

Genesis 3:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

Analysis

Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;... 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

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does this verse deepen our understanding of God's character and His relationship with creation?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?
3. In what ways does this narrative foreshadow or typify aspects of Christ's redemptive work?

Interlinear Text

וְקִין וְסִיחִי	וְיָבֵשׁ רֶחֶל	תִּצְמַח יָקָה	לְךָ	וְאָכַלְתָּ	אֶת
Thorns also	and thistles	shall it bring forth	H0	to thee and thou shalt eat	H853
H6975	H1863	H6779		H398	
הַשָּׂדֶה:	עֵשֶׂב				
of the field	the herb				
H7704	H6212				

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 7:23 (Parallel theme): And it shall come to pass in that day, that every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall even be for briers and thorns.

Job 5:5 (Parallel theme): Whose harvest the hungry eateth up, and taketh it even out of the thorns, and the robber swalloweth up their substance.

Matthew 13:7 (Parallel theme): And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

Hebrews 6:8 (Parallel theme): But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

Isaiah 32:13 (Parallel theme): Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city:

Isaiah 5:6 (Parallel theme): And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

Job 31:40 (Parallel theme): Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley. The words of Job are ended.

Proverbs 22:5 (Parallel theme): Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.

Jeremiah 4:3 (Parallel theme): For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.

Joshua 23:13 (Parallel theme): Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.