



Key Scripture Passage

Genesis 3:14-16

14 The Lord God said to the serpent,
“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.
15 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.”
16 To the woman he said,
“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.”

Commentary on This Week's Text

It has been written that Calvin and Hobbes provided one of the great cartoons of the 1990s because it so perfectly captured the growing no-fault ethos of the decade. The cartoon is mostly a monologue by Calvin, the little boy, to his stuffed-tiger friend Hobbes who comes to life in Calvin's imagination. It begins with the two walking along and Calvin musing, “Nothing I do is my fault.” The next frame shows Hobbes scratching his whiskers as Calvin expostulates, “My family is dysfunctional and my parents won't empower me! Consequently, I'm not self-actualized!” Then we see Calvin, eyes shut and arms crossed, doing a poor me: “My behavior is addictive functioning in a disease process of toxic codependency! I need holistic healing and wellness before I'll accept any responsibility for my actions!” Hobbes responds, “One of us needs to stick his head in a bucket of ice water.” The strip ends with Calvin walking on saying, “I love the culture of victimhood.”

“Victimhood” has become the fantasyland refuge of everyone from criminals to presidents to theologians who imagine that the blame for their conduct can be placed on some other person or thing or group. Buck-passing is the therapeutic trademark of the new millennium. Of course, as we saw in Genesis 3:8-13, the culture of victimhood has primeval roots in original sin. It is nothing new. Adam's sin brought instant spiritual death and instant sinfulness. In the bat of an eye, every part of the couple's beings was diffused with sin, and in a nanosecond they were utterly dead in their transgressions and sins. Then came instant guilt and instant victimhood as

Adam pointed his guilty finger at the woman and even at God himself while the woman pointed to the snake who “deceived” her.

And so it has been throughout history until the cross of Christ, when the sinless Son of God, the second and better Adam, became the willing victim of our sins. Significantly, in the garden God did not question the serpent but straightaway cursed him, there was no hope for Satan. Yet in that cursing of Satan there was imbedded a hope of grace for the couple. And when God judged Eve and then Adam, the judgments were again laced with grace.

The divine curse and judgment in the garden were strangely interwoven with grace. Indeed, paradise was utterly and totally lost. Depravity and death became the lot of all humanity. But the curse and the judgments given as they were meant that paradise could be regained, but only by grace.

Curse

As already noted, God made no offer of forgiveness to the serpent. There was only a curse. The curse had two objects, first the reptile itself (v. 14) and then Satan who controlled the reptile (v. 15). The curse is typical of prophetic language that addresses an object or person and then moves beyond the object to the source.

Reptile Cursed

God said to the serpent: “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” (v. 14). The cursing of the snake is consistent with the fate of other animals in Scripture that caused injury to humans and were therefore put to death. Exodus 21: 28 states, “When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned.” Beasts used for immoral purposes were also put to death, not because they were accountable, but because they were used to abuse men and women made in the image of God (Leviticus 20:15-16).

Every animal was made for man and was subject to him as its head. Thus any abuse or perversion of the order called for strict judgment. This is one of the two places in the Bible where God himself verbalized a curse. The other is in Genesis 4:11, where we read that God cursed Cain for the murder of Abel. In all other instances men invoke curses in God’s name. Here the fact that God made the curse means that the curse was completely certain. The idea of this curse is banishment from the place of blessing, the garden. All of animate creation would be banished from the fertility and harmony of the garden, but the serpent was cursed “above all” the rest of the animals. His exile was eternal.

The curse upon the serpent is stated in physical terms — the snake crawling on its belly and eating dust. Does this suggest a new way of travel for the serpent, say, from an upright posture to its belly? Possibly, but probably not. Derek Kidner argues “that the crawling is henceforth symbolic (Isaiah 65:25), just as in 9:13 a new significance, not a new existence will be decreed for the rainbow.” Thus through God’s curse, a new significance was given to the serpent’s distinctive posture. Eating dust variously signifies abject humiliation in Scripture. “May. . .his enemies lick the dust” (Psalm 72:9). “They shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their strongholds” (Micah 7:17; also Isaiah 49:23). The image was so fitting. The snake had exalted itself above man. Therefore it would go upon its belly.

And what a fittingly repulsive image a snake is. I know some people delight in snakes, but that is an acquired taste, and an odd one at that. John Calvin had it right when he said, “It is regarded, as among prodigies, that some take pleasure in them; and as often as the sight of a serpent inspires us with horror, the memory of our fall is renewed.” Serpents continue to keep the revolting image of Satan before our eyes. Isaiah 65 pictures the whole of creation delivered from the effects of the fall, except for the serpent, which lives in perpetual degradation, fulfilling the sentence “all the days of your life” and therefore prophesying the fate of the ultimate serpent for whom there will be no deliverance!

Satan Cursed

As God addressed the reptile, his speech moved beyond the snake, and the object of his speech became Satan himself: “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” (v. 15). What we have here is an astounding gospel prophecy because God’s curse upon the serpent turned into a word of grace, giving what has been recognized from the second century A.D. as the “first gospel,” the *protevangelium*, when the post-apostolic fathers Justin Martyr and Irenaeus preached that the woman’s offspring (literally, “seed”) here referred to Christ who would crush Satan’s head. This has been the church’s position, with little variation, until the rise of modern biblical criticism, which now views it as nothing more than a statement that there would be perpetual conflict between humanity and the snake population in which humanity would ultimately triumph.

But we know such thinking is wrong, for several good reasons. Most tellingly, in 250 B.C. when thoroughly Jewish scholars translated the Bible into Greek, giving the world the Septuagint translation, they interpreted the word “seed” (“offspring” in the ESV) as a single individual, saying “he will crush your head.” The Septuagint translators, who could not possibly have had any Christian presuppositions or desire to read something back into the text that was not there, understood the seed of the woman to be a future individual who would deal a deathblow to the serpent.

Recently Hebrew scholar Jack Collins examined every use of the word “seed” when it means offspring and found that when the word is singular (as it is here in Genesis 3:15) it always denotes a specific descendant and that when it is an individual, the pronoun will always be masculine. Thus, in the broader context of Genesis, Collins argues that “it would be fair to read this as God’s threat to the snake, of an individual who will engage the snake in combat and win.” This view is sustained by the fact that in Galatians 3:16 Paul argues, on the basis of the use of the singular “seed” in God’s promise to Abraham, that the word “seed” refers to Christ: “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ.”

Here in Genesis 3:15 we have a prophecy of the cross when Satan would strike the heel of Christ (the suffering on the cross), but Christ would crush Satan’s head (through his death and glorious resurrection). All Christians (those who are in Christ) participate in the crushing through Christ, so that Paul could write in the conclusion of the book of Romans, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (16:20). Those who argue that the author of Genesis could not have known or meant this betray their naturalistic assumptions of the world. God is the author of Scripture, and this prophecy is a direct quotation of his words. God knew what he meant. He meant to communicate that his Son, the second Adam, as the ultimate offspring of Eve, would be wounded in his destruction of Satan. Certainly Moses got the gist of God’s words.

Read the rest of Genesis and the Pentateuch and observe the theology — all of which came through Moses' hand. Here is the gospel in paradise just lost. God cursed Satan and in the process proclaimed grace through his Son, the second Adam, who crushed Satan by his great work on the cross.

And there is more, because when Christ came, he understood the “first gospel” in Genesis. He understood that he himself was the antidote to the serpent’s venom. In fact just prior to declaring “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3: 16) Jesus said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). His reference, of course, was to Numbers 21, where due to Israel’s sin God sent venomous snakes into the camp so that many people died and were dying. As Moses prayed amidst the death, “the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live” (Numbers 21:8-9).

The details of the event are remarkable. The snakes were the result of sin, in fact, the perfect expression of sin because it was a serpent who tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, thereby bringing sin into the world. Our very natures have been polluted by the serpent’s venom. Paul says, “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one’” (Romans 3:10). Above the dying people we see the likeness of a serpent lifted up on a pole, foreshadowing Christ who was “made to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). And it is significant that Moses elected not to use an actual serpent but a likeness! The symbolism would not have been so exact and perfect if he had used a literal snake. Our Lord became sin (or a serpent to continue the analogy) for us. Romans 8:3 says, “God [sent] his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 adds, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” And Galatians 3:13 states, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” With all the animal realm from which to choose, God chose the perfect representation, the serpent. On the cross our Lord took the sins of the world upon himself as symbolized by the writhing serpent.

But we dare not miss the importance of the gaze of faith. Numbers 21:9 says, “If a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.” The command to look to that uplifted serpent was a gracious foreshadowing of looking to the crucified Christ for our salvation. No wonder our Lord said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14). Moses raised that serpent up high in the camp, and all the dying Israelites had to do was look to that pole and be saved. No matter how horribly they were bitten, no matter how many times they had been bitten or how sick they were, the opportunity for salvation was there. Even the most degraded and miserable sinner who looks to Christ alone for salvation will be saved. This great grace had its origins and image in the “first gospel” in the garden. There was hope in paradise lost!

Judgment

This unexpected intermingling of grace continued in the judgments upon the woman in her two primary roles of childbearing and her relationship to her husband.

Childbearing

First, the intrinsically joyous area of her life was invaded by pain. “To the woman he said, ‘I will surely multiply your pain in child bearing; in pain you shall bring forth children’” (v. 16a). The pain of childbirth, still unrelieved totally by modern medicine, is a bitter pill. Maternity and suffering became coextensive. And her pain was not limited to the physical because pain here means “painful toil” and refers to the emotional as well as the physical. Mothering itself, with its attendant joys, was also to be a source of painful labor.

Marriage

Marriage was also struck with a corresponding pain: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (v. 16b). The woman’s desire would be very much like the desire of sin to master Cain because the same word is used in Genesis 4:7, where God says to Cain, “Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you.” The woman would now desire to control her husband, but she would fail because God had ordained that man should lead. Nevertheless strife would persist in domestic relationships. John Sailhamer writes, “Thus the Lord affirms in the oracles of judgment the creation order: the serpent is subjected to the woman, the woman to the man, and all to the Lord. In those moments of life’s greatest blessing, marriage and children, the woman would serve most clearly the painful consequences of her rebellion from God.”

The grace in all of this is a sense of unease and dissatisfaction in what ought to be the most rewarding areas of life. Bliss, perfect peace, is no woman’s lot in this world. And as we shall see, the center of the man’s life will also know the same striving. These punishments are God’s graces. Marriage alone will give no woman all she wants. Mothering is fraught with pain from birth onward. To be a mother is to experience a new and ongoing index of pain. Nothing completely satisfies. This is a grace because it will drive the willing soul to seek God. Augustine praised God in retrospect for this uncomfortable grace, saying, “Your goad was thrusting at my heart, giving me no peace until the eye of my soul could discern you without mistake.”

It was midnight in the garden of Eden. Curses and judgments rained down. Paradise was lost. Yet there was grace. God’s curse upon Satan meant that his own Son would one day become a curse for us. Satan would strike his heel, but the wound received would mean that the Son would strike a deathblow to Satan. Grace is rooted in Christ’s victory. God’s judgments would fall on the very center of the woman’s existence. But in those judgments there was grace. Nothing would satisfy her but God. And Jesus’ gracious words often would have powerful appeal to such needy hearts: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Have you seen the “first gospel” in the garden of Eden? “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” (v. 15). If you see this “first gospel,” you will understand Jesus’ words: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3: 14-16). This is grace indeed!

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Study

- The culture of victimhood and “passing the buck” has its very roots in the original disobedience of Adam and Eve. How does this culture find its roots in this first sin, and how

does that culture continue on, even today. Do you find yourself prone to passing the buck for your wrongdoings, or blaming others for your own actions? How does Christ end this long line of “passing the buck” for sin?

- God pronounces a swift and severe curse upon the serpent for his role in the Fall. How does God curse both the serpent and the root cause of the serpent’s deception?
- What does the word *protoevangelium* mean? And where does it show up in this passage? What are some of the reasons that we can express confidence in the fact that the promised “seed” is singular and refers to Christ? In other words, what would you point to in order to counter someone who claims that this prophecy refers only to the enmity that will exist between men and snakes (which is a common modern view)?
- Explain how the incredible story of the Israelites in Numbers 21 is a perfect prophecy about the coming Messiah and who he would be and what he would accomplish for his people? Does this passage make new sense of John 3:14-15 and even the most memorized passage in Scripture, John 3:16?
- In this week’s passage, we see the judgments God placed on the woman which continue on even today. How do these judgments of fundamental parts of a woman’s life (childbirth and marriage) continue to exist today? And how is God’s judgment laced with grace even though it is a strong judgment?

Family Catechism and Scripture Memory

New City Catechism Question: “*What is the law of God stated in the Ten Commandments?*”

Answer: **“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below—you shall not bow down to them or worship them. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not covet.”**

Scripture Memory Verse: “*You shall have no other gods before me.*” - Exodus 20:3

Song of the Week: “*But God*” - The Village Church

Weekly Unreached People Group

Every week, in this space, we highlight an unreached people group somewhere in the world. Please consider spending some portion of your prayer and reading time during the course of the week praying for the highlighted group. Pray that their hearts would be softened, that the Lord would provide laborers to take them the good news of the Gospel, and that they would come to know the glory of that Gospel and of Christ himself and be saved. Pray also that your own heart would be softened for the reality of the nearly 6,000 people groups that have not heard the Gospel and consider what part the Lord is calling you to play in fulfilling our common command to be about making disciples of all nations. (Source: The Joshua Project - joshuaproject.net)

This week's unreached people group are the **Bairiki of India**

Population 3,338,000	% Christian 0.00%	% Evangelical 0.00%
Largest Religion Hinduism (100.0%)	Main Language Bengali	Progress No Known Believers

Introduction

The history of the Bairagi commences with Ramanuja, who lived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and taught in the southern part of India. A proper Bairagi is one whose principal deity is either Vishnu or any of his incarnations, like Rama and Krishna. A mark (tilak) on the forehead and ear are their identification marks. They worship Gouranga as their family deity and Kali, Manasa and Durga as village deities. They are indifferent to the education of girls.

Ministry Obstacles

To follow Christ is to risk disturbing community harmony within this Hindu community.

Outreach Ideas

Much sustained, focused prayer is needed to prepare the hearts of the Bairagi community to understand and receive the good news of Jesus of Nazareth.

Pray for the Followers of Christ

There are no known followers of Jesus among the Hindu Bairagi, but pray for those that the Lord will soon call to himself. Pray they will be zealous to learn of Christ, and that they will be sent teachers and pastors to help them. Pray they will live holy lives that honor Christ.

Pray for the Entire People Group

Pray for the Hindu Bairagi community to make schooling for both boys and girls a priority.