Studies in Genesis - 07

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"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

"Ye shall surely die"

When Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she knew what the penalty would be. She knew that the penalty for eating was death. She knew when she offered that fruit to Adam that, if Adam ate of it at her suggestion, he would die. But I doubt very much if she knew what death meant. She was beguiled through Satan's subtlety.

I have often wondered what Adam and Eve think now, if they know what is transpiring down here. I wonder what they think now if they look over the whole human race and all history, to see what has happened?

What is the world? It is a graveyard, a veritable graveyard. Two thousand million people are living today in this world. Within sixty years, two thousand million people will die. How many times two thousand million people are already under the sod? Gather all the tears, all the heart-aches, all the cryings, and all the despair of the widows, the orphans, and the bereaved of all the ages; and you will think that surely Eve did not know what it really meant when she said to the serpent, "God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it . . . lest ye die." Possibly she did not know all this when she handed that fruit to Adam; but perhaps Adam knew, for he "was not deceived."

If Adam and Eve were born again by faith in the promised Redeemer—and we have reason to believe that they were—then they are in heaven; and no sorrow or sadness or remorse can enter there! But what tragedy their disobedience has brought into the world!
Dr. C. I. Scofield suggests that it was “Adam’s faith” which prompted him to call “his wife’s name Eve (meaning ‘living,’ or ‘life-giver’); because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20). And this careful student of the Word of God suggests further that it was “the response of Jehovah . . . to the faith of Adam” that provided the “coats of skins” to replace the fig-leaf aprons, which Adam and Eve had made to cover their shame.

Certainly Adam and Eve knew of God’s promise of the coming Redeemer, the “Seed of woman,” even the virgin-born Son of God and Saviour of sinners. Evidently they taught Abel—and later Seth—that “without shedding of blood is no remission” of sin (Heb. 9:22). Evidently they would have taught Cain this all-important truth of the promised “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29); but Cain would not heed the lesson or obey the Lord. Doubtless in accepting “the coats of skins,” to replace their own miserable vain attempt to make themselves fit for the presence of a holy God, they acknowledged their need of the “robe of righteousness,” which only Christ can provide, to replace the “filthy rags” of the sinner’s self-righteousness. Yes; we believe that Adam and Eve were saved by faith in the promised Redeemer, just as sinners of all ages have been saved by faith in the Christ of the Cross.

“Ye shall surely die,” God had said to Adam; and God meant death, both physical and spiritual. Physical death, no man can deny; and the Word of God speaks plainly, from Genesis to Revelation, saying, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4). “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). And “nothing but the blood of Jesus,” nothing but “the gift of God,” can give “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

“Why Will Ye Die?”

“The Seed of woman,” even Jesus, the Lord, has come and bled and died in the sinner’s place. He has bruised the serpent’s head. Therefore, God asks all unbelievers everywhere, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?” (Ezek. 33:11). “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).
"The Seed of woman," as we have seen, is the virgin-born Son of God. The promise of Gen. 3:15 proclaimed Him as the Saviour of the whole human race. The promise of Gen. 12:3 named the very nation through which He was to come, even Israel. The promise of Gen. 49:10 foretold the very tribe of that nation of the human race, which was to give to the world the Saviour—the tribe of Judah. II Sam. 7:13-16 even names the family, through whom this “Son of David” and “Son of Abraham” and “Son of Man” should come.

The Old Testament is aglow with the Messianic Hope. The Gospels declare His coming into the world to die and rise again as the sinner’s Substitute. The Acts and the Epistles tell of His indwelling Presence in the born-again heart. And the Revelation portrays His glorious return to earth to be magnified by every creature.

Oh, sinner, “Why will ye die?” Why will you spurn such love—and such glory—offered by such a wonderful Saviour?

TOIL AND TRIBULATION—THORNS AND THISTLES

Apart from the risen Christ, the human heart can know no escape from the toil and tribulation, thorns and thistles that sin brought into the world. Even for the Christian, in this life, God does not promise escape from the trials entailed by the curse of sin; but He does promise strength for the toil, comfort through tribulation, and a future eternity when “there shall be no more curse” (Rev. 22:3).

The curse upon the serpent, we have already considered, and all that the term involves—the eternal doom of “that ancient serpent,” which is the devil.

The curse upon the woman, we have considered, too, and all that it involves of sorrow and subjection. Yet for the woman, as for the man, there was the ray of hope in the promised Saviour from sin.

The curse upon the man, and upon the ground for man’s sake, the Holy Spirit records in these words of Gen. 3:17-19:

“And unto Adam he (God) 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; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; 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."

There were no thorns and thistles in the Garden of Eden, that beautiful Paradise, which was the home of unfallen man. Thorns and thistles came as a result of the curse of sin. So also did hard toil, by which man eats his daily bread. Not so before the fall.

We work and labor and struggle and strive—to what purpose? But to return unto the dust, from which we were taken. Yet, thank God! There is a bright side to the picture; for He who died for our sins has taken away the curse for us who believe; and beyond the grave there is a resurrection hope!

And even now, in this present life, God has graciously turned the curse of toil into a very great blessing. What should we do without the blessing of work? The idle hands and the idle brain are the restless, discontented, ever-seeking, never-finding hands and brain. Yes, God has turned the curse into a blessing. How good is our God!

"The Crown of Thorns"—"No More Curse"

When our Lord Jesus died upon "the accursed tree," He bore upon His brow the very symbol of the curse, "the crown of thorns." And bearing it to Calvary's Cross, He bore it far away for all who will believe. For in heaven "there shall be no more curse. . . . And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things" shall have "passed away" (Rev. 22:3; 21:4).

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).
And when He comes in glory to reign, this old earth will be delivered from the curse of sin. Then

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad . . . the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose . . . Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree" (Isa. 35:1; 55:13).

The animal kingdom, too, will be delivered from the curse.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them" (Isa. 11:6; compare Isa. 11:1-9).

In that day nations like little Finland will not be ruthlessly bombed and shelled by a godless, cruel giant of a country; for Christ

"shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:4).

Because at Calvary our Lord wore the crown of thorns on His brow, "there shall be no more curse" for us who love Him—not for all eternity!

**Chastisement Prompted by Love**

"And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (verses 22-24).
In chastisement God “drove out the man” from Eden’s paradise; and yet it was in chastisement prompted by love. For, God said, “lest he (Adam) put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever”—in his sinful, fallen state—“therefore, the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden.” Yes; it was chastisement—and the very word chastisement means “child-training”—it was loving child-training that prompted our God of love to send Adam “forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.”

Had he eaten of “the tree of life” in his sinful state, he could not have been saved by the promised Redeemer, for all the eternal ages. And in going forth from Eden “to till the ground,” Adam was to find the curse turned into a blessing.

This is the tragic, yet triumphant story of the third chapter of Genesis. It pronounces the verdict of sin, sorrow, and death upon guilty man; yet it proclaims a message of hope and life and love through the promised Saviour. For He was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom. 11:33). O the depth of such love!

This third chapter of Genesis marks the end of God’s first moral testing of man, in innocence. Man failed God; and his sin brought the righteous judgment of the Lord—the expulsion from the garden of Eden. No longer innocent, man was guided by his conscience, knowing “good and evil,” taught by the Lord Himself how to choose the good. For ever unfolding before fallen man, there has been the revelation of the love of God in Christ Jesus, the Lord.

All the Old Testament saints were saved by faith in Him who was to come; all who are saved in New Testament times are redeemed by the same Lord who has already come to purchase His own by His precious blood, buying back all that Adam lost—with a plus.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (I Cor. 15:22).
Some people ask whether it was right that God should place all the responsibility on one man; tell that man not to sin; and then, because he sinned, plunge the whole race into sin and death. People wonder at the righteousness of it all, that God should create the whole world in one man. But in the fifth chapter of Romans we find that God’s plan was to save the race in just the same way, in which the race was lost.

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned . . . For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" (Rom. 5:12, 15).

That is a terrible statement, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." But the words which follow show us what God had in mind. He had, from all eternity, planned to save the race by one Man, Christ Jesus.

You ask me what I mean when I say, "God has saved the race." God has provided an atonement for the whole race. He only asks that everyone believe it. That is all. He has not asked man to do a thing in the world but believe that God has redeemed the race in Christ. There is atonement for the whole world. He died, not for our sin only, but for the sin of the whole world. And as the race was lost in one man, God has redeemed the race in One.

My friends, if this principle of representation were not true, then Jesus would have had to die separately for every one of us. He would have had to die for me; then He would have had to die for you; then He would have had to die for the next one. But in order that He might redeem the race by one Man, and give the gift of grace to all who will receive it, God created the race in One. And He has re-created the race in One, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

Somebody asks this morning, "Well, how do I get this gift of eternal life?" My friend, you get it just in the way it was lost. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). Adam
ate and was lost, and the race was lost. You partake of Christ by faith. You take the Bread of Life. You eat, and you are saved. Isn’t that simple? Listen yet further to the words of the Lord Jesus:

“I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst... Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you... The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:35, 53, 63).

Adam ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and was lost. You come to Christ, my friend, and eat the Bread of Life, saying, “He is mine”; and you are saved forever!

**TWO GARDENS AND TWO TREES**

As we look back over this tragic, yet triumphant third chapter of Genesis, we are reminded further of the two lines of development running throughout the Word of God, and centering around two gardens and two trees. It was in a garden and because of a tree that sin had its beginning in the human heart; and it was in a garden and on a tree that the God of sinners paid the penalty for the sinner’s guilt.

“And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:8, 9).

In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, even though God had told them that, in so doing, they would surely die. But in a garden and on Calvary’s tree our Lord Jesus bore the penalty of Adam’s guilt, and brought redemption to His fallen creatures; for “in the place where he was crucified there was a garden” (John 19:41).
"Christ also suffered for us ... who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:21, 24).

To the unbelieving Jews who persecuted the apostles, Peter said, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree" (Acts 5:30).

My friends, it was not without purpose that the cross of Christ was called a tree. The world was lost through a tree in a garden; and the world was saved through a tree in a garden. "By one man" sin entered the Garden of Eden; and "by one man," Christ Jesus, redemption from sin came to all who will receive His salvation.

Moreover, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was "in the midst of the garden." In like manner we read, concerning our Saviour, that "they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst" (John 19:18).

1. The Tree Planted by God and "The Accursed Tree."
The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was planted by the Lord. He made "to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food."

It was through human hands that the cruel tree of Calvary was provided and erected. It has rightly been called "the accursed tree"; "for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

Our Lord emphasized this truth when He said to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" on the cross to die. Nicodemus, being a Jew, well-instructed in Old Testament history, knew the story to which Christ referred. Israel had been miraculously delivered from Egyptian bondage, and miraculously fed by the Lord with manna from heaven. That manna was a beautiful type of Jesus, the Bread of Life; and yet ungrateful, rebellious Israel had the audacity to murmur against Moses and against God, saying, "Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread" (Numbers 21:5).
In chastisement of His rebellious people, the Lord sent “fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.” But when Israel confessed their sin, God told Moses to make “a fiery serpent . . . of brass, and put it upon a pole.” Then whosoever looked at it lived.

It was a wonderful lesson that our Lord taught Nicodemus. The serpent is the symbol of sin, even as God “hath made him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:21). Moreover, brass speaks of judgment; and on Calvary’s tree Christ bore our judgment for us. “The serpent in the wilderness” was “lifted up” upon a pole; our Saviour was “lifted up” with outstretched, nail-pierced hands upon “the accursed tree.” Whosoever looked at the brasen serpent lived; there is “life in a look at the crucified One.”

“Look unto me,” He invites all the world; “look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:22).

2. The Tree “Pleasant to the Eyes” and “The Old Rugged Cross.” “And when the woman saw that the tree was . . . pleasant to the eyes . . . she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat.” Just in what way that tree was “pleasant to the eyes,” we do not know. But what a contrast between it and “the old rugged cross”! Everything about that cross was hideous and repelling. So hideous was it that God, the Father, turned away His face and covered the scene with darkness. Why? Because His sinless Son, our Saviour, there “became sin for us”; and His holy Father could not look upon sin. That is why the Son, “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8), cried out, in that dark hour, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). And yet He knew, before He came to die, that He would face and go through this agony alone—for us. He knew that, in that hour, His own people, Israel, would say of Him, “There is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa. 53:2).

It was “the old, rugged cross,” upon which our Saviour died; therefore, with the hymn writer, we love to sing:
"On a hill far away stood an old, rugged cross,  
The emblem of suffering and shame;  
And I love that old cross, where the Dearest and Best  
For a world of lost sinners was slain."

3. The Forbidden Fruit and the Bread of Life. Because God forbade man to eat of the first tree, Satan used every artifice to get man to eat of it. But, in contrast, God has invited men to eat of the second tree; whereas the devil is using all his powers to prevent man from eating of it. The Lord Jesus said,

"I am the bread of life ... Whoso eateth my flesh,  
and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise  
him up at the last day" (John 6:35, 54).

You see, my friend, the order is reversed. Just as man was commanded not to eat of the first tree, he is commanded to eat of the second.

4. Death? Or Life? Which will you choose, my unsaved friend? In Adam "ye shall surely die"; for his sin of eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil brought death to the human race—both physical and spiritual death. It was through the eating of the fruit of this tree that the curse, with all its accompanying miseries, descended upon mankind.

But God offers the free gift of eternal life in Christ, who died on Calvary's cruel tree. Again, we ask the question, "Why will ye die?" when you may have such a wonderful Saviour?

5. "Paradise Lost"—"Paradise Regained." Through the eating of the first tree Adam was driven out of Paradise; but through the eating of the second we enter into Paradise. It was because of "the accursed tree" that the Lord could say to the repentant thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

The Garden of Eden must have been very beautiful; but "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him (I Cor. 2:9).
6. *Both Trees Speak of “Good and Evil.”* The tree which led to Adam’s fall was “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” And where in this wide universe do we learn the knowledge of good and evil as we do at Calvary? There we behold goodness incarnate, the holiness of God displayed, “God . . . manifest in the flesh” (I Tim. 3:16). There we see unfathomable love. But we see also the depths of the wickedness of the human heart. As if it were not enough to crucify the Lord of glory, wicked men “reviled him, wagging their heads . . . and sitting down they watched him there” (Matt. 27:39, 36).

Yes; the heart of sinful man was shown to be “desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9) at Calvary, but the heart of God was shown to be “full of grace” and full of love (John 1:14).

7. *The Bitter Made Sweet by the Cross.* There is a tree that, if brought into a man’s life, sweetens it. Should it not be so? It is the cross of Jesus.

Many centuries ago He taught His people, Israel, this precious truth. They had reached Marah in their wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan.

“And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter . . . And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet . . . And there he proved them” (Exodus 15:23-26).

Have you had bitter sorrow, my friend? Cast the tree into the waters; and the cross of Jesus will make the bitter to become sweet. That is what Paul and James meant when they exhorted the early Christians in words strikingly similar:

“We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:3-5; compare James 1:2-12).
If the cross has not sweetened the bitterness of your life, what has it done for you? The people of Israel murmured, and God said for Moses to bring a certain tree to sweeten the bitter waters. My friend, if you bring that tree, it will sweeten everything.

“But,” you say, “there is so much in my life to endure! I have so much trouble!” You have Christ, though; and He has washed your sins away. He comforts and strengthens you for every trial, drawing you closer to Himself by every sorrow, if you let Him. Your neighbor has troubles; his life is made bitter; and perhaps your neighbor does not know the cross. Why did the Lord permit the bitter in our lives, if not to sweeten them, that we might bear witness to our neighbors of His power and love?

I have a dear Hebrew Christian friend who was cast out by his loved ones when he accepted Christ as his Messiah and Lord. It was a bitter cup of sorrow, extending over a long period of years. But the knowledge that the suffering was for his Lord sweetened the experience. And never is he heard to murmur or complain at this cross. His joy is in the Lord, whose cross has sweetened every bitterness.

Some time ago a telephone operator bore testimony to the fact that she had been led to Christ by a doctor whom she had never seen. Asked how it came about, she said:

“Often at the switchboard I am on night duty. Usually calls late in the night are very serious. Perhaps someone is sick, or an accident happens, or someone expected to arrive on a train has not come, or a train is late. And in our excitement we often call the wrong number.

“Now you know how people sometimes talk when they are called out of bed, only to be told that theirs is the wrong number,” the girl continued. “How many times I have called that doctor by mistake—at one, two, three o’clock in the morning! But in all the years, I never heard that man say a single word that was not spoken in sweetness.”

The girl wondered at it. She asked his friends the secret. And she was told that the doctor was a very earnest Christian, that Christ was everything to him.
What was the secret, my friend? It was the tree—the cross of our Lord Jesus—that sweetened the doctor's life.

May He help us to cast the tree into the bitter waters, that we may know His own joy, and that others may "see Jesus in us."

"By one man sin!" But thank God! "By one man salvation!" And that One Man is none other than the eternal God who "was made flesh," in order to redeem our souls and to sweeten our lives—in this present world and for all eternity.

"He that heareth my word," the Saviour said, "and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).