

Genesis 3:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Analysis

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast ... 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

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about The Fall emerge from this passage?
2. How should this truth about Curse and Promise shape our daily decisions and priorities?
3. How does this verse fit into the broader biblical story culminating in Christ?

Interlinear Text

בַּצְעַת	תְּאַכֵּל	תֵּאַכֵּל	לְקַחְתָּ	תִּשְׁׁבֹּה:	אֵל
In the sweat	shalt thou eat	bread	till	shalt thou return	H413
H2188	H398	H3899	H5704	H7725	
הַדְמֵתָה	מִתְּהִלָּה	לְקַחְתָּ	תִּשְׁׁבֹּה:		
unto the ground	for out of it wast thou taken	H3947	H3588		
H127					
עַדְתָּה	אֵל	עַדְתָּה	תִּשְׁׁבֹּה:		
art and unto dust	thou	H413	art and unto dust	shalt thou return	
H6083	H859		H6083	H7725	

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 12:7 (Parallel theme): Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Job 34:15 (Parallel theme): All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.

Psalms 104:29 (Parallel theme): Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.

Psalms 90:3 (Parallel theme): Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.

Genesis 2:7 (Parallel theme): And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Ephesians 4:28 (Parallel theme): Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

Ecclesiastes 3:20 (Parallel theme): All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.

Genesis 18:27 (Parallel theme): And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes:

Psalms 22:15 (Parallel theme): My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

Ecclesiastes 1:3 (Parallel theme): What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

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