

Chapter 4: The Curse

Genesis 3:8–24

Adam and Eve have sinned, and nothing can ever be the same. Yahweh God gave them every good thing they could ever desire, but they forfeited it all by stealing the only gift that God had forbidden them from taking. While the eyes of Adam and Eve are now open (Gen. 3:7), just as the serpent promised them (Gen. 3:5), but they only see their guilt, misery, and shame. How far will this go? How hard will Yahweh judge Adam and Eve? Yahweh would be justified to annihilate his people entirely; will he execute the full extent of his judgment? Will he destroy Adam and Eve in order to start over with a new humanity and a new plan? There is significant dramatic tension between Genesis 3:7 and 3:8 as we wait for Yahweh to judge his people for their sin; however, we do not need to wait for long, as Yahweh shows up immediately to demand that the man and the woman give an account for their rebellion.

Confronting Adam's Sin (Gen. 3:8–13)

In our English translations, Genesis 3:8 sounds almost as though Yahweh God is simply out for a walk, perhaps even a daily stroll that he took with the man and his wife: “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Gen. 3:8). Is Yahweh simply looking for his walking partners, or is there something different happening in this text? In fact, there are three phrases that may change our interpretation of this passage after closer study.

Yahweh's Storm of Judgment

First, the word “sound” in the phrase “sound of the LORD God” is a Hebrew word that might also mean “voice.” In the context of the Pentateuch, to “hear the voice of Yahweh” is an expression that means to “obey the voice of Yahweh.” In the wake of the original sin, then, the words of Genesis 3:8 drip with bitter irony: “It can hardly be without purpose that the author opens the scene of the curse with a subtle but painful reminder of the single requirement for obtaining God's blessing: ‘to hear/obey the voice of the LORD God.’”¹ The man and the woman have disobeyed the voice of Yahweh God, leading them into such deep shame that they foolishly try to hide from their Creator altogether.

Second, the word for “walking” carries a special meaning that is hard to convey directly in English. This is the normal verb for *walk*, but it is written in a special form called the Hithpael stem. In this form, the word “walking” means something very different than “taking a stroll.”² Eugene Merrill explains:

A special nuance of [the verb “walk”] occurs with the [Hithpael] stem, which views walking or stepping as tantamount to the exercise of sovereignty. Whether this is expressed in literal or metaphorical terms, the symbolism of dominion remains the same.³

Likewise, God will use this form of the verb in Genesis 13:17, telling Abram, “Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.” In this way, he was instructing Abraham to signify his ownership over the land of Canaan, even before he and his offspring take possession of it. Elsewhere, this form of the word “walk” describes Yahweh’s walking in the midst of his people in his tabernacle (e.g., Lev. 26:12). It isn’t as though Yahweh were pacing back and forth to kill time in a confined space like a prisoner in a jail cell. Rather, Yahweh is presenting himself as the sovereign of the tabernacle and exercising his dominion over it.⁴

Here in the garden of Eden after the Fall, then, we see Yahweh God asserting his dominion. Yahweh God is not looking for his walking buddies. Rather, we are seeing him assert his sovereignty over the sacred space of the garden. We might imagine a lion pacing and strutting back and forth over an area to mark his territory, warning any who would encroach upon the area that he will fight, if necessary, to defend it. More appropriately, it is as though Yahweh God is ascending to his official throne of judgment in the royal court to hear the case of two people accused of treason.

Third, the phrase “in the cool of the day” is the standard translation since popularized by the King James Version of the Bible, but the word translated as “cool” is actually the word that we usually translate as “wind” or “spirit.” Early translators chose “in the cool of the day” rather than “in the wind of the day” because they believed that this phrase refers to the “cool evening breezes.” While this thought is possible, it is not the only interpretation, and, in context, it is probably not the most plausible translation. Sailhamer is almost certainly closer to the mark when he writes this:

Indeed, nothing in the context suggests that this refers to a time of day. In the light of the general context of the picture of God’s coming in judgment and power, the “wind” which the author envisions is more likely intended to resemble that “great and powerful wind” which blew on the “mountain of the LORD” in 1 Kings 19:11. Thus the viewpoint of the narrative would be much the same as that in Job 38:1, where the Lord answered Job “from the whirlwind.”⁵

The connection to Job 38 is significant, since the Lord there asks Job a series of questions about Job’s (lack of) involvement at the beginning of creation (Job 38:4–38). When a creature challenges or defies the Creator, the Creator corrects the arrogance of the challenger by demonstrating his awesome, terrible power in a whirlwind.

John Walton builds on this general concept, noting that the words for “wind/spirit” (“...in the cool/wind/spirit of the day...”) and “voice” (“...they heard the voice of the LORD God...”) occur together in Jeremiah 10:13 and 51:16, where they refer to the “wind” and “thunder” of a storm. Furthermore, he notes that the word “day” (“the cool of the day”) can mean “storm” elsewhere in the Old Testament, such as in Isaiah 27:8 and Zephaniah 2:2. Outside the Old Testament, the word for “day” also means “storm” in Akkadian, a cognate language to Hebrew. Based on this, Walton writes:

The Akkadian term is used in connection to the deity coming in the storm of judgment. If

this is the correct rendering of the word here in Genesis 3, we can translate verse 8 this way: “They heard the roar of the LORD moving about in the garden in the wind of the storm.” If this rendering is correct, it is understandable why Adam and Eve are hiding.⁷

If we paraphrased the word for “walking/moving about” to communicate the significance of that construction as discussed above, we could further tweak Walton’s translation this way: “They heard the roaring voice of Yahweh coming as sovereign Judge in the garden in the wind of the storm.”

Hiding in the Trees

The roaring, stormy voice of Yahweh would be terrifying to guilty sinners. It is not surprising, then, to read that “the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Gen. 3:8). Gordon Wenham observes two elements of tragic irony in this verse.⁸ First, the phrase “the man and his wife” was last used in Genesis 2:25, when “the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” Not only is the word “naked” spelled differently from Genesis 2:25 to Genesis 3:7 (as we observed in the previous chapter), but “the man and his wife” have a drastic change of status from Genesis 2:25 to Genesis 3:8. Second, the trees used here for hiding had a different purpose originally: “And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is *pleasant to the sight*....” Wenham therefore writes, “The trees that God created for man to look at (2:9) are now his hiding place to prevent God seeing him.”

The First Interrogation

As sovereign Judge, Yahweh calls to the man, saying, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9). We cannot possibly imagine that Yahweh is unaware of the location of the man. Rather, he is serving the man a subpoena to appear before him for judgment. Yahweh’s calling the *man* is an important detail, since it demonstrates that Yahweh holds the man primarily responsible for the original sin, even in spite of the emphasis on the role of the woman in the first half of Genesis 3.⁹ Yahweh addresses both the first word (Gen. 3:9) and the last word of the judgement (Gen. 3:19) to the man to demonstrate that *Adam* is responsible for this sin in a way that neither the woman nor the serpent share. The rest of the Bible uniformly blames Adam for the fall, so that it is “in *Adam* all die” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22). God still calls men to unique responsibilities of leadership both in the marriage relationship (cf. Eph. 5:22–33) and in the church (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1–13; Tit. 1:5–9). Make no mistake, though: God does not give men a free pass to use and abuse their authority in whatever way they see fit. At the last interrogation, God will demand that men give account for how they have used that authority, just as God demands an account from Adam here.

With court in session, the man provides his initial testimony: “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” (Gen. 3:10). Notice that the man does not, at first, confess to his sin. Instead, he only describes his terror at hearing the sound/voice (or, perhaps, “roar”) of Yahweh God in the garden, causing him to hide his nakedness. Because the man does not freely confess his sin, Yahweh God asks him about it pointedly: “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Gen. 3:11). In response, the man eventually confesses his sin, but only after blaming both Yahweh God and his wife for what he had done: “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate” (Gen. 3:12). In a desperate attempt to protect himself, Adam turns against Yahweh God’s

good gift of a wife, blaming both the gift and the Giver for his sin.

Having gained the confession of the man, Yahweh God turns to the woman, asking, “What is this that you have done?” (Gen. 3:13a). The woman also eventually confesses, but only after blaming the serpent: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Gen. 3:13b). John Calvin rightly observes that Yahweh God does not even attempt to interrogate the serpent, because “in the animal itself there was no sense of sin, and because, to the devil he would hold out no hope of pardon.”¹⁰

The Judge of all the Earth

In the next section, Yahweh God will issue his righteous judgment against the sin of the man, woman, and serpent. Before we examine that judgment, we should simply recognize that Yahweh God rightfully possesses jurisdiction over his creation. Because he is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and of everything in them, he holds all authority to give laws and to judge those who break his laws. Yahweh God is not drunk with power. Instead, he is rightfully ordering his Creation, which is his prerogative to do.

When Satan tempts us to doubt God’s word in its goodness, truthfulness, or relevance, he is fundamentally tempting us to reject God’s authority over us. Just as the nations and the peoples of Psalm 2 rage and plot against Yahweh and his anointed in vain, saying to themselves, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us” (Ps. 2:3), so we also attempt to throw off the righteous judgment of God every time that we sin. We therefore need to hear the warning of Genesis 3: Yahweh God is the righteous Judge of all the earth, and no one can escape from his judgment. Do you adequately fear the Lord and his righteous judgment?

Cursing Creation (Gen. 3:14–19)

As righteous Judge, Yahweh proclaims three curses that address the role of the serpent, the woman, and the man in bringing about the Fall into sin. Because of these oracles of judgment, nothing will ever be the same; however, as we study what Yahweh says in these verses, we discover that Yahweh insulates every curse with some measure of grace. The curse of sin, therefore, does not represent all the doom that we might expect.

The Cursed Serpent

Yahweh levels his first curse directly against the serpent, who is “cursed” above all livestock and the beasts of the field:

“Because you have done this,
 cursed are you above all livestock
 and above all beasts of the field;
 on your belly you shall go,
 and dust you shall eat
 all the days of your life.
 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.” (Gen. 3:14–15)

The word for “cursed” (*‘ārūr*) plays an important part through the rest of this passage, but it slap serves as a wordplay with the word “crafty” (*‘ārúm*) used to describe the serpent in Genesis 3:1.¹¹ Importantly, Yahweh only *directly* curses the serpent, and not the man or the woman.¹² The man and the woman will experience the bitterness of Yahweh’s curse, but only *indirectly*: through the pain of childbearing and through Yahweh curse against the ground (Gen. 3:17).

The nature of this curse against the serpent has two major elements to it. First, Yahweh curses the serpent to go on his belly, eating dust all the days of his life (Gen. 3:14). This probably does not suggest that the serpent moved in a different way than on his belly before the curse. Instead, this curse gives a new significance to the serpent’s movement on his belly since the serpent will eat dust, which is “figurative for abject humiliation, especially of enemies (cf. Ps 72:9; Isa 49:23; Mic 7:17).”¹³ Since Yahweh God created the man from dust (Gen. 2:7), then the curse of eating the dust reflects the temptation story of itself: the dust-eating serpent has consumed the man of dust by leading him into sin.

Second, Yahweh curses the serpent by putting “enmity” between both the serpent and the woman, and also the serpent’s “offspring” (lit., “seed”) and the woman’s offspring/seed (Gen. 3:15). Theologians call this verse the *protoevangelium*, or the “first gospel,” since we find here a promise in “seed” form of how Yahweh will eventually undo the disastrous sin of the man and the woman. Over the course of time, Yahweh will superintend a developing genealogical line of offspring. Ultimately, this offspring will culminate in One who will bruise the head of the serpent through wounds he receives in his heel, his hands, and his side on the cross.

Additionally, we must pay careful attention to the fact that Yahweh depicts here not only a single showdown between the seed of the woman and the serpent, but an ongoing war between *all* the seed of the woman and *all* the seed of the serpent. The full number of the offspring of the woman will bless the whole world, but the offspring of the woman will also be relentlessly persecuted by the offspring of Satan throughout their generations—that is, “all who rejected the Lord and opposed his kingdom.”¹⁴ In fact, we will see the first major showdown between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent in the very next chapter. To our horror, we will discover there that the offspring of the serpent will draw first blood. At this crucifixion of Jesus, this struggle will eventually come to its climax, but not its conclusion. The Apostle Paul therefore encourages the church at Rome by reminding them that God has not forgotten his first promise, no matter how bad things might get: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20). Let us continue to cling to that promise in faith until Jesus Christ returns.

Curses in Families

In the punishment against the woman, we must remember that Yahweh does not directly curse the woman. Rather, Yahweh brings an indirect curse upon the woman by marring aspects of her life. Yahweh does not even use the word “curse,” although the content of his oracle toward her is clearly a kind of curse:

“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.” (Gen. 3:16)¹⁵

The extent of this oracle reaches both into the nature of the woman’s childbearing and the woman’s relationship to her husband in marriage.

Pain in Childbearing

The word for “childbearing” here more precisely refers to “conception.” While the fact that conception contains no pain explains the translation of “childbearing,” we should not limit our interpretation of the pain in view here to the process of labor and birth only. Allen Ross argues that “conception” here serves as a *synecdoche*, a literary term referring to a word or phrase that uses a part of something to represent the whole. For example, to describe someone as a “hired *hand*” does not mean that you have hired only a hand, but instead a whole person for your work. In this light, Ross explains that the pain of conception here refers not only to the physical pain, but also to the full extent of emotional pain in the entire course of motherhood, from conception forward.¹⁶ To this idea, we might also include the emotional pain of barrenness—the inability to conceive—especially since barren women take such a prominent role in the book of Genesis in bringing forward the promised seed of the woman, since Sarah (Gen. 21:1), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), and Rachel (Gen. 30:22) are all barren before Yahweh himself opens their wombs to conceive.

As bad as this pain surely is, we must recognize Yahweh’s grace in the specific kind of curse that he selects. The original blessing given to the man and the woman was to be fruitful and multiply to fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). Rather than removing the blessing of childbearing altogether, Yahweh makes the process painful. Furthermore, the ongoing role of childbearing for the woman will be directly connected to the coming of salvation, since it will be the offspring of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). John Sailhamer explains it this way:

Now, after the Fall, childbirth is again to be the means through which the snake would be defeated and the blessing restored. The pain of the birth of every child was to be a reminder of the hope that lay in God’s promise. Birth pangs are not merely a reminder of the futility of the Fall; they are as well a sign of an impending joy.¹⁷

Salvation will come through the woman’s offspring, but motherhood will also be a great source of pain for the woman.

Pain in Marriage

Next, Yahweh brings pain into the marriage relationship as well. The woman’s “desire” shall be for (lit., “toward”) her husband, but he will rule over her. The perfect, one-flesh union of marriage that was characterized by unashamed nakedness (Gen. 2:25) will no longer be a reality. Both the husband and the wife will seek to dominate and rule the other. The phrase about the woman’s “desire” for her husband appears with nearly identical language in Genesis 4:7, where Yahweh warns Cain that sin’s desire is for him (that is, seeking to control him), but that Cain must, instead, master that desire. The woman’s desire, then, will henceforth be to control her husband.¹⁸ The man, then, will do the same thing by seeking to “rule” his wife, a harsh word that describes “dominion, mastery,

lordship.”¹⁹ Therefore, the woman will endure a cursed desire to usurp the leadership of her husband, while her husband will experience a cursed twisting of his authority by exercising harsh control over her. Derek Kidner writes this:

The phrase your desire shall be for your husband (RSV), with the reciprocating he shall rule over you, portrays a marriage relation in which control has slipped from the fully personal realm to that of instinctive urges passive and active. ‘To love and to cherish’ becomes ‘To desire and to dominate’. While even pagan marriage can rise far above this, the pull of sin is always towards it.²⁰

At the risk of stating the obvious, we should remember that this is a curse, and not a prescription for how a marriage *ought* to work. These are the wicked tendencies that marriages will move toward in sin; they are absolutely not God’s ideal goals for marriages. Kenneth Mathews puts it well when he writes, “We cannot understand the divine word ‘he will rule over you’ as a command to impose dominance any more than v. 16a is an exhortation for the woman to suffer as much as possible during childbirth. It is a distortion of the passage to find in it justification for male tyranny.”²¹ Rather than Genesis 3:16, Christian husbands should look to passages like Ephesians 5:22–33 to learn the true nature of the husband’s authority: self-sacrificial ministry for the sake of the wife. Our marriages should seek to live up to the example of Christ toward the church rather than down to the full scope of the curse’s depravity.

The Cursed Ground

When Yahweh addresses the man, the curses do not affect the man’s relationships, but the man’s work:

“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.” (Gen. 3:17–19)

Again, Yahweh does not curse Adam, but he instead curses the ground which Adam must work (Gen. 3:17). Adam’s work will no longer be restful service as Yahweh’s priest in Yahweh’s temple (Gen. 2:15). Instead, Adam will exert himself all the days of his life in difficult, painful, sweaty,

fruitless toil. Adam's work will now be characterized by "pain" (Gen. 3:17), the same word used to describe the *pain* of the woman's conception (Gen. 3:16). Moreover, Adam's painful toil will be marked by the fruitlessness of thorns and thistles that will invade his cultivation of the ground (Gen. 3:18). Only by the sweat of his brow will Adam eat bread (Gen. 3:18b–19). Still, all this toil will not save him. Instead, his labor will merely sustain him until the day when he returns to the ground as dust in his death (Gen. 3:19).

While the curses directed toward the serpent and the woman's relationships both revolved around the themes of seed/offspring, the curse directed toward the man's work revolves around the theme of *eating*. The word *eat* shows up five times in Genesis 3:17–19. Because the man ate from the forbidden tree, he will now eat only through difficult, painful, and futile toil from this point forward. In the Mosaic law, eating will receive a special emphasis in two ways. First, a detailed set of regulations will distinguish clean foods from unclean foods. Second, God will ordain provisions for feasts that anticipate both the Lord's Supper and, ultimately, the wedding supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19.²² The subject of food overshadows the entire story of the Bible.

Still, Yahweh extends his grace to the man in the midst of this curse. When God "blessed" the man and the woman, he not only gave them the command and ability to be fruitful and multiply to fill the earth with offspring (Gen. 1:28), but he also gave them abundant food to eat (Gen. 1:29). When the man and the woman stole the one food that Yahweh God had forbidden, Yahweh could have starved them entirely; however, Yahweh graciously allows them to continue eating, albeit only through pain. In this way, the oracles delivered to the woman and to the man correspond to one another. Just as Yahweh God did not withdraw the blessing of reproduction altogether, so also he does not cut off food supplies altogether from his people. The curse of the fall will affect both the processes of reproduction and food production, but God's blessing in both areas will still remain.

Blessings and Curses

The judgment of Yahweh for the original sin of Adam and Eve, then, sets up a pattern of blessings and curses that will extend throughout the entirety of the rest of the Bible. When Yahweh calls Abram, he says that he will bless the whole world through Abram's family, so that anyone who blesses Abram will be blessed, but that anyone who curses Abram will be cursed (Gen. 12:3). Then, the Mosaic covenant will be marked by a strict distinction between blessings for obedience, but curses for disobedience (e.g., Deut. 28). Even at the cross, we see both the full glory of God's blessings toward his people and full weight of God's curse displayed at once: Jesus bore our curse in order to bring us the blessings of reconciliation to God through the gospel.

This is important, since the philosophies of the world throughout human history tend to over-emphasize one side or the other. Some have overemphasized God's blessings, giving themselves to the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, while others have overemphasized God's curses, living in utter despondency and hopelessness. As Christians, we believe in the fundamental, primary *goodness* and *blessings* of God's creation. Furthermore, we believe that God does not abolish the goodness of these blessings from his creation entirely. Instead, God's curses of judgment against our sin merely *corrupt* those blessings. God's goodness still remains in the world, but only in a broken, tarnished form. We simultaneously recognize the emptiness of pursuing worldly pleasures as ends in themselves while also seeing hope where others can only despair. Practically speaking, this means that we seek to live our lives in accordance with God's instructions for flourishing. Still, we also understand why even

our best work will be subjected to pain, sweat, thorns, and thistles.

Most importantly, we recognize that this state of corrupted blessings in the world will not last forever. Therefore, we look in hope to the day Jesus Christ will return to abolish every remaining corruption of sin and death from the world. On that day, Christ will resurrect his creation just as he was resurrected, renewing and restoring the full goodness of creation as far as the curse is found. Nothing will be left corrupt or diminished or formless or incomplete, for *all* things will be made new in Christ's kingdom. We must live in the shadow of the curse today, but we will not forever. Therefore, take heart! Christ is coming to dwell with us forever in the new heavens and the new earth.

Continuing Life Outside the Garden (Gen. 3:20–24)

In the midst of all this sorrow, Genesis 3:20–21 almost seem out of place. After such a devastating pronouncement of judgment, why would the man's first reaction be to name his wife? Why do we then read about the clothes that God makes for them in Genesis 3:21? In fact, these are critical, instructive statements. They temper our despair from the fallout of the Fall, and they shape the direction of post-Fall life that humanity has lived *outside* the garden of Eden from that day forward.

Faith in the Promises

The narrator tells us the significance of why Adam names his wife Eve: "because she was the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). This detail links the naming of Eve with her role as mother. By this name, Adam commemorates Yahweh's grace in preserving Eve's capacity to bear offspring, even in the midst of the pain that childbearing will bring. If Adam focused instead on blaming his wife for what she had done, he might have named his wife something related to the ideas of "Pain in My Side" or "Easily Deceived," or "The One I Rule Over." Instead, Adam focuses on Yahweh's promise that the woman will *continue* to bear children, albeit through much pain. The name Eve, then, is a title of honor that Adam bestows on his wife as he looks forward in faith to the woman's role in bringing forth the promised offspring who will crush the head of the serpent.²³

The next verse, then, demonstrates that Adam does not act in vain. Making garments of skins to clothe Adam and his wife is Yahweh's first action toward his people after pronouncing his oracles of judgment. Critically, we should see that this action is characterized not by vindictive pettiness, but by grace. Yahweh recognizes that the man and his wife are not only naked, but ashamed by their sin (Gen. 2:25, 3:7). The fig-leaf loincloths they made for themselves will not suffice. So, Yahweh puts animals to death and uses those animals' skins to clothe his people from their shame.

Here we see the first sacrifice in the Bible. Through the rest of the Bible, sacrifice will accomplish the same result: something (or Someone) will die because of another's sin. On the basis of that substitutionary death, God will forgive the sins of his people and clothe them in righteousness. Now, many commentators object that we are reading too much into the text to the death of this animal as a form of sacrifice.²⁴ Certainly, these criticisms are correct insofar as they point out that the text does not fully develop a doctrine of the atonement. Nevertheless, in these early passages of Genesis *everything* we find is subtle and undeveloped. We find here only the *seeds* for the rest of the narrative of the Bible (and especially for the rest of the Pentateuch), not any fully flowered theology ready for harvest. We do not expect to find a fully defined doctrine of the atonement any more than

we expect to find an explicit account of Jesus Christ's death on the cross in Genesis 3:15. The promise that the offspring of the woman will crush the head of the serpent is only a seed, but it grows into the cross of Christ. In the same way, the seed of these slaughtered animals who cover the shame of Adam and Eve develop into a full sacrificial system—and, eventually, back to the cross of Christ.²⁵ God clothes his people with skins by the death of animals after they sin in the same way that he will eventually clothe his people in righteousness through the death of his Son.

Exile from the Garden

Despite the hope that we see in Adam's faith and Yahweh's provision of clothing, the effects of the curse continue. Yahweh God notes that the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:22). This fallen state of the human will cause many more problems if he now takes of the fruit of the tree of life to live forever. Humankind must be remade, renewed, and even resurrected before our lives may extend forever for good. The consequences of sin are so disastrous that Yahweh God must remake his creation before there can be lasting peace.

In the meantime, Yahweh God drives the man out of the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:23). No longer will Adam work the garden, for he will now “work the ground” (Gen. 3:23). Furthermore, the role of keeping/guarding the garden (Gen. 2:15) will now fall to the cherubim with a flaming sword who will “keep/guard” the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). If the “flaming sword” is a description of lightning (as Allen Ross mentions as a possibility), then this lightning continues the motif of the storm of judgment in which Yahweh God appeared after the first sin (Gen. 3:8).²⁶ Furthermore, if this is lightning, then we will encounter this “flaming sword” unsheathed again when we come to Mount Sinai, which is surrounded by “thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled” (Ex. 19:16; cf. Ex. 20:18).

At Sinai, Yahweh will give his people a new tabernacle where he will dwell in their midst. As in the garden of Eden, Yahweh will again commission priests who will work and keep that new tabernacle under the threat of the flaming sword of curses for disobedience to Yahweh's law. After God's people depart from Mount Sinai, God will then instruct the entire tribe of Levi to “keep guard” over the tabernacle and everything in it (Num. 3:5–10). The warnings for unauthorized entry into Yahweh's new tabernacle will be just as clear with the Levites as they are with these cherubim and their flaming sword: “if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death” (Num. 3:10). In the fullness of time, God will dwell in our midst in two other new tabernacles/temples: first, in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 2:21–22) and then in the church, where the Spirit of God dwells (1 Cor. 3:16). Ultimately, the new heavens and the new earth will need no temple, “for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev. 21:22).

Additionally, God will continue holding out the promise of restoring life to his people through a tree. At Mount Sinai, God will direct his people to fashion a lampstand sculpted to look like a tree, to dwell in the holy place of his tabernacle.²⁷ Still, the lampstand itself will serve as nothing more than a symbol, incapable of transforming Israel into a new creation. Transforming God's people into a new creation will not be accomplished so easily. Reopening humanity's path to the tree of life will require nothing less than for the Son of God to pass under the judgment of God's fiery sword by being hanged on a *cursed* tree in our place (cf. Deut. 21:22–23; Gal. 3:13). We will not come to the tree of life in its full glory until we arrive in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 22:2). In the meantime, we, like Adam and Eve, must live out our lives as exiles (1 Pet. 2:11), dwelling east of

Eden as strangers in the land, waiting by faith for our heavenly city prepared by God (Heb. 11:13–16). While we enjoy whatever blessings God bestows on us during our sojourn through Christ, we understand that this world is not our home. As pilgrims, we are waiting and longing for our true home in the city of God, where we will dwell with him through all eternity.

Until then, press on in Christ by the grace of the Spirit, knowing that “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (Rom. 16:20).

Discussion Questions

1. Does Yahweh’s confrontation of Adam and Eve seem more terrifying than how it appears in English? Is God justified to judge sinners, even by condemning and destroying them altogether? Would God be justified to judge *you* by condemning and destroying you? Why does the good news of gospel require us to acknowledge our great guilt?
2. Why does God hold Adam uniquely accountable in this story, especially since Eve was the one deceived? What does this higher level of accountability tell us about the responsibilities of men and women in marriages, and about men ordained as officers in the church? Does God’s definition of leadership have more to do with *power* or with *responsibility*?
3. Explain how God both *curses* the blessings of reproduction for women and of food production for men, while still *preserving* those blessings. How does this account of the dual presence of blessings and curses explain the goodness and the brokenness of the world? What do we learn about God’s justice? What do we learn about God’s grace and mercy?
4. From Genesis 3:20–24, what principles do we learn to prepare us for life outside the garden of Eden? In what ways does God eventually come to dwell in the presence of his people during the days of Moses? During the days of Christ? Today? In the future? How do we grow in our enjoyment of God’s presence by his Spirit as we await Christ’s return?

Notes

1. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 105.

2. The word “walking” (מַתְּהִלֵּךְ) is a Hithpael participle, and, according to the significance given to the word in this stem, might best be classified as having a “estimative-declarative reflexive” meaning, which “may note esteeming or presenting oneself in a state” (Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 430–31.). In this case, the “state” presented in this “walking” is Yahweh’s sovereignty over the garden.

3. Eugene H. Merrill, “הָלַךְ,” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 1, ed. Willem VanGemeren, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1034.

4. As we will discuss later, this Hithpael form of the verb “walk” is also used to describe the way in which Enoch “walked with God” (Gen. 5:22) before God took him without death. The nuance of this use is closely related, but distinct, from what we see in Genesis 3:8.

5. Walton, *Genesis*, 224.

6. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 105.

7. Walton does not necessarily think this is the “right” translation, and he immediately adds these caveats: “The major objection is that the word *yom* [‘day’] only rarely carries the meaning ‘storm.’ The appearance of the other two words here and the logic of the context makes this new rendering a possibility, but one that can only be held tentatively.” (Walton, *Genesis*, 224.)

8. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 76.

9. Sailhamer offers an intriguing possibility as to why the man is held responsible for the woman’s deception: “Why was the man held responsible for the actions of both he [sic] and his wife? There are some clues in the text and its context. For example, the author stresses in 3:13 that the woman was ‘deceived.’ Since the text does not explicitly state that the man was also ‘deceived,’ the author apparently means to suggest that the man was, in fact, not deceived and hence was to be held responsible for his own action. The woman, being deceived, was not responsible. There is a further indication within the text why the man was being held responsible for the woman’s actions. That is, in the larger context of the Pentateuch (e.g., Nu 30:1–16), the Mosaic Law teaches that the husband is responsible for those vows which his wife has made....The author of the Pentateuch allows the reader’s knowledge of the Mosaic Law to guide the reading of this passage. In Numbers 30, if the husband hears his wife make a vow and does not speak out, he is responsible for it. It may be important, then, that the author states specifically in Genesis 3 that the man was with his wife when she ate of the tree, and that he said nothing in reply to the serpent or the woman. His silence may be a clue as to why the man must bear the responsibility for the actions of his wife.” (Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 104–05)

10. Calvin, *Genesis*, 165. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.ix.i.html>>

11. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 196.

12. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 145.

13. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 79.

14. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 145.

15. The 2016 edition of the ESV has “Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” This change was controversial, since “contrary” is a paraphrase rather than a translation, while the text literally reads, “Your desire shall be *toward* your husband.” To use the more literal translation, I am quoting here the previous version of the ESV.

16. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 146.

17. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 108.

18. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 202.

19. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 146.

20. Kidner, *Genesis*, 76.

21. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 251.

22. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 108–09.

23. “The expositor will have to look at this verse [v. 20] very carefully in order to appreciate its significance in the context. At first it seems out of place. But a closer analysis of the meaning of, and motivation for, the name, especially in contrast with the prospect of death as a punishment for sin, will show that it indicates Adam’s faith. The whole incident shows that they accepted their lot in a fallen world (now Adam named his wife; in chap. 4 the woman named her children) but held on to the positive side of it—life would continue. Their look is uplifted in faith (contrast Cain’s bitterness after his interrogation).” (Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 148.)

24. Kidner sees reading this as a reference to the atonement as “unduly subtle, and a distraction” (*Genesis*, 77). Additionally, Hamilton argues that “It is probably reading too much into this verse to see in the coats of skin a hint of the use of animals and blood in the sacrificial system of the OT cultus” (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 207). Walton even goes so far as to say, “It is a serious error to read sacrifice between the lines of

verse 21” (*Genesis*, 229).

25. As perhaps a mediating option between the extremes seeing, on the one hand, the first sacrifice explicitly presented in Genesis 3:21 or, on the other hand, seeing nothing of the sort, Sailhamer writes this: “Later in the Pentateuch the Lord instructed the people to make tunics for the priests who were to enter into the presence of God at the tabernacle. The purpose of the tunics was to cover the priests’ nakedness (עֲרֹנָה), lest they incur guilt and die (Ex 28:42). The author may be anticipating this “lasting ordinance” (Ex 28:43) in drawing our attention to God’s covering the nakedness of the man and the woman. In this way the role of the priests, developed later in the Pentateuch, is foreshadowed by God’s work in ages past—his work of restoring to humanity the blessing of his presence and fellowship.” (Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 109–10.)

26. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 149.

27. Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 193.