

Justice 10-1-06

Genesis 3:14-24 (NIV)

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. 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." ¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." ¹⁷ To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." ²⁰ Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. ²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²² And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." ²³ So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴ After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

God created the heavens and the earth. He filled it with good things. He created man and a productive counterpart to be with the man. He set them in a garden that met all their needs. He walked and talked with them and gave them only one prohibition. They were told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or they would surely die. They ignored this one prohibition. Our passage today is the account of God's justice upon that rebellion.

We have a tendency to consider the justice of God as harsh, even extreme. When we look at much of the Old Testament justice, we wonder about the connection with the God of love in the New Testament. (1John 4:8) Some theologians have even said they are two different gods. They forget the harshness of the cross. We overlook the seriousness of the rebellion that took place in Eden. We see Eve's decision as merely a wrong choice instead of rebellion against all goodness. (John 8:34) We see her tricked by the serpent instead of lusting after the forbidden. We minimize the seriousness of our own sin and so we tend to do the same for others. We're so enveloped in grace that we forget the seriousness of sin. (Romans 6:19)

God declares that sin deserves death. (Romans 6:23) Rebellion against our good Creator is such a heinous act that anything short of death is less than just. We are ready to decry the light sentences of child abusers, but we aren't as quick to argue against the light sentence we receive for our rebellion against God and His goodness. The psalmist tells us that the problem is our lack of the fear of God. (Psalm 36:1) We don't respect Him as one who dispenses the full measure of justice deserved. We see

Commented [notes1]: 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.
1 John 4:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."
John 8:34 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.
Romans 6:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 6:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 1 An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes.
Psalms 36:1 (NIV)

Him more like a liberal judge who gives us probation time and time again for the same crime. Therefore as we read the sentence of God on the serpent, humanity, and the earth, we tend to see it as overly harsh. It is righteous and just, and as you will see, it is graced with love.

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. Serpent in Hebrew is "shining one". What did it look like before this curse? We can only guess. Using their tongue to sense, they now literally eat dust all their days. As I said a few weeks ago, the serpent may have had wings (as ancient Chinese symbols indicate) or legs. Now it is the one creature that crawls on its belly. The physical creature was physically cursed. Most of us have an innate fear of snakes, even to the extent of herpophobia.

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." This verse is called the proto-evangelium, the first gospel. God is speaking to the snake indwelt by Lucifer. He gave him a prophetic indication of what was to come. Remember, Lucifer is after worship. Instead, God predicted that man will hate him. There will be this antagonism between her seed and his. Who are the seed of Satan? Jesus told some of the religious leaders of Israel that they were of their father the Devil. (John 8:44) Those who resist the children of God, who call good evil and evil good, and who live for self are the seed of Satan. The Apostle Paul declares in Ephesians that we were all at one time by nature objects of wrath. (Ephesians 2:3) Because we come into this world as servants of sin, we were all his seed, but the promise declares how we can be children of God. (2Corinthians 5:21)

The woman's seed will be at odds with the seed of Lucifer. The word "seed" here is her progeny, but it is also singular. It is referred to as "he", in other words, a male descendent of Eve. He will crush Lucifer's head, his authority. In the immediate context we see this played out in the conflict between Cain and Able, and later in the two societies that develop, and then in the flood. Ultimately, the seed of the woman Mary is the one that crushes his head. Not the seed of a man and woman, but of the woman, the virgin. (Luke 1:34) Jesus crushed the head of Satan on the cross, and in the process his heel was struck. This is the resolution to the conflict between justice and the love of God. Justice says death is deserved. Love says there must be another way. Mercy decided before the earth was formed that Jesus would die in our place, that He would crush the serpent's head and that it would be His heel that was bitten with the venom of death. (Revelation 13:8)

Prophecy often has multiple layers of fulfillment culminating in Christ. It meant something in the lives of those who first heard it, but the words ultimately apply to Jesus. He is the seed of the woman who crushed the authority of the serpent. He is the only one that could have done it. As we are in Christ, the Apostle Paul wrote that the God of peace would soon crush Satan underneath your feet. (Romans 16:20)

¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule

Commented [notes6]: 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. Eph 2:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Cor 5:21 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" Luke 1:34 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast--all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. Rev 13:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. Romans 16:20 (NIV)

over you." Now it's Eve's turn. She may have been hoping the blame game got her off the hook, but she was susceptible to Lucifer because she chose to listen and be enticed. (James 1:14) Lucifer's seduction was met with the lust in her own heart. Her penalty was not only spiritual death, but pain in childbirth, a desire for her husband, and his rule over her. It affected the very core of her existence. We've been trying to escape this curse but it is still present. A chapter later the same word for desire is used by God to explain how sin desired to rule in Cain's life. (Genesis 4:7) Woman would desire to rule, as Eve did over Adam in that fateful decision, but man will rule. There is this inevitable conflict in every marriage. But now it's the man's turn to face his sentence.

¹⁷ To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Adam is the breadwinner. He is hit in the very core of his sense of self-worth too. We've been trying to make this one easier as well, but try as we may, we still end up working and working hard to make a living. The moral here is not to refuse to listen to your wife's desires. The moral is to be the man God called you to be and stand against what is wrong. Instead of just watching your wife be tempted and fail, speak out and resist that temptation. Help her say no. (Ephesians 5:23)

Being an agrarian society, the curse was expressed in a difficulty for the farmer. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. The earth was cursed with producing weeds when we farm. It was also cursed with decay. In Romans 8 we read that the creation was subjected to decay. (Romans 8:20) Rot, mildew and mold would damage our crops before and after harvest. The Apostle says that the purpose in this curse is that we would look forward to the day when things would be restored, when decay and death would cease. The world's condition teaches us that we should not be at home here in our present condition. It should cause us to long for a change not only of our hearts but also of our physical conditions. (Romans 8:23) The aches and pains of illness and age should cause us to long for the redemption of our bodies, our adoption as children of God.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." We will all die. These bodies return to dust. Don't wait till the next funeral or memorial service to consider how brief our lives are. Fix your hope and your expectation on heaven now. Live with eternity in mind. This decaying world is passing away and your body along with it, but the unseen is eternal. (2Corinthians 4:18) The curse will one day be lifted. Your body that lies in the dust of the earth will be reassembled in a new way and rise to meet your spirit in the air when Christ returns with that great trumpet call. (1Corinthians 15:51-52)

Such were the judgments for their great transgression. We share in it because we inherit the sin nature of Adam and Eve. We come into this world as rebels. (Psalm 51:5) We suffer the pain of childbirth, the desire of woman toward her husband and his rule over her, the labor of man to make a living, the inevitable decay of our bodies. But we live in hope that there is a change coming. Today, we look back on

Commented [notes12]: 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.
James 1:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."
Gen 4:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.
Eph 5:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope
Romans 8:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.
Romans 8:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.
2 Cor 4:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--
52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
1 Cor 15:51-52 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
Psalms 51:5 (NIV)

the crushed head of the serpent and bruised heel of our Savior and we know that day of deliverance from the curse is coming. (Revelation 21:4)

²⁰ *Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.* Geneticists today have studied the genes of the main people groups around the planet and have come to the conclusion that we all descended from one couple. Science agreed with this verse in the past, and then for about 150 years didn't, and now it does again. Science will continually change as it investigates and explores, as it overcomes prejudices from within and without, but the Bible remains the same. (Isaiah 40:8)

²¹ *The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.* Before this, they had made an apron of fig leaves. We discussed the effort of man to cover himself from the lustful eyes of another. We saw it as man's attempt to be right with God by his own efforts. But now God takes care of their nakedness in a more permanent fashion. He made clothing of animal skin for them both. That would mean an innocent animal had to die for the skin to be available. This covering that was provided through the shedding of blood was a picture of the day in which the real covering for sin would be provided from the Lamb of God shedding His blood for us to cloth us in a robe of righteousness. (Galatians 3:27) What man could only do in an ineffective and temporal way, God would take care of with a permanent solution. (Hebrews 7:27)

Marcus Dods, a nineteenth century Scottish preacher and principal of New College, Edinburgh University, wrote a comment on this passage that I'd like to read to you. *It is also to be remarked that the clothing which God provided was itself different from what man had thought of. Adam took leaves from 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.* Mr. Dods' words convey the seriousness of sin.

²² *And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."* What the serpent tempted Eve with was partially true. She would be like God in knowing evil. The difference is God's perfect character keeps Him from evil. Now, Eve's character is fallen, and she and Adam will choose evil again and again. If they were to take the fruit of eternal life in their fallen condition they

Commented [notes20]: 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Rev 21:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." Isaiah 40:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. Gal 3:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. Heb 7:27 (NIV)

would only grow continually worse. The answer to man's condition is not eternal youth. He would only grow ever more depraved and destructive.

Years ago there was a movie called *Ground Hog Day* with Bill Murray. Every day he would wake up and it would be the start of the same day. He got worse and worse, more and more depraved until he saw it wasn't getting him anywhere. Finally he realized that he had to stop being so selfish to really attain what he wanted. So, he got better and better and got the babe. The problem is that it was still selfishness. Man does not have the capacity to improve his heart. He needs the covering of skins. He needs God's intervention. Eternity in a fallen condition is a kind of hell.

²³ So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴ After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. They were driven away for their own protection. They would now coax their food from the ground with the labor of tilling and weeding. Now they would face the consequences of their sin in daily life and that of their children.

Cherubim guarded the entrance to the Garden, I assume, until the time of the flood. Cherubim are not chubby little angels but great powerful creatures that cause man to drop on their face in fear. (Ezekiel 10:14) They wielded flaming swords that kept anyone who would try to go back into the Garden from entering the way to the tree of life. In contrast, Jesus said He is the way, the truth and the life. (John 14:6) He is the way to the tree of life, and there is no cherubim's sword to keep us away. Instead, the angels are servants of those who will be the heirs of salvation. (Hebrews 1:14) If anyone comes to Him, He will never drive them away. (John 6:37) Why is the way to the tree of life now open to us? His work upon the cross makes a transformed life possible. He can now give us eternal life because we will not steadily grow more depraved. We can go on to righteousness. We can have His very own righteousness. (Hebrews 6:1) We can be indwelt by the Spirit of God and go on to sanctification. (2Thessalonians 2:13)

For all those people that lived before the flood, don't you think it was always in the back of their minds to try to find a way around those cherubim? Who wouldn't want to enter that garden and live forever, at least when they were young and didn't understand the full consequences of sin? From a redeemed perspective, we can see that would be a terrible thing, but they probably dreamed about it. How much more then should we, who can be delivered from sin, desire to enter the way and receive eternal life? How much more should we desire to go to that place and walk and talk with God? We've been given access, past the cherubim, into His presence. (Ephesians 2:18)

Paradise was lost to Adam and Eve, but Jesus has reopened the best of paradise to all who will come to Him. No flaming swords block the way. It isn't an escape from the curse. We'll have to wait for His return for that. But the best of the garden can be ours, intimacy with God and eternal life. The Way stands before us with open arms inviting us in. Why would you want to live anywhere else? (Revelation 22:17)

Commented [notes24]: 14 Each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. Ezek 10:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? Heb 1:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. John 6:37 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 1 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, Heb 6:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: 13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 2 Thess 2:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes30]: 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Eph 2:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes31]: 17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. Rev 22:17 (NIV)