

Christmas in Genesis

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. ¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." (Genesis 3:14-15)

It is a strange fact of human history that just about every human culture has some story of humans fighting dragons or serpents. Ancient Indian, Egyptian, Chinese, Mesopotamian, African, Polynesian, West and East European, North and South American, every culture has some story, mythology or legend of some evil reptilian creature, usually a giant kind, who battles with some brave humans, and only the slaying of the dragon or serpent brings peace.

This is a fairly curious cultural artefact. Not every culture has a lion-hunting myth, or a bear-hunting myth, because often the animals were not endemic to the area where people lived. But wherever people have gone, they have had some story of slaying the dragon. An evolutionist might explain that with some claim that reptiles were always dangerous to man, so we just inflated them in our imagination, and came up with worst nightmare stories.

The Bible has a very different explanation. It suggests that at the heart of these stories is the most ancient prophecy ever given. It was a prophecy given when there were only two human beings on the Earth. It was a prophecy given not by a prophet but by God Himself. It's the prophecy found in our Bibles in Genesis 3:15, a verse sometimes called the protoevangelium: the first mention of the Good News.

This prophecy was written down by Moses somewhere around 1500 B.C., but it was given thousands of years before that. Depending on when you date Adam, at least 2500 years before, if not further. Almost certainly, these words had entered the oral storytelling and folklore of people, before the first words of the Bible were written by man and inspired by the Holy Spirit. These words passed from Adam to Seth, from Seth to Enosh, down to Noah, and after the Flood from Noah to Shem, Ham and Japheth, and into all the cultures that came from them and dispersed before at the Tower of Babel. Contained in this verse is the original Dragon-Slaying story, the first of them, the root out of which all the others came. Here you have a serpent-dragon, a great battle, and a victorious dragon-slayer. It becomes a short summary of the entire history of the human race, encapsulated in one verse.

Many have seen this text as nothing more than an explanation of why humans and snakes are not the best of friends. They see it like Rudyard Kipling's "Just-So" stories, where some mythological story is given to explain the giraffe's long neck, or the zebra's stripes. So they say, this is the same thing: just an account of why the snake slithers, why snakes bite humans and humans kill snakes.

But that is not what large numbers of believers in history have thought. This verse has been one of those verses that is like panning for gold: while looking at everything else, suddenly this verse glints, and sparkles with rich, messianic meaning. It jumps off the page, breaking the flow of thought with words that go far beyond the immediate context.

We are not the only ones to think so. Nor is it just a Christian invention. In some of the writings of the rabbis before the New Testament era, known as the Targums, they see this passage as speaking about an individual, King Messiah. When the Jewish scribes translated this verse into Greek, in the writing of the Septuagint, they also held that this refers to a coming Messiah.

In many ways, these verses represent Christmas in Genesis; Christmas in its entirety foretold. What you will find here is one of those glorious verses which squeeze a grand explanation of life into one verse. W. A. Criswell said, "Many Christian commentators since the second century have called this the Protevangelium (Lat.), the "first preaching of the gospel." It has also been described as "the Bible in embryo, the sum of all history and prophecy in a germ."

It is a story with three parts: a curse, a conflict, and a conqueror. These three explain the world you live in, why it is the way it is, and where it is going.

I. The Curse

So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life.

This section begins with a curse. The curse is given after the Fall. God gives judgement in reverse order to the questions He asked in earlier verses. He first asked Adam why he had eaten, and Adam had blamed Eve. God then asks Eve why she had eaten, and she blamed the serpent. God does not ask the serpent, for he is not denying anything. So now God announces judgements first on the serpent, then on Eve, then on Adam.

Our focus is on the judgement given to the serpent. Of all of them, only the serpent is directly cursed. For Adam, it is the ground that is cursed, making work hard and frustrating. For Eve, it is childbearing and family relationships that will bear a curse. But only to one does God say, "You are cursed". He says this to the serpent.

Of all creatures, the serpent will carry and embody the curse. Two things are said to result: he will go on his belly, and he will eat the dust.

Now of course, we know that snakes don't actually eat dust. This is a metaphor for humiliation. The Bible uses this phrase about Messiah's enemies in Psalm 72: ⁹ Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, And His enemies will lick the dust. (Psalm 72:9)

Micah predicts the enemies of God's people will one day be humiliated.

¹⁶ The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; They shall put *their* hand over *their* mouth; Their ears shall be deaf. ¹⁷ They shall lick the dust like a serpent; They shall crawl from their holes like snakes of the earth. They shall be afraid of the LORD our God, And shall fear because of You. (Micah 7:16–17)

The same is likely true of the serpent crawling on its belly. Now it is not impossible that the serpent had a different appearance pre-Fall, had some appendages. But if *eat dust* is an image for humiliation, it may be that crawling on the belly is as well. The serpent is cursed, marked out by God as the animal used by the Enemy.

But why should a mere animal be cursed if it was unintelligent, non-moral creature? Any why would God be speaking to it as if it understood, if it is merely a non-rational snake? Clearly, God is speaking beyond the animal to the power behind the Serpent.

The word for serpent in Hebrew is *nachash*. In the noun form that means snake. In its adjectival form, it means shining one. In its verb form, it means diviner, medium, one speaking through. What we have here is a dark spiritual being. This power either possessed a reptilian animal, or took the form of a reptilian animal, or like the other cherubim that have the appearances of a lion, an ox, an eagle, perhaps this was his actual appearance: a multi-jeweled dragon.

He is the one being cursed above all creatures; He is the one being cursed with humiliation and indignity. The snake was just a vessel, and the vessel will carry some physical marks of the curse as a public, visible reminder to everyone what it was used for and who used it. But it is the spiritual power behind the serpent that is really being cursed.

It is possible that the spiritual fulfilment of this crawling on your belly is found in Revelation 12, where we read that ⁷ And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, ⁸ but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. ⁹ So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Revelation 12:7–9)

Cast out: doomed to dwell on the earth, walking about, seeking whom he may devour.

Now the point of this is to tell us what sort of world we are in, and what sort of Enemy we will face. It is no longer Eden. It is a place of hardship: pain, suffering, and toil. The verse is giving us a partial answer to the problem of evil. Why is there pain, and suffering, crime, and violence, abuse and oppression, war, disaster and famine? Answer, because someone very powerful introduced evil, first into heaven, and then into the earth.

But now we have an Enemy whose first sin was pride, who is seethingly angry about the Curse, about humiliation.

¹² Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." (Revelation 12:12)

Well, when you have an angry, cursed adversary, that leads to the next part of the story.

II. The Conflict

¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed

Here the Lord prophesies that there will be enmity, hostility between the serpent and the woman, between the descendants of the two. The world will now be characterised by a kind of combat, a perpetual war between these two groups. Here is a deep and profound explanation for the presence of war, conflict, destruction.

But you should notice an oddity in this verse. It's one thing to talk about hostility between a snake and Eve. But the next phrase is odd. It speaks about the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. The Hebrew word *zera*, which means offspring, descendants. Now nowhere in the Bible does it speak of an animal having descendants. This is a word reserved for people, for rational moral beings that have families. Also, nowhere in the Bible does it speak about the descendants of a woman. In the Bible, descendants and genealogies of families are always reckoned through a man, representing the head.

So that leads us to the conclusion that the two sets of descendants here are not physical snakes and or the whole human race. This is somehow a family connected to the One behind the serpent, and a family somehow connected to the woman. These are spiritual families, groups sharing the same spiritual loyalty.

The one family would be related to the serpent, which is Satan. The devil's family.

But why does the prophecy speak of the woman's seed, and not Adam's? It seems we have here a

veiled prophecy of a virgin birth. Here is someone who is coming, who will be human, because He will be born, but He will be more than human, because He will not be born of man, but of woman. He will be virgin-born. The child who is born of woman is the ultimate Seed, singular, the Descendant. That one, that virgin-born one, is the long-predicted Messiah. And everyone connected to Him, everyone Messianic, believing in and trusting in and loyal to Messiah, is part of the woman's seed, part of that spiritual family.

And because they belong to different families, there will be conflict.

John wrote of this in his epistle:

⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. ⁸ He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother. ¹¹ For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, ¹² not as Cain *who* was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death. ¹⁵ Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:7–16)

Notice all the family language. Habitual sinners are of the devil (v8); people born of God (v9) are not habitual sinners. Two families: children of God and children of the devil (v10). Children of God practice righteousness and love one another (v11). Children of the devil practice evil, and specifically, they hate God's children and persecute them. The murderous hatred comes from the devil's family towards God's children.

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:18–19)

¹⁴ I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (John 17:14)

Now it's important to see where the hatred comes from and where the murderous violence comes from. The devil's family, the seed of the serpent, from Cain attacking Abel, down to the last shot fired at the battle of Armageddon is the family is always trying to eliminate and destroy the righteous. God's people are not trying to destroy anyone. We want to see people changed; we evangelise, we witness, but our ethic is give up your life to save others, not to destroy the lives of others.

So here at the very beginning, God explains that human life is going to be characterised by the devil's family making war on God's family.

Now war and conflict have always been part of the human condition. But perhaps we've never stopped to consider what the Bible says is the reason for it being such a battleground. The Bible says behind what looks like just wars over land and gold and water and trade routes and empire-building, there is actually a deep spiritual war.

We see just glimpses of this in Daniel 10. There an angelic being tells Daniel he was in a conflict with the heavenly prince of Persia, and was helped by Michael, one of the chief princes, and he

mentions another, the prince of Greece. While we cannot build a whole theology out of these verses, we know that angelic, spiritual forces have some sort of sway over the earth, over people groups or perhaps regions. We know some sort of battle takes place in that realm.

“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought” (Revelation 12:7). And that war in heavenly places almost certainly ends up fleshing out in the conflicts between peoples and nations and empires.

It also issues out in a persecution of God's people. Think of the unrelenting persecution of Israel. From its inception, through the judges, the kings, the exile, the pagan empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, into the Christian era and modern era. Think of the unrelenting persecution of true believers: the martyrdoms under Rome, and then later when the church and state became one, it became the persecutor of groups of believers who still held to the biblical faith. A persecution that continued for centuries. It continues today with persecution of Christians in countries with Islamic, Hindu, communist governments, and even nations where the government claims to be Christian. We are living now in the days when a hostile secularism is seeking to root out and destroy the vestiges of Christianity from our universities, from our music and literature and art, from our customs and social norms of family and sexuality. It is war, and it will not end until one party is destroyed.

So that brings us to the third section of this story.

III. The Conqueror

He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

Here's the remarkable thing. In the previous phrase, we thought we were dealing with groups: And I will put enmity Between your seed and her Seed;

That sounded like groups, whole collections of people. And it was: it was the entire spiritual family of the Serpent, and the whole spiritual family of the woman's seed. But suddenly it is in the singular: **He** will bruise **your** head; **you** will bruise **His** heel. In the Hebrew, it is the singular pronoun *hu*, which can be translated either it, or he. It could be the descendants taken as a single collective group.

But when the Jews who translated the Old Testament into Greek came to this verse, they chose to use the Greek word for *he*, instead of the word for *it*. They clearly understood that this was talking about a He, a person, who will do something to the one being cursed. This Seed, or Son takes on the Serpent, and all the conflict of all the ages of the two families comes down to a battle between the two: the Serpent, and the Son. As I said, the sages who wrote commentaries even before the time of Christ, Targum Jonathan, Targum Onkelos, saw the individual here as none other than King Messiah who is to come: the world's redeemer, the Saviour of mankind.

Now the action here is the same for both. Some translations misleadingly made the one word bruise, and the other word crush, but it is the same verb for both what the serpent does and what the Seed does. They both strike each other. A snake would bite a man, if he were barefoot on the foot or ankle. And a man, if he were killing a snake, would crush its head.

Both serpent and Son strike at each other, and apparently, they both give death blows to each other. The serpent manages to strike at the coming Son and kill him. But somehow the Son strikes at the Serpent and kills him. How is this possible?

Well it is fairly clear how the Serpent was striking at the Son. As early as Cain and Abel, Satan is trying to destroy the line of Messiah. By the time of Noah, the earth is filled with violence, and even

corruption of the human bloodline, with the Nephilim upon the Earth, trying to destroy the seed of the woman. When Abraham is chosen, and God promises that the whole world will be blessed in his Seed, Satan begins a campaign to wipe out Israel, through the surrounding nations, which goes on all the way to the time of Christ. When Jesus is born, the Serpent tries to kill Him with Herod, and then again at several points in His ministry.

But finally the time comes when Satan does succeed, and the Son is killed on a cross, and perhaps Satan believed he had won. But Satan didn't know what He was doing when He killed the Son. Paul actually tells us that the real meaning of the Cross was “a hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory,⁸ which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Corinthians 2:7–8)

I think the writer of Hebrews actually had Genesis 3:15 in mind when he wrote a mini-commentary on it.

¹⁴ Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Hebrews 2:14–15)

The Son took human flesh so that He could die. His death, according to these verses would do two things: it would release some, and destroy another.

The release would be for humans. Humans were in bondage needing release. Our mortality led humans to trust in this world system, to believe lies, to pursue vanities. But when the Son died, He destroyed the fear of death. How? He paid for the wages of sin for others. He Himself rose from the dead. Everyone who comes to Him, repents of sin and accepts Him as their Saviour is no longer controlled by fear of death. You know that you share eternal life with Him, the promise of resurrection of the body and life eternal in His presence. You no longer have to serve a world system rooted in the fear of death.

His death would be the destruction of the one who had always used the curse of death as power over men. Satan's power has always lay in deceit and fear. Deceiving men about God and sin and eternity, and fear of dying. Once Jesus rises from the dead, the lie is exposed, and the power is gone. Colossians 2:15 describes the victory of Jesus death:¹⁵ Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Colossians 2:15)

Jesus's death is the ultimate indictment and condemnation of Satan. Repentant sinners can return to God. Guilt is paid for. Death itself has been overpaid by the death of the Life Himself. The curse itself is now turned back on everyone who repents and on all creation. But the Serpent will not partake of this: He remains cursed, and eternally defeated.

When Messiah came, Satan tried to destroy Him, apparently not understanding that Jesus' death on the Cross would be Satan's ultimate defeat. Like Haman who constructed a gallows for his enemy Mordecai that ended up being the very gallows he was hung on on, Satan set up the murder on the cross that would be his own defeat. Jesus would accomplish through His death, the death of death, and defeat the Lord of death.

Genesis 3:15, according to Spurgeon is, “THIS is the first promise to fallen man. It contains the whole gospel... It has been in great measure fulfilled. The seed of the woman, even our Lord Jesus, was bruised in His heel, and a terrible bruising it was. How terrible will be the final bruising of the serpent's head! This was virtually done when Jesus took away sin, vanquished death, and broke the power of Satan; but it awaits a still fuller accomplishment at our Lord's second advent and in the

day of judgment. To us the promise stands as a prophecy that we shall be afflicted by the powers of evil in our lower nature, and thus bruised in our heel: but we shall triumph in Christ, who sets His foot on the old serpent's head"

²⁰ And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen. (Romans 16:20)

There is human history in a few lines. The curse, which explains the evil. The conflict, which explains all the wars. But then the conqueror, the one who will win the conflict.

There is a simple call to you today. Which family are you in? Are you in the family that fights and wars, hates and attacks to get its own way, to protect its own independence, to fight for its own pride. That's the Serpent's family, and he, and his family will be crushed. The other family, is the family of the virgin-born Messiah, the family that lives by the motto: to die is to live, to give up your life is to gain it, to sacrifice is to profit, to give is to gain. That family has accepted Christ's death as their own death, so they no longer fear death. Instead, they live for Him who loved them and gave Himself for them.

You've probably sung these words many times, and maybe we haven't realised they came from Genesis 3:15.

Come, Desire of Nations, come,
Fix in us thy humble Home;
Rise, the Woman's conq'ring seed,
Bruise in us the Serpent's Head;
Adam's Likeness now efface,
Stamp thine Image in its Place;
Second Adam from above,
Re-instate us in thy Love.

Wesley is telling us how we should respond the Genesis 3:15. We invite the Messiah, the Desire of Nations, to take up residence in us. We ask Him to defeat Satan's hold on us by putting to deth our old nature, or nature in Adam, our independent, selfish nature. We ask for His image in its place. We ask for the Second Adam to lovingly reinstate us, reconcile us. Have you embraced the conqueror, who will win the conflict, and remove the curse?