



THE CURSE AND THE CHERUBIM

Genesis 3:14-15; 21-24; 4:1

Because they disobeyed God, Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden of Eden, but they didn't leave without hope. Satan had won a battle, but the Lord assured them—and all who believe in Him—ultimate victory through the coming Redeemer.

Today we're coming to the end of Genesis chapter 3, where Adam and Eve are faced with the loss of everything they had enjoyed because of their sin against God. Paradise is lost, spiritual intimacy with God is lost, their future death is now certain, and Satan seems to have won the day.

But in the middle of all that is lost is a promise of all that will be restored. Let's go back to verse 14 as God speaks to the serpent and says, "On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life."

Now this seems to imply that snakes originally moved in some kind of upright manner, although we really don't know. There's much speculation as to why Satan decided to possess a snake in order to tempt Eve—and I'll tell you it's just a lot of speculation. But you can be sure that from then on, every time Adam and Eve saw a snake slither by them as they scratched out a living, they remembered the tempter and their sin.

Today, snakes are just normal members of the animal kingdom, even though I don't want one. There was a snake in my backyard the other day, and I didn't have any desire to get close to it.

God now speaks in verse 15, not to the serpent, but to Satan; and God delivers this incredible promise:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

This verse is called the *protoevangelium*. It is the *proto*, or first, *evangelium*—the first gospel announcement; and it means that a woman will deliver a Redeemer who will defeat the tempter.

Now Satan is told here that he will bruise the Redeemer's heel but the Redeemer will bruise Satan's head. The Hebrew word for bruise (*shuph*) means to seize or fall upon. Satan will sink his fangs into the heel of the Redeemer—and it will hurt. But it will only be temporary, for the Redeemer will fall on Satan's *head*.

If I wanted to kill that snake in my backyard, I wouldn't crush its tail; I would crush its head. So, Satan's ultimate defeat—the crushing of his head—is foretold in this gospel promise.

Now before God exiles Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, we're told in verse 21, "The LORD God



made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”

This is the first death in God’s creation and the first act of atonement. The death of an animal is required to cover the guilt of Adam’s sin—the death of the innocent for the sin of the guilty.

God’s covering of Adam and Eve pointed to the coming Redeemer who will become the final sacrifice for sin.

Adam and Eve’s religious effort to cover their guilt with fig leaves was ineffective; frankly, God can see through fig leaves.

God’s covering of Adam and Eve pointed to the coming Redeemer who will become the final sacrifice for sin—the death of the innocent One for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2).

God is essentially teaching them that from now on, the only way to approach Him is through the blood of an atoning sacrifice.

So how do Adam and Eve respond to all this? Well, no doubt they’re dejected and sorrowful, but they believe in God’s plan of a coming Redeemer. And we know that because of the first verse in the next chapter, Genesis 4:1

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.”

Here’s Eve in the delivery room, praising God for giving her a son.

And more than that, she names him Cain, which can mean “to acquire.” It has the idea of saying, “He’s here—he’s arrived.” Many biblical scholars are convinced she’s referring to the promised Redeemer, and she believes Cain is that Redeemer.

Of course, he isn’t. Cain won’t be the Redeemer; in fact, he will become a murderer.

But for now, the good news is that Adam and Eve are looking for the promised offspring of the woman who will become mankind’s full and final Redeemer.

Now back in chapter 3, Adam and Eve are ushered out of the garden of Eden lest they eat of the Tree of Life and essentially live forever as sinners (verses 22-23). They had walked with God in the cool of the evening, but verse 24 tells us God now puts on guard duty outside the garden cherubim with a flaming sword.



Libation vase of king Gudea from 2100 b.c.



We're not told how long these warrior angels were to guard the garden gate, so to speak. They may have remained there until the flood of Noah wiped mankind from the face of the earth in Genesis 7. After the flood and the reshaping of the topography of the earth's surface, the garden of Eden and these angels were gone.

But let me tell you, the cherubim weren't forgotten. In fact, God didn't want mankind to forget what they represented as guardians of the very presence of God.

Centuries later when God gave Moses directions for the construction of the tabernacle, at its center was the Holy of Holies, the place of God's special presence. A heavy curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the outer area, and in Exodus 26 God ordered that into the fabric of this curtain was to be woven the figures of cherubim. As such, they are pictured as still guarding the presence of God. And the only way into His presence was through blood atonement.

Centuries later, the glorious temple was built by Solomon in Jerusalem. And once again, cherubim were sewn into the thick veil hanging in front of the Holy of Holies. Even the doors of the temple sanctuary had cherubim carved into the wood.

Only one man could enter the Holy of Holies, and that was the high priest. Once a year, he would slip behind that curtain embroidered with cherubim; and once inside the Holy of Holies, he would face the ark of the covenant directly in front of him—a golden box containing the law of Moses.

And he would immediately be awestruck by the golden cherubim that stood above that golden box as if they were hovering above it—their wings of gold designed so that they reached forward and touched each other (Exodus 25). They were still guarding the presence of God.

The high priest would sprinkle the blood of the inno-

cent animal sacrifice on the lid of that box, which was called the mercy seat, and God would temporarily be satisfied with the covering of the sins of the nation. It was temporary because the blood of animals could never secure eternal forgiveness.

The sacrifices all pointed to a future sacrifice when a wooden altar called a cross would hold the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus, who would die and forever pay the penalty for sin.

When the Lord cried from His cross, "It is finished," the promise delivered to Adam and Eve thousands of years earlier finally was realized. Yes, Satan bruised the Redeemer's heel on the cross where He suffered, but Christ crushed the serpent's head in victory.

And what happened as soon as Jesus uttered those words, "It is finished"? Matthew 27 tells us that at that very moment, the veil embroidered with cherubim that hung in the restored temple nearby was torn open, from top to bottom.

This is the victory of our Redeemer who now gives us access into the very throne room of our creator God. The cherubim no longer stand in the way.

Beloved, you can do better than that high priest could ever do. You can walk right past that veil; right past those cherubim to the very throne of God anytime you want—day or night—as a believer in His Son, your victorious, Satan-crushing, sin-forgiving Messiah, Mediator, and Savior.

What personal warnings and what encouragement do you find in the experience of Adam and Eve?

What does it mean to you to have direct access to the presence of God?

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