

Genesis 3:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:

Analysis

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattl... This chapter narrates humanity's tragic fall from innocence through temptation, sin, and divine judgment. The serpent's subtle questioning of God's word, Eve's addition to and misquotation of God's command, and Adam's passive participation demonstrate the progression from doubt to disobedience to disaster.

The consequences affect every dimension of human existence: spiritual death (separation from God), physical death (mortality), relational dysfunction (shame, blame, conflict), vocational difficulty (cursed ground, painful labor), and cosmic disruption (groaning creation). Yet within the curses, God provides gracious provisions: proto-evangelium promise of redemption, clothing to cover shame, and preservation of life despite deserved death.

Theologically, this chapter establishes the origin and nature of sin, the reality of Satan's activity, the universality of human fallenness, the justice of divine judgment, and the necessity of redemption. Understanding the fall illuminates why the world contains suffering and evil, why humans rebel against God, why salvation requires divine intervention, and how Christ as the second Adam reverses the first Adam's failure (Romans 5:12-21, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45).

Historical Context

The serpent in Genesis 3 reflects ancient Near Eastern associations between serpents and chaos, evil, or deceptive wisdom. Unlike pagan myths where serpents might be deified, Genesis presents the serpent as a mere creature, though Satan's instrument (Revelation 12:9, 20:2). Ancient curse formulas from various cultures parallel God's pronouncements, but Genesis uniquely embeds redemptive promise within judgment.

The agricultural curses (thorns, sweat, difficult labor) would have resonated deeply with ancient subsistence farmers for whom crop failure meant starvation. The pain in childbearing acknowledges a universal female experience that ancient cultures attributed to various causes, but Genesis traces it to sin's consequences rather than divine cruelty or inherent evil in creation or sexuality.

Archaeological evidence of humanity's ancient struggles with agriculture, disease, death, and violence aligns with Genesis's portrayal of a fallen world. Ancient wisdom literature from Mesopotamia and Egypt grappled with suffering's origins, but Genesis alone provides the theological explanation: human rebellion against God brought cosmic corruption. This account would have answered Israelite questions about why their promised land required hard labor, why they suffered pain and death, and why they needed redemption.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about The Fall emerge from this passage?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?
3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and the gospel of redemption?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה ה	אֱלֹהֵי יִם	אֶל	הַנָּחָשׁ	כִּי	עָשָׂה יָדָיו
said	And the LORD	God	H413	unto the serpent	H3588	hast done
H559	H3068	H430		H5175		H6213
זֹאת	אָר וּר	אֲתָה	מִכָּל	הַבְּהֵמָה ה		וּמִכָּל ל
H2063	this thou art cursed	Because thou	H3605	above all cattle		H3605
	H779	H859		H929		
תִּיבָּ:	הַשָּׂדֶה ה	עַל	גִּחְזֶיךָ	תֵּלֶךָ		וְעָפָר ר
and above every beast	of the field	H5921	upon thy belly	H1980		and dust
H2416	H7704		H1512			H6083
תֹּאכֵל ל	כָּל	יְמֵי	תִּיבָּ:			
shalt thou eat	H3605	all the days	and above every beast			
H398		H3117	H2416			

Additional Cross-References

Micah 7:17 (References God): They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee.

Isaiah 65:25 (References Lord): The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

Psalms 72:9 (Parallel theme): They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust.

Isaiah 29:4 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.

Genesis 9:6 (References God): Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

Leviticus 20:25 (Parallel theme): Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean.

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