticate animals (4:20).
- Jubal and his family develop musical instruments (4:21).
- Tubal-Cain and his family advanced ancient metal technology (4:22).

The presence of sin means the development of creation will be more difficult, abused for evil purposes, and require other duties to combat the effects of sin, as we’ll see in act three.

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As the biblical drama unfolds, humanity embarks on its commission to develop God’s creation into a glorious civilization, but they are quickly sidetracked by the temptation to be in charge themselves. They rebel against the King and so forfeit the life of the kingdom. The results are catastrophic: loss of access to God, lack of communion with each other, disharmony with the earth, and even personal dysfunction and death. The world is a mess, infected by the disease of sinfulness. Even starting over with a righteous family leads once again to defiance. What will come of God’s creation? What will God do now?