

PROTOEVANGELIUM OF GENESIS 3:15

By Dante Spencer

“Enmity I will put between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall crush your head,
and you shall crush his heel.”

Context of Genesis 3:15

God is speaking to the serpent (3:14) about the new order for the universe after Adam's fall into sin (3:1-7). Before God addresses Adam and Eve to curse them for their rebellion against himself in the covenant of works (3:16-19), God curses Satan in what is a foretelling of what will be the history of humanity. Genesis 3:15 is therefore prophecy. God is the first prophetic voice of Scripture. But v. 15 is even more than that. In the midst of uttering a curse upon the serpent, God also prophetically announces the first promise of the gospel. The gospel is spoken in Scripture for the first time from the Creator and Redeemer himself.

Exegesis of Genesis 3:15

There are seven things we will look at in this verse: (1) enmity between the seeds, (2) the source of the enmity, (3) the identity of the serpent, (4) the meaning of 'seed,' (5) the identity of the woman's seed, (6) the doom of the serpent's seed, and (7) the suffering of the woman's seed. These elements of this first prophecy can be put under three categories: two seeds in humanity, judgment on Satan, and the victory of the Savior.

The normal structure of a Hebrew sentence begins with the verb but here the noun comes first (enmity). Moses places 'enmity' first for the sake of emphasizing it. This Hebrew word for 'enmity' is used just five times in the OT (see Ez 25:15, hostility; 35:5; Num 35:21-22, hatred unto murder).

What is important to note is that the enmity does not merely arise, it is specifically said to be set or appointed by God himself. The animosity we experience from unbelievers is sin, but it is divinely ordained hatred. God tells us here that he intends the wicked to hate the righteous. This is not the origin of 'culture wars' because the people of God are neither to create their own 'culture' nor are they

to defend a conservative agenda for American (or European or English) culture. The world's hatred of the church is not to be because the church represents morality. The world will hate Christians because we believe in Christ (John 3:19-20; 2 Cor. 2:15-16). There is a big difference between these two. The world is not to hate us because we are offensive in and of ourselves; the offense is in the gospel (1 Cor. 1:17-18, 21,23 ;cf. Rom 9:33; Gal 5:11). They hate us because we testify to the truth of Christ and they do not believe (1 Tim 1:13). It is true that our new life in Christ can convict them, Paul gets at this in Ephesians 5:3-21, but we have no business parading a self-righteous attitude in our rejection of homosexuality, divorce, abortion, etc. Our transformed minds are by grace, not our own wisdom, so we have no place to boast. At any rate, the point is that the course of history is according to God's will, he is sovereign over all aspects of his creation, both before and after the Fall.

In Revelation 12:9 and 20:2, the serpent is identified as the devil (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3). Satan's intrusion into the theocratic garden was not only about deception and temptation, Jesus tells us Satan was guilty of murder (John 8:44). When Satan led the first couple into sin, he murdered them spiritually. Hence, we are born spiritually dead because of our federal head, the first Adam (Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:1-2). The death God warned of when he said the soul that eats of the forbidden fruit will die referred not to physical death, but to spiritual death (Gen. 2:17).

The Hebrew that is often translated as 'seed' is the word *zera* and is rendered in the LXX as *sperma*. *Zera* is lineage or descent. This does not speak of physical offspring but of spiritual seed. The woman does not have a seed, she has an egg. Nor does the devil have physical seed because he is a spirit and spirits do not procreate (Matt. 22:30). Therefore, *zera* is spiritual seed just as Adam and Eve's death was a spiritual death.

This is the distinction between people: are they of the seed of the woman or the seed of the serpent? The rest of redemptive history is the warring between these two seeds. If Genesis 3:15 is the skeletal framework, the rest of Scripture is the fleshing out of this one verse. These two seeds come to fruition in Adam and Eve's first two sons. In Genesis 4 we see the beginning of the two seeds in Cain and Abel (cf. 1 John 3:10, 12). Reading this passage, John said Cain belonged the devil because his deeds were evil. Abel, on the hand, was of God's seed (i.e., the Spirit, Heb. 11:4; 1 John 3:9; cf. 1 Pet. 1:23). Jesus said Abel was a prophet (Matt. 23:35); this is why Cain hated him, because he spoke from God. Cain and Abel is not just a story about two brothers at odds, the enmity between them is on a cosmic scale; it is about the two seeds – the Cainite line (Gen. 4:17-26) and the Sethite line (Gen. 5). The substitutionary son that God gave Adam and Eve, Seth, likewise belonged to God's kingdom. Later in Genesis, we see Jacob and Esau (Mal. 1:2-3). Jacob was elected by God to salvation and Esau was passed over and left in his sin (Rom. 9). The two seeds then grow from just being family members to nations. In Exodus 1 we have Egypt trying to destroy Israel. The growth of these two seeds/kingdoms is most explicit in Revelation 12:13-17

where John writes of the woman's seed. In Revelation 12: 17 Satan wants to kill all who are followers of the Lamb. Those who know Christ obey the word of God and believe the gospel (vs.17). That is the mark of the seed of the woman.

The 'he' God refers to in Genesis 3:15 is Jesus, the chief enemy of the serpent. He is the Seed promised to Eve. *Zera* is singular here – Christ is Eve's Offspring – but we are her *zera* by virtue of our being united to him. In recounting Jesus' genealogy, Luke goes all the way back to the beginning with Adam and Eve. Jesus was a descendent of Eve as God said he would be (Luke 3:38).

A much better translation for the word 'bruise' (NIV) is 'crush.' The fatal wound to the serpent's head is mentioned first because it is his defeat. But his death happens in conjunction with the crushing of Jesus' heel. The picture is that as Satan bites at Jesus' heel, Jesus crushes the head of Satan in the dust (Gen. 3:14). This is Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus died and it would have appeared as though he lost. His disciples did not even understand what was happening to him when the Jews wanted him dead and the Romans nailed him to the cross. But it was in this very suffering that Christ killed the devil. He proved it when he rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:54-57). Satan wanted Jesus to be crucified (John 13:2), but he did not realize what his death would accomplish. Jesus' death was the will of God from before creation (Acts 2:23; 4:28). We see how God used Satan in the words of Caiaphas (John 11:50-53). Being of the seed of the serpent, Caiaphas wanted Jesus killed. But being the high priest, his suggestion that Jesus die for the people was prophetic. With the cross being predestined in God's eternal decree, the names of those whom Christ would redeem – Jesus' sheep (John 10:14-15) – were written in the book of life from before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; 17:8; cf. Eph. 1:4-5).

Significance of Genesis 3:15

This is the good news of the Son of God from heaven who will conquer the devil (1 John 3:8; Heb. 2:14; and Rom. 16:20 all have Gen. 3:15 in view). Christ's triumph over Satan comes in two stages. Jesus undergoing the judgment of the cross was in fact the judgment of Satan (John 12:31; 16:11; Col. 2:15). When Christ returns in glory, he will consummate the judgment upon Satan (Rev. 20:10; 2 Thess. 1:8; 2:8). Jesus the Last Adam (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:21-22) is unlike the first Adam, God's unfaithful son (Luke 3:38) who failed to guard the garden by slaying the serpent. Christ destroyed sin, death, and the devil by his sacrifice. Christ's death was the death of death (John 11:25-26).

There is more good news. Because the enmity between the two seeds has been placed there by God, it means there is nothing the seed of the serpent can do to the seed of the woman that is not permitted by God. God is sovereign over all men and they can do nothing to you that is not under God's jurisdiction. Your suffering for Christ is appointed by God (Phil. 1:29; 1 Pet. 4:12-14) as a means of

putting to death your love for the things of this age and making you long for your true home, heaven (1 Pet .1:6-7; 5:8-10; Phil. 3:20).

The division within humanity is determined by faith or rejection of Christ (Matt. 7:13-14). We are united to Christ who did not belong to this world and because he did not belong to this world, he suffered (Isa. 53:2-3). Therefore, since we too do not belong to this world, the world will reject and scorn us (John 15:18-21; 17:14-18; cf. 1:11). What Christ receives from this world, we receive. (Note that Saul's persecution of the church was against Christ, (Acts 9:4-5). This is why Paul can think of his own sufferings as "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" in Col. 1:24.) Persecution is the fruit of our faith (Matt. 5:10-12). The world will hate you because they hate Christ. They live by sight and they see you so they will attack you because they can not do anything to God. Cain killing Abel sets the paradigm: the righteous always suffer in this age (cf. 1 Pet. 2:20; 3:17; 4:12-19; 2 Tim. 3:12; this is one reason why Rev. was written).

APPENDIX

Romans 16:20 clearly reflects the use of Genesis 3:15; however there is something curious about it. Not only does Paul put the destruction of Satan in the future, but he includes the church in the victory, writing that God will soon crush Satan "under your feet." This then brings into question how are we to account for the role of the seed of the woman in Satan's judgment? Psalm 110:3 provides insight. Psalm 110 is a psalm that speaks directly to the Messianic King, it has no bearing on a human king in the Davidic dynasty because no earthly king ever held the offices of both king and priest as we find in Psalms 110. In v.3 of this psalm, David writes,

Your people will offer themselves freely
on the day of your power,
in holy garments;
from the womb of the morning,
the dew of your youth will be yours.

This sings of Christ consummating his victory not by himself but with his own army. In 2 Chronicles 20:21 the priestly singers accompanied the army in battle. In like manner, we will worship Christ as he destroys the seed of the serpent (see Jud. 14-15). Jesus' death and resurrection were D-day, the first phase of conquering the serpent; V-day will be with his saints (Rev. 20:7-15; 2 Thess. 1:8-10). Christ will crush Satan under *our* feet.

There is one other interesting aspect to Paul's use Genesis 3:15 here. Romans 16:20 is in the context of the church being plagued by false teachers. How does this relate to Genesis 3:15? Paul looked at the world through the lens of Genesis

3:15 – one was either a seed of the serpent or the seed of the woman. Paul recognizes those who were causing division at the church of Rome through false doctrine to be the seed of the serpent (see Rom. 16:17-19). Persecution and heresy are both means of the seed of the serpent to physically or spiritually destroy the seed of the woman. But the gospel is our sure hope: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”