



Part 18 – Curses and Coverings

Genesis 3:14-21

Having sinned, the man and woman must now face judgment. Before we consider God's judgment upon their sin, however, we notice that even his wrath is mixed with mercy. He did not storm the garden with fire and fury as was his right. Rather, God wooed the man out of his hiding that he might acknowledge his sin. It is also worth noting that the man and woman are spared physically. Certainly decay and death have now entered the human experience. Spiritual

death has fractured their once harmonious communion with God. The earth, their home, will experience the same sorts of decay. But God spares them for a glorious purpose. Nevertheless, God's mercy does not nullify the need for justice.

God pronounces a series of curses upon the serpent, the woman, and finally the man. Take note of God's sovereignty throughout. God's absolute rule has in no way been diminished by the wicked actions of his creatures. The attempt of the man and woman to be as God, is revealed as a pathetic fantasy. Even the ancient foe is proved to be unable to act apart from the willing of God.

We must be careful to not say more than the Scriptures allow. But it seems clear that the fall, while tragic and wicked, played a part in God's sovereign design to magnify his glory in judgment and mercy. Indeed, God's work of redeeming sinful man was decreed long before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-10; Revelation 13:8). So God's response to the sin of the man and woman was not complete destruction. But in the midst of the curses pronounced there was also a promise.

In what Martin Luther called the *proto euangelion* – the first gospel – the LORD God promised that the serpent would be finally slain by a descendant of the woman (3:15). In a display of sovereign grace, the Lord snatched the woman from the clutches of Satan and made her the progenitor of the Messiah. No wonder genealogies are so important in Scripture. They are a record of God's faithfulness to his promise to send the Savior. As if to foreshadow the work of Christ, God takes the life of a blameless one in order to provide coverings for the guilty man and woman even as he will one day offer up his Son to cover sinners with his righteousness.

1. God Pronounces Judgment

A. The curse upon Satan

- Vs.14 – It would have been obvious to any Israelite reader in the 15th century B.C. that the serpent was the incarnation of a dark power whom the Bible would later identify as Satan. This is not a curse upon snakes. Going about on the belly and eating dust were familiar ancient near eastern metaphors for humiliation and defeat.
- Vs. 15 – It is important that the one to be "bruised" is the serpent himself. The offspring of the woman will do the bruising. But that very serpent will be the one who is bruised. This serves as another indication that snakes are not the subject but Satan. So, the offspring of the serpent are all those men and women who are seduced by Satan as Adam and Eve were.
- Interestingly, it is within the curse upon Satan that the first mention of any solution to the problem caused by his seduction of mankind is mentioned. The serpent, God's enemy and man's, will have a human adversary who will defeat him after some suffering of his own. Bruising the head is far worse than bruising the heel! At the very beginning of the story we know that good and evil are not in conflict in some eternal dualism and that evil will not finally triumph. God remains in complete control. Satan has had a great victory, but he will suffer a far greater, and indeed, final defeat. [Waltke, 94]

B. The judgment upon the woman

- As a mother she will know increased pain in childbirth. There will be complications such as miscarriages, stillbirths, genetic disorders passed on, births that threaten the life of the mother. “Here is a hint of all the sorrows a mother knows because of her children that continue throughout her life, pain rendered more difficult by the lack of perfect harmony with her husband. The miseries of this life are hers as well as the mans. She had to experience the agony of one of her sons murdering another. In her marriage she could have delighted in submitting to the considerate leadership of her husband instead of the battle of the sexes and the blame he would have hurled at her.” (Robert Rayburn)

C. The judgment upon the man

Vv. 17–19 – “And to Adam he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.’”

- Work was part of the original blessing God gave to man. Sin however corrupted this good gift making what had once been only blessed, now toilsome and frustrating. Death is the ultimate judgment. “For the wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6:23).

D. The curse upon the land

Vv. 17–18 – “...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you...”

- We are not told precisely how the natural world was altered by the Fall. We are told that man would find working the ground toilsome. By placing a curse upon the land, God was visiting judgment upon the man and woman because the earth is their home.

2. God Promises Deliverance**A. Salvation is always by God’s initiative.**

- Vs. 15 – God himself is the one who will establish a new enmity against the serpent. Salvation is always of grace, which means simply that it is of God, and had not God taken the initiative here and intervened with lost and ruined man, there would have been no salvation.

B. The woman’s heart is captured by God.

Vs. 15a – “I will put enmity between you and the woman.”

- This is the first explicit example of the doctrine of unconditional election in the Bible. The woman had chosen sides. She sided with the serpent. She rejected the Lord her God. But in his sovereign grace what does God do? He takes the woman back. He captures her heart to the extent that she will now hate the serpent whom she had sided with moments before. This same sovereign grace is seen in the lives of all those who repent of their sin and place their faith in Christ. There would be no salvation were it not for God’s sovereign election of sinners.

C. The enmity will be generational.

Vs. 15 – “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring...”

- God is referring here to evil men, men who throughout the course of history have placed themselves on the serpent’s side as over against God – Those who practice evil. Those who mock and reject Christ. God is making an announcement here that there will be two kinds of people in the world: Those who belong to God and those who are set against him.

D. The serpent will be destroyed.

- Speaking to Satan of the One who will be a descendent of the woman, God states: “...he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (vs. 15b). This is the promise which will shape the unfolding of human and redemptive history. The curse upon Satan is simultaneously the promise of redemption. One will arise who will deliver a blow that will crush the serpent. And notice here that God does not say that he will bruise the *seed* of the serpent, but that he will bruise the serpent *itself*. This is the first Messianic promise in the Old Testament. It is what Martin Luther called the first gospel proclamation in the Bible.