

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel..

Children are naturally curious about the world around them

- And one of their favourite questions is ‘why?’
- Why is the sky blue? Why do I have to eat cabbage? Why do I have to go to bed?
- Are some of the easier questions that children ask – but they ask difficult ones too
- That older people tend to be more cautious of asking
- Why is there evil in the world? Why do people die?
- These and several other questions are answered in the opening chapters of Genesis

The first eleven chapters of Genesis deal with origin questions

- In what some biblical scholars call aetiological myths
- I tend to avoid the word ‘myth’ because to most people it means something untrue
- One of the things about Genesis, especially the early chapters
- is the strange blend of real people, talking snakes and fruit with special properties
- so before we dive into Genesis 1-11 we must ask what sort of book it is
- And strangely for help we are going to the book of Revelation
- In Revelation we have a curious blend of real people, real churches
- And fantastic apocalyptic imagery – seven-headed dragons coming out of the sea
- In Genesis we have people who seem to be much the same as us
- But we also have talking snakes and fruit that gives knowledge
- Revelation gives us an insight into the future, Genesis gives us an insight into the past
- And helps us to answer some of the why questions that we might be afraid to ask

Regarding Genesis 3, I was interested to read a sermon by Simon Flinders

- An Anglican minister in Sydney, Australia
- Like me, Simon believes in the importance of biblical theology
- That is taking the sweep of the whole biblical teaching on a given subject
- Which will lead us to a correct interpretation of a particular biblical passage
- Take for example the story of David and Goliath
- Goliath is 9’ tall and the champion of Israel’s enemies and David is a shepherd boy
- Nevertheless David is able, with his sling and stones, to kill the giant
- The preacher says we all have ‘Goliaths’ in our lives but God can help us to beat them
- This turns into a sermon that I call ‘blessed thoughts’
- Because we know that we do all have besetting problems and often they loom large
- And of course it is true that God can help us to overcome them
- The problem is I am not convinced that’s what the story of David and Goliath is about

Now I don’t know the last time you heard a sermon on Genesis 3, the fall of mankind

- But I do know that it would be easy to make the subject of this chapter ‘temptation’
- A quick mental search for New Testament passages on temptation
- Could easily lead us to the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4
- The Matthew narrative tells us about Jesus’ victory over temptation
- So that it would be very easy to pretend that Genesis 3 was about temptation
- So that Adam and Eve become the subjects of a ‘how-not-to’ discussion of temptation
- So don’t be like Adam and Eve, be like Jesus – is that what Genesis 3 is really about?

It would certainly be a relatively easy sermon to prepare and preach

- And it might well include some very good points – but it is not biblical theology
- When we really look at this passage we have to conclude it is about more than that

I THE HUMAN HEART EXPOSED

The chapter begins describing the serpent as ‘more crafty’ than any of the wild animals

- ‘crafty’ suggests that by cunning the serpent will outwit the woman and the man
- there is a subtle simplicity in all that the serpent says
- and although the serpent only speaks twice
- that is enough to disturb the balance of trust and obedience
- between the man, the woman and their creator

Throughout Genesis 1 and 2, God has provided everything good for the man and woman

- the only time the phrase ‘not good’ was used was when the man was alone (2:18)
- and God provided a helper/partner for him
- but now the adequacy of God’s provision is being challenged
- God is keeping something good for the man and woman from them
- Knowledge – knowing good and evil
- It is a profound challenge to the idea that God the creator knows best for his creatures
- Until now God has looked upon things and pronounced them good
- But now the woman looks upon the tree and sees that it is good
- It is not so much that the woman wants to rebel against God’s authority
- But wants more than God has provided – presumably doubting God’s generosity

The whole web of deceit is bound up with the serpent’s misquoting of the Bible

- You must not eat from any tree in the garden
- And the woman’s inaccurate reply
- We may eat from the fruit of the trees in the garden but not from the tree in the middle
- And we must not touch it or we will die

The tragedy of the situation is that what the serpent promised actually came about

- The man and the woman did become like God by knowing good and evil
- But the irony of the situation was that they were already like God
- Because they had been created in his image (Genesis 1: 26-27)
- If they had hoped that through knowing good and evil they would enjoy the good
- All that happened was that when their eyes were open it was not the good they saw
- What they saw was their nakedness
- Not that nakedness of itself is evil but something unholy and impure
- Entered into a relationship that had once been characterised by its holiness and purity

Not only did their new knowledge of evil – and with it the capacity to continue in sin

- Spoil their relationship with God – it also spoiled their relationship with God
- For they tried to hide themselves from God at the first sound of his coming
- When God called out to Adam, ‘Where are you?’ (3:9)
- Adam replied, ‘I was afraid because I was naked so I hid’ (3:10)
- And in saying so, he was convicted by his own words

The unseemly passing of the buck shows that the alienation between the man and the woman

- Went beyond the shame that each now felt
- The man tries to blame the woman ‘she gave me the fruit’
- He even tries to put some of the blame on God, ‘the woman you gave me’
- Here, the human heart is exposed
- Both the man and the woman are quicker with their accusations than apologies

God’s verdict on their tragic choice is to unfold the tragic consequences

- The serpent is no longer the most crafty but the most cursed
- To eat dust is an expression that meaning total defeat (Isaiah 65:25; Micah 7:17)
- The woman was to be a helper to the man in child-bearing
- Now that will be a painful experience – but not one that she can opt out of
- The relationship of mutuality between the man and the woman is destroyed
- The man was to be a gardener in Eden – not idle but just engaged in fruitful work
- Now it will become a drudgery, because of weeds, thorns and thistles
- But although it will be painful toil – it is not one that the man can opt out of
- Finally, whereas chapter two begins with an account of God breathing life into Adam
- Chapter three nears its end with the shadow of death and return to dust
- This is the bleak future in a world ruined by sin
- Yet even in this darkness, light shines through a small chink
- For Eve is named the mother of all the living
- A reassurance that not all human life will end here

One of the ways to get a biblical interpretation of any scripture passage

- Is to compare scripture with scripture – what do other passages say about this passage
- What do other passages that cover the same subject area say?
- When we turn to the writings of the Apostle Paul we find that all humanity is in Adam
- Adam is not ‘illustrative for us’ but a ‘representative of us’
- We don’t see a man and woman who are like us but we see a picture of ourselves
- By birth, we share in the sins of Adam; by faith, we share in the nature of Christ

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned ... (v. 17) For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Romans 5:12, 17-21)

If we are honest, we don't really need the Bible to convince us of this

- We know from our very nature and life's experience that we carry this disease
- We are ready to question the word of God, 'you will not surely die'
- For we have believed it and made mistakes just like the ones made here
- And tried to pass the buck or blame others when we have been found out
- In challenging the Word of God, the serpent offers not death but enlightenment
- And the lie that God will not punish anyone for anything is very much with us today
- In fact, the Father of all lies, has been spreading that lie from the beginning
- We find doubt and disobedience in our hearts – just like Adam and Eve
- And we find ourselves sharing in the curses that fell upon them
- Painful child-birth, painful toil, broken relationships, hiding from God

At the end of the chapter, Adam and Eve, man and woman are banished from the garden

- They find themselves like God, knowing good and evil, but no longer with God
- With no access to the tree of life, instead they are living under the shadow of death
- They are now east of Eden – not a mere geographical details
- Later east is the direction of Babylon, of Sodom and Gomorrah
- To return from the east is to return to Salem and the Promised Land
- The critical question must be asked – is there a way back?
- And the brutal answer is – 'no there is no way back'
- There is no way back – but by the grace of God there is a way forward

In all this we see;

- I THE HUMAN HEART EXPOSED
- II THE WORK OF CHRIST EXALTED

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The good news that unfolds in the New Testament is how Jesus meets our need with grace

- For, in God's mercy, being in Adam is not the end for humanity
- As representatives the serpent and the woman embody the fate of their offspring
- This is really better rendered 'seed'
- By a final crushing blow, not the seed of the serpent but the serpent itself
- Will be crushed

Revelation (12:9) reveals the identity of this serpent

- The ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray
- But the more difficult question is 'who is the seed of the woman?'
- We might not find the answer to the question in this passage
- But the question has been duly raised and the rest of the book is the answer
- It is through the unfolding promises of God (the covenant) that God will save
- And this promise will unfold when the one born of woman
- Without a natural human father, a second Adam, comes to the rescue
- And brings the hope of new heavens and new earth
- This is the work of none other than Jesus Christ in the New Testament
- Who shared in our humanity so that he might destroy death
- And the one who holds the power of death – the devil himself

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants [seed]. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Hebrews 2:14-18

There is a very real sense in which Genesis gives us an insight into the human heart

- But a passage such as this gives an insight into the divine heart
- Christ is exalted because he has achieved a great victory
- By sharing in our humanity – here is the one who fights for us
- The proper man – whom God has called into his service, that we might be saved
- By his incarnation he embraced the human condition
- He shared in our humanity fully, yet without sin, so that he might save us
- Human sin and desperate need is met by the grace of God in Jesus Christ
- He is the Saviour who will cleanse our hearts
- In Adam – all die but in Christ all shall be made alive
- We are given the opportunity of finding ourselves in Christ
- And enjoying all the benefits of belonging to him
- This is victory through the work of Christ
- Who died and rose again, so that we might have life in him

III THE VICTORY OF CHRISTIANS EXPLAINED

The obedience to death, even death on a cross, is the dramatic outworking

- Of the reversal of the fall – the decisive battle over sin and death has been won
- And, Paul writes to the Romans, the God of peace
- Will soon crush Satan under your feet (Romans 16:20)
- Interestingly enough this a great victory for the seed of woman
- Mother of all living – this is a corporate fulfilment of the promise in Christ
- For the death of Christ has suddenly opened up the way to life

The story of the Bible begins in a garden with rivers and trees

- But unfolds into a tragic account of doubt, disobedience and death
- Only Christ, faithful and obedient in every way can triumph over death
- But at the end of the Bible we have this glorious vision (Revelation 22:1-3)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.

A day is coming when the curse on the serpent will be fulfilled

- For now his fangs continue to snap at the heels of all Eve's children
- But those who are children of God, in Christ, will finally crush his head
- In Revelation, we see that the tree that was guarded by the flaming sword
- Is no longer guarded but is there bearing abundant fruit
- And those who are in Christ Jesus can freely eat of it and live
- For they have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb
- And claimed the victory over death that his death brings

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet". Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

(1 Corinthians 15:20-28)