

For both the man and the woman there would be painful consequences – for the woman in childbirth, for the man in the husbandry of the earth. (vv. 16-10).

Reflect:

- So the words “you will die” (v. 2) weren’t an instant judgment. Reflect on 2 Peter 3.9, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”. To what extent was the “curse” express the Lord’s desire to give the blessing?

Read: Genesis 3.3.21-24.

The banishment from Eden and exclusion from access to the tree of life represented very major punishment indeed. We accept the hard work and sweat and toil. “Life wasn’t meant to be easy”, we are told. Yet it was meant to be far easier than we now find it. And something in us longs for the lost Eden and deeply desires some “tree of life” that would enable us to “live forever”.

But eternal life can only come to us on the basis of redemption, a sacrifice given for our sins. The “garments of skin” may well be simply the divine answer to what had become a very real necessity – and a sign of the ways in which their dominion over the animal world could be used to meet their needs. However, v. 21 has long been seen as the first sacrifice – made by the LORD himself – and pointing forward to the coming Saviour and his redemptive work.

Reflect:

- We are a fallen race living in a fallen world. What evidence of this do we see about us?
- What evidence do we see that the Lord is loving and gracious, as well as just and holy?

4. My Brother’s Keeper? Reading: Genesis 4

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Studies in Genesis chapters 1-11
by Peter J Blackburn

3. Paradise Lost

Reading: Genesis 3

In December 1987 we spent a week in the Port Campbell, exploring the beautiful coastline – and reading up about the numerous wrecks. It is just 50 miles between Cape Otway on the mainland and Cape Wickham on King Island – the “eye of the needle”, they called it. A slight error in the ship’s chronometer and a hazy day were enough to put a ship at peril.

“Bully” Forbes’ career was ruined in 1855 in a perplexing wreck. Given command of the 2600 ton Schomberg, Britain’s proud reply to the American-built clippers, he became obsessed with an ambition to reach Melbourne in her in 60 days. Although the Schomberg’s main mast was 210 feet high, and she carried 3.3 acres of sail, she was beset by calms and Forbes seems to have been piqued by the fact.

On Boxing Day, in good weather, land was sighted well west of Cape Otway. That night, when told by his officers he was close to land, Forbes at first did not so much as come on deck, but continued playing cards with the surgeon and an 18-year-old girl.

When he did appear, he stood watching the gap between ship and shore narrowing while all hands waited for his orders. He gave none until it was too late to execute them. The great ship almost beached herself on the spit that juts into Newfield Bay near the present town of Peterborough. All passengers were safely taken off by two passing coastal vessels, but the bulk of their luggage was lost and the beautiful ship was doomed. Within a matter of days heavy storms pounded the pride of Britain to pieces. (Don Charlwood, *Settlers under Sail*, p. 10).

The world has many good challenges for human mind and skill. Yet, again and again, we are aware that something is vitally wrong. Did the Creator make a mistake? Should he have done things differently? How come we don’t see the Paradise we read about – and dream about? Or is the problem that we should be doing things differently?

Reflect:

- If God is a God of love, why do we see so much that is wrong in the world? What happened to Paradise?

Temptation and Disobedience

Read: Genesis 3.1-7.

The serpent is specifically described as part of the creation – as one of “the wild animals the LORD God had made” (v. 1a). He is described as “crafty”, a word sometimes used in a good sense to describe a person who is “shrewd, sensible, prudent” (as in Prov. 14.15).

In the original there is a play on the words “naked” (2.25) and “crafty” (3.1). Their nakedness was a sign of their innocence, unaware of danger, whereas the snake would use his craftiness to take advantage of them. Derek Kidner says that

this chapter speaks not of evil invading, as though it had its own existence, but of creatures rebelling. [The serpent’s] malevolent brilliance raises the question, which is not pursued, whether he is the tool of a more formidable rebel; the inference becomes compelling in 15... But Eve must not be under duress: her temptation comes through a subordinate (*cf.* Mt. 16.22,23, concerning Jesus and Peter), which strengthens its appeal to pride but carries no compulsion. (*Genesis* p. 67)

“Did God really say...?” Surely God’s word is subject to human understanding and judgment? Let’s look at what God said. Does it really mean what you think it does?

Eve is drawn in further. The serpent’s blanket question about a ban on the fruit of any tree in the garden leads her to overstate the Lord’s requirements – “you must not touch it” (v. 2).

The serpent’s response is to deny the consequences of disobedience – “you will not surely die” – and to infer that eating will confer a benefit – “you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (v. 3). This questions the character of God. Yet there is almost a suggestion that the purpose of the prohibition is, in fact, to lead them to this choice with the desirable goal of their moral improvement.

The implicit lie is that the choice to disobey would lead them to God-likeness. They were already made in the image and likeness of God (1.27). We noted in the previous study, “Man was created innocent. He would become a moral being by exercising his choice.... It is sometimes suggested that they had to eat the forbidden fruit to become moral beings. This is not so. But they had to make a moral choice – a choice that could equally have been to refuse to disobey the divine command”.

Reflect:

- “Did God really say...?” Today there are two questions that emerge – is it really the will of God or is it the voice of human cultural conditioning? Alternatively, if it is God’s word, does it really mean what it seems to mean if taken literally? Think about these questions in relation to recent approaches to current issues in the world and the church.

It seemed so good and natural and beneficial to eat of the forbidden fruit. They forgot the warning and hoped the consequences would be all good. But when “their eyes were opened” – as the serpent said they would be – the result was guilt and shame.

Encounter with God

Read: Genesis 3.8-13.

Up until their disobedience, “walking [with God] in the garden in the cool of the day” was a normal and natural part of their lives. Afterwards, they “hid from the LORD God”. They hid because of fear (v. 10), knowing that they had disobeyed.

The LORD, of course, knew where they were. The question, “Where are you?”, was a call to repentance, to acknowledge their disobedience. It was a call of grace. When asked whether they had eaten the forbidden fruit, their answer evaded direct blame – “the woman you put here with me” (v. 12), “the serpent”. If the serpent had been given opportunity to speak for himself, he might well have said, “You made me!”

Reflect:

- Why do we find it so difficult to admit our own fault? Why do we “pass the buck”?

Read: Genesis 3.14-20.

The first word of divine judgment is on the serpent. The serpent was part of the creation. In Rev. 12.9 we read of “that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the world world astray” (also 20.2). Finally the condemnation is for the who the serpent represented. Verse 15 has long been seen as pointing forward to Christ which faced the full brunt of Satan’s attack and yet won the crushing victory.