

Genesis 3:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

Analysis

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the... 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

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What does this passage reveal about God's sovereignty and human responsibility?
2. How should this truth about Curse and Promise shape our daily decisions and priorities?
3. In what ways does this narrative foreshadow or typify aspects of Christ's redemptive work?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹאֲדָם	לֵאמֹר	כִּי	שָׁמָעְתָּ	לְקוֹל	
And unto Adam	he said	H3588	Because thou hast hearkened	unto the voice	
H121	H559		H8085	H6963	
אִשְׁתְּךָ	תֹּאכֹל נָה	מִן	הָעֵץ	אֲשֶׁר	צִוִּיתִיךָ
of thy wife	Thou shalt not eat	H4480	of the tree	of which	I commanded thee
H802	H398		H6086	H834	H6680
לֵאמֹר	לֹא	תֹאכֹל נָה	מִמֶּנּוּ	אֲרוּךְ הָ	הָאֲדָמָה
he said	H3808	Thou shalt not eat	H4480	of it cursed	is the ground
H559		H398		H779	H127
בְּעִבּוֹרְךָ	בְּעִצְבוֹן	תֹּאכֹל נָה	כָּל	יְמֵי	חַיֶּיךָ
H5668	for thy sake in sorrow	Thou shalt not eat	of it all	the days	of thy life
	H6093	H398	H3605	H3117	H2416

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 5:29 (Curse): And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed.

John 16:33 (Parallel theme): These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Psalms 127:2 (Parallel theme): It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.

Job 14:1 (Parallel theme): Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.

Job 21:17 (Parallel theme): How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! and how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger.

Ecclesiastes 5:17 (Parallel theme): All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

Ecclesiastes 2:17 (Parallel theme): Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Romans 3:19 (Parallel theme): Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.