

An Ancient Christmas: The Coming of Christ in the Old Testament — The Seed

Genesis 3:1-19

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III](#)

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Genesis 3. We're beginning this morning our month-long December series, "An Ancient Christmas: The Coming of Jesus in the Old Testament." And just as David said as he was reading Jeremiah 7 this morning that those who do not know their need and their brokenness are not in a position to adequately rejoice at the provision that is given to us in the mercy of God, so it is also true that we're not ready to rejoice in the good tidings of Christmas, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, His incarnation, and advent in this world, until we understand our predicament, our need. And to do that, we need to go all the way back to the beginning.

And we're going to do that as we look at Genesis 3. I want to focus especially on Genesis 3:15 this morning but I want us to read all the way from verse 1 to verse 19. And as we do, I want you to be on the lookout for four parts in this passage. First, if you look at verses 1 to 5, you will see the temptation, the original temptation of Satan in the form of the serpent, especially tempting Eve. But notice that you'll find out later in the passage that Adam is there all along. He's silent, he's not engaging, he's not defending the honor of his Lord, he's there — and so the temptation is being carried out in verses 1 to 5. Then, if you look at verses 6 and 7 you'll see the fall of Adam and Eve described. That's the second part of the passage. Then, in verses 8 to 13, there is a confrontation. The Lord comes and encounters, in fact, He confronts Adam and Eve about their sin. And then finally in verses 14 to 19, you see the curse that the Lord delivers. He speaks first to the serpent, then to Eve, and finally culminating with Adam because of Adam's accountability as the federal head of the human race. So as we read this passage today, be on the lookout for those four parts — the temptation, the curse - the fall, the confrontation, and the curse. Let's look to God in prayer before we read this passage together.

Heavenly Father, open our eyes to behold the truth of Your Word. Speak to our own hearts. Show us our sin, convict us, comfort us, instruct us, encourage us, give us hope and faith in the Savior, and change our hearts in the reading and hearing of Your Word. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

This is God's Word. Hear it, beginning in Genesis 3 verse 1:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said,

"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The Lord God said to the serpent,
"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.

To the woman he said,

I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.

And to Adam he said,

Because you have listened to the voice of your wife

and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant Word.
May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

About two thousand seventeen years ago, a baby boy was born in a situation befitting a peasant in some obscure corner of Palestine. The world would not have taken much note of it but it was in fact the first Christmas. But that first Christmas was portended thousands of years before it ever occurred, back at the very dawn of human history. And that's why we're calling our study this month, "An Ancient Christmas." We are going to go back to the primeval, the primordial, the outset of our race, and then follow through the olden prophecies of the venerable Hebrew prophets who spoke out of the misty past about a Christmas to come. And so this morning we begin at the beginning.

And I want to direct your attention especially to Genesis 3:15 where God says to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Now this passage in Genesis 3:15 is picked up on by the apostle Paul and at the very end of Romans chapter 16 he applies the language of this verse to the victory of Jesus over Satan. That was not lost on the writers of the early church. For eighteen hundred and fifty years, since at least the time of Irenaeus, the great early church father who studied under a man who studied under the apostle John, this passage, Genesis 3:15, has been called, "the first Gospel." It's the Gospel set forth in the context of Moses' prophecy in which he records God's curse on the serpent but a curse which contains a promise to believers.

SALVATION BEGINS WITH A CURSE

And there are four things that I want us to learn from this passage together today, and the first one is this one. And it's ironic, it's shocking, but I want you to understand it and take it in. And the first thing is this. Our salvation begins with a curse! Our salvation begins with a curse. It's odd to say but it's true. Take a look

at Genesis 3 verses 14 and 15. You'll notice several very interesting things in this passage. First of all, when God comes to the garden and confronts Adam and Eve, notice that He does so asking questions to them. Now that, in and of itself, is an indication of the kindness of God. God was not asking questions because He needed information; He was asking questions like you ask your children when they're caught red-handed doing something that you've commanded them not to do. He wasn't trying to gather information; He was trying to cultivate a response of repentance. And so He came asking questions. But when He comes to speak to the serpent, He asks no questions! He delivers a curse.

Look at verse 14 in Genesis chapter 3. There we see, "The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you.'" Now the language of Genesis 3:14-19, the whole section, everything that God says to the serpent and then to Eve and then to Adam, is in the form of judgment. God is handing down judgment, just judgment, on rebellion, on sin, on wickedness, on evil. And there are consequences for Eve and there are consequences for Adam. But did you notice God does not say to Eve, "Cursed are you." He does not say to Adam, "Cursed are you." He does say to Adam, "Cursed is the ground because of you." Can you imagine Adam living the next nine centuries with everybody on the planet being able to point to him and say, "This is all your fault." And it would have been true. "This is all your fault." But God, even to Adam, doesn't say, "Cursed are you." He says, "Cursed is the ground because of you." But to the serpent He says, "Cursed are you."

And yet in that curse there is a hope and a blessing and a promise to us. In God's curse of the serpent there is blessing and promise for God's people, and so it shouldn't surprise us that this book that begins with God giving a promise in the context of a curse will end in Genesis 50 verse 20 with Joseph saying to his brothers in the context of a disastrous family situation, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." You see, you worship a God who loves to bring blessing out of curse. He loves to turn curses into blessing. That's one of the reasons we sing in this Christmas season and we love to lift up our voices using, "Joy to the World," and we love to sing that line, "He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found." And it all begins right here in Genesis 3:15. He curses the serpent, but in that curse, there is a kernel of blessing and hope and promise and salvation for everyone who believes. Our salvation begins with a curse. That's the first thing.

SALVATION BEGINS WITH GOD INAUGURATED WARFARE ON OUR BEHALF

But the second thing I want you to see is this. Our salvation not only begins with a curse; our salvation begins with a God-inaugurated warfare on our behalf. In Genesis 3:15, God announces to the serpent that He is declaring war on him. In Genesis 3:15, God says to Satan, "Today, the battle begins. I am instituting

warfare against you.” Isn't it interesting that in God's words to Eve and then to Adam that follow this passage, God never ever says to them, “Now, Eve, Adam, in light of the fact that you rebelled against Me, in light of the fact that you did what I told you not to do, here are the things you need to do to get yourself back in My good graces, and here are the things that you need to do in order to oppose the serpent.” No, God's word to the serpent is, “I am not declaring war. I'm going to war, serpent. I'm going to war against you and I'm going to war against you in order to drive a wedge between the woman and you, the enemy of her soul, and between the offspring of the woman and your offspring, the designs of which are to do harm to her and to her offspring.”

God initiates the warfare, the battle, with Satan. He turns, as it were, to Eve and to Adam and He says, “Now that you have rebelled against Me, now that you have rejected Me, now that you have done this evil, this wickedness, I am now going to war on your behalf against Satan, your enemy.” In that declaration that God is setting an enmity between the serpent and the women, we see inkernelled the emphasis on the sovereignty of God in salvation. He does not turn to us and say, “Save yourselves,” or “Here's a little grace, now save yourselves.” He says, “I'm going to war for you. I'm going to war against the serpent.” He begins our salvation with a God-inaugurated warfare on our behalf.

SALVATION BEGINS IN THE MOST UNLIKELY WAY

The third thing I want us to see, though, is this. Our salvation begins in the most unlikely way. It begins with a woman bearing a child, the promise of seed, the promise of offspring, the promise of a child. This seed promise — and look at it again there in Genesis 3:15 — “between your offspring and her offspring.” This promise of the offspring of the woman is a major theme in the book of Genesis. Forty-one times, the word, the term for “seed” or “offspring” or “child” is used in the book of Genesis, and it's a major theme, this contest between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. And by the time you get to Genesis 9, you have these words coming out of the mouth of God to Noah, “The promise is to you and to your offspring.” And those words will be repeated to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15 and 17. And you will hear the echoes of that promise, “to you and to your seed, to you and to your offspring, to you and to your descendants, to you and to your children and to your children's children,” throughout the end of this book. And it begins this great, great theme that's picked up on in the rest of the Old Testament. And so not only does Sarah wait long before she's given a child, and Ruth is given a child in such an amazing way, and the prophecy of the virgin in Isaiah 7, and on and on and on until finally, Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, bears a child.

And this theme is picked up on in the New Testament in Matthew chapter 1 verse 23. We read, “The angel said, ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call His name, Immanuel.’” And Paul will say this. “When the

fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.” Now you see what’s going on here. Satan thought to use the woman that God had created as a tool. He sought to abuse her, to misuse her, as his henchman in bringing destruction on the whole of the human race at its very outset. God, however, says, “That’s your plan, Satan? You’re going to bring sin into humanity through this defection of the woman? Well, I’m going to use a woman to bring the Savior of the world who will crush your head.”

It’s really quite amazing. In this passage, God speaks to Satan and He tells him exactly what He’s going to do. It’s like a great general looking at his opponent on the field of battle and saying, “Let me tell you what my battle plan will be today. I’m going to outflank you, I will be smashing you on the right, and then I will be pummeling you in the middle.” Or it would be like a football coach announcing to his opponent, “This is my game plan today. On the first play we will run it up the middle for fifty yards, then on the fifth play — and so on and so on.” And here’s God speaking to Satan and saying, “This is exactly what I’m going to do. You sought to rob Me of glory and to do eternal damage to these human beings that I created in My own image and you sought to do it through this woman and through your wicked deception of her. Well here’s what I’m going to do, Satan — I’m going to use woman to bring the Savior of the world who is going to crush your head.” It’s a picture of how God loves to reverse the stratagems of the evil one against us and use the very thing that he would use against us for God’s own glory and our everlasting good. Our salvation begins with a woman bearing a child, the seed, who ultimately, the apostle Paul says, is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

SALVATION BEGINS WITH A PROMISE OF DEATH AND VICTORY

And here’s the last thing. This passage, Genesis 3:15, makes it clear that our salvation begins with a promise of both deaths and victories. Look at the end of Genesis 3:15. “He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.” It’s a picture of man versus serpent. How does the man destroy the serpent? Perhaps by pinning him down with a fork staff and then crushing his head with a stone or maybe even the foot. How does a serpent, a poisonous serpent, kill a man? By striking at his heel. Now you might have expected Genesis 3:15 to stop with these words, “He shall bruise your head,” so that God is saying, “Satan, I’m going to take you out. Satan, I’m going to have victory over you.” And of course that’s true. The Lord is going to take him out; the Lord is going to have victory over him. But it is so interesting and it is so poignant that God says, “The one who comes into this world born of woman, He will have victory over you, but He will have victory over you at the cost of His own life.” You will strike His heel, you will kill Him, but in the killing of Him He will raise many to life. You see, our salvation begins with a promise of both death and victory. This is a costly victory. The only way that what Eve and Adam have done can be reversed is for the very seed who is promised to bear the devastation that they wrought and to bear the curse

that they deserve. And this is a curse of death and damnation. And at the very outset, God is saying, "I am going to send My Son into the world and He is going to gain the victory and He is going to do it by bearing a curse, My curse." It is a poignant thing, my friends, that in this passage Eve and Adam never hear God say, "I curse you," but the Son bears the curse of His Father on the cross in their place and in the place of all who trust on Him and He has to lift His voice up to His own Father and say, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" And both the Father and the Son know the answer to that question that comes from the lips of David. Why? Because of sin, because of their sin.

You see, in the garden, in this passage that we just read, Eve and Adam have listened to the serpent who has said to them, "There is something better than your God and it can only be found in disobeying Him. And if you will disobey Him you will be like Him and if you disobey Him you will get things that He has withheld from you that are better than the things that He has given to you. There is something better than God." And they believed it and they acted on it and it plunged them into misery. And so God looks at the people who have just chosen something, someone else over Him, and says, "I'm going to war for you. And I'm sending My Son for you. And I am going to visit the curse that you deserve for your rebelling against Me and preferring something else other than Me over Me, I'm going to visit that curse of Him in your place so that as you believe on Him, you will receive all the blessings that He alone deserves. And that is the beginning of the prophecies of the coming of Jesus into this world. The first portent of the first Christmas. It is an ancient foretelling of Christmas. May God grant us to hear and understand and believe. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word. Work it into our hearts. Help us to see our sin and need so that we would not be dupes of the evil one, blinded by his deceptions, but see clearly the condemnation that we deserve and the escape, the salvation, which has been so richly provided at so great a cost in Jesus Your Son, in whose name we pray, amen.

Now let's take our hymnals and turn to number 224. When you hear news like that you have to, "Go, Tell It On the Mountain"!

The God of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the God of grace, will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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