

Genesis 3:20 – 24

²⁰ Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. ²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. ²² Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever' – ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

Historical and Cultural Background

- Adam and Eve had just fallen into sin, corrupting their own human nature (3:1 – 7). They had felt shame over their nakedness and put together fig leaf garments (3:7)
- God had responded to the sin of Adam and Eve by cursing the serpent and the ground, but not human beings. God promised them a coming hero – a 'seed of the woman' – who would triumph over the serpent and its evil (3:14 – 15).
- God still wanted them to bring forth life – human life and garden life – but it would be more painful for them (3:16 – 19).

Questions

1. Let's break down this short passage into smaller pieces so we can examine it and consider it more carefully. What do you see going on here?
 - a. Adam names Eve in hope: v.20
 - b. God reclothes them in animal skins: v.21
 - c. God drives them out of the garden: v.22 – 23
 - d. God bars the way to the tree of life: v.24
2. Why does Adam name Eve now?
 - a. Because of God's prophecy that Eve will be the mother of the 'seed of the woman' who will bring true life back to humanity.
 - b. Adam blamed her before (3:12) but now God has made him look to her as an agent of blessing and redemption.
 - c. Adam and Eve are looking in hope to God's future work, His coming champion who will undo the work of the enemy.
3. Why does God re clothe them in animal skins?
 - a. They were more durable than fig leaves! This was a practical act.
 - b. Whose blood was contaminated and unclean now? Human blood.
 - c. Were animals corrupted creatures? No. They were innocent.
 - d. So God was clothing them with innocent life.
 - e. This was a prophetic act. God would re clothe them with human innocence one day, when He would come and wear humanity and cleanse it, in Jesus, and allow us to wear Jesus' new humanity.
 - f. Illus: Walter Wangerin draws up a simple, powerful picture of Jesus as healer in his story *The Ragman*:

'I noticed a young man, handsome and strong, walking the darkened, dirty alleys of the city. He was pulling an old cart, filled with clothes, bright and new, and he was calling in a clear, tenor voice, 'Rags! New rags for old!' I wondered about this and so I followed him. The Ragman came to a woman sobbing on her back porch, with her elbows on her knees, wiping her face with a handkerchief. Her shoulders shook with each sob.

'Give me your rag,' said the Ragman, 'and I will give you mine.'

She looked up and he took her old handkerchief and laid a new, clean, white linen one in her hand. Then, as he began to pull his cart again, the Ragman put her handkerchief to his face and began to weep, to sob with grief as she had done, his shoulders shaking. Yet she was left without a tear.

'Rags! Rags! New rags for old!'

In a little while, the Ragman found a girl whose head was wrapped in a bandage. Blood soaked her bandage. Blood ran down in a line down her cheek.

'Give me your rag, and I will give you mine.'

The child stared back helplessly. So he untied the bandage and tied it to his own head. Then he put a brand new bonnet on hers. I gasped at what I saw, for the wound went with the bandage! Against his brow it ran with fresh blood, his own!

'Rags! New rags for old!' cried the sobbing, bleeding Ragman.

The Ragman met a man slumped against a telephone pole.

'Do you have a job?' the Ragman asked.

'Are you crazy?' said the man, showing that the right sleeve of his jacket had no arm in it.

'Give me your jacket and I will give you mine.' He took off his jacket, and I trembled because the Ragman's arm stayed in its sleeve. When the other man put it on, he had two good arms, but the Ragman had only one.

I wept to see the change in the Ragman. He stumbled, weeping, bleeding, exhausted to the garbage pits of the city. He climbed a hill. With clumsy labor he cleared away a little space on that hill. Then he sighed. He laid down. And then he died.

I slipped into a junked car and cried because I had come to love the Ragman. The wonder of this man remained in my mind, and I sobbed myself to sleep. I slept through until Sunday morning when I was awakened by a light. Light slammed against my sour face and I saw him. The Ragman stood there, folding the bandage carefully, a scar on his forehead, but healthy! And all his rags were clean and shined. I lowered my head, trembling, and walked to him.

‘Please dress me,’ I said. And he put his new rags on me, and I am alive beside him: the Ragman, the Christ. (paraphrased from Walter Wangerin’s *The Ragman*)

Jesus took into himself all of our self-centeredness, God-resistance, brokenness, and fearfulness. But he resisted all that, to realign his humanity to be in perfect union with God. So he can now give us his resurrected, God-drenched humanity in place of our self-centeredness, God-resistance, brokenness, and fearfulness. ‘He put his new rags on me, and I am alive beside him.’

- g. Application: Think about the act you most want to hide from others, that you’re most ashamed about. Now think about tracing the source of that action being in your heart. Now think about God covering over your shame so completely that it is undone. Not because He ignores it but because He takes it into Himself and mingles it with His own divine nature.
 - i. Why would we ever try to hide from God, or deny our own faults?
 - ii. God wants us to be truthful with Him, and repent.
 - h. This established the principle of sacrifice – the sacrifice of the innocent animal ‘covers’ the shame and guilt of the human. The life in the blood probably also leaked into the ground, symbolically saying that this innocent life will help sustain humanity’s guilty life on the land. This seems to be why God accepted Abel’s sacrifice of animals, but not Cain sacrifice of agriculture in 4:1 – 15.
4. Why does God drive them out of the garden?
- a. Is God somehow jealous of them? Is He punishing them?
 - i. It may seem that way, especially when we think of humans as ‘knowing good and evil’ like God.
 - ii. But ‘knowing good and evil’ basically means ‘determining good and evil.’ Humans will now compete with God to *determine* what good and evil are.
 - b. To prevent them from eating from the tree of life.
 - i. According to Genesis 3:22 – 24, the tree of life makes people live forever. However, it appears that the tree of life would have sealed humanity in whatever state they were in. After the fall, human beings were in a dying, corrupted state. This is why God expels human beings from the garden. He doesn’t want to deny humanity something good. He wants to protect them from something bad. He wants to prevent human beings from becoming dying beings, corrupted *forever*. Notice that in 3:22, God doesn’t even complete His thought. He chokes on His own thought, the thought that humanity would be forever corrupted.
 - ii. The earliest writing theologian outside the New Testament, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, said this: ‘Wherefore also He drove him out of Paradise, and removed him far from the tree of life, not because He envied him the tree of life, as some venture to assert, but because He pitied him, [and did not desire] that he should continue a sinner for ever, nor that the sin which surrounded him should be immortal, and evil interminable and irremediable. But He set a bound to his [state of] sin, by interposing death, and thus causing sin to cease, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh, which should take place in the earth, so that man, ceasing at length to live to sin, and dying to it, might begin to live to God.’ (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.23.6)
 - iii. See also Methodius of Olympus (died circa 311 AD), who said: ‘In order, then, that man might not be an undying or ever-living evil, as would have been the case if sin were dominant within him, as it had sprung up in an immortal body, and was provided with immortal sustenance, God for this cause pronounced him mortal, and clothed him with mortality. For this is what was meant by the coats of skins, in order that, by the dissolution of the body, sin might be altogether destroyed from the very roots, that there might not be left even the smallest particle of root from which new shoots of sin might again burst forth. For as a fig-tree, which has grown in the splendid buildings of a temple, and has reached a great size, and is spread over all the joints of the stones with thickly-branching roots, ceases not to grow, till, by the loosening of the stones from the place in which it sprung up, it is altogether torn away; for it is possible for the stones to be fitted into their own places, when the fig tree is taken away, so that the temple may be preserved, having no longer to support what was the cause of its own destruction; while the fig-tree, torn away by the roots, dies; in the same way also, God, the builder, checked

by the seasonable application of death, His own temple, man, when he had fostered sin, like a wild fig-tree, killing, [Deuteronomy 32:39] in the words of Scripture, and making alive, in order that the flesh, after sin is withered and dead, may, like a restored temple, be raised up again with the same parts, uninjured and immortal, while sin is utterly and entirely destroyed. For while the body still lives, before it has passed through death, sin must also live with it, as it has its roots concealed within us even though it be externally checked by the wounds inflicted by corrections and warnings; since, otherwise, it would not happen that we do wrong after baptism, as we should be entirely and absolutely free from sin. But now, even after believing, and after the time of being touched by the water of sanctification, we are oftentimes found in sin. For no one can boast of being so free from sin as not even to have an evil thought. So that it has come to pass that sin is now restrained and lulled to sleep by faith, so that it does not produce injurious fruits, but yet is not torn up by the roots. For the present we restrain its sprouts, such as evil imaginations, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble [Hebrews 12:15] us, not suffering its leaves to unclothe and open into shoots; while the Word, like an axe, cuts at its roots which grow below. But hereafter the very thought of evil will disappear.’ (Methodius of Olympus, *From the Discourse on the Resurrection*, Part 1.4 – 5)

- iv. Athanasius of Alexandria (298 – 373 AD), the advocate for the Nicene Creed and opponent of the Arian heresy, first to name the New Testament as it currently stands, said: ‘For the Word, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition...’ (Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 8.1)
- v. Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 390 AD), whom the Orthodox church calls ‘the Theologian’ in appreciation for his work in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (and they only share that title with the apostle John ‘the Theologian’ and Simeon ‘the New Theologian’), agrees: ‘Yet here too he makes a gain, namely death and the cutting off of sin, in order that evil may not be immortal. Thus, his punishment is changed into a mercy, for it is in mercy, I am persuaded, that God inflicts punishment.’ (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 45)
- vi. Ambrose of Milan (340 – 397 AD), who excommunicated Emperor Theodosius for a massacre, first church leader to challenge an Emperor, said, ‘And, indeed, death was no part of man’s nature, but became natural; for God did not institute death at first, but gave it as a remedy. Let us then take heed that it do not seem to be the opposite. For if death is a good, why is it written that ‘God made not death, but by the malice of men death entered into the world’? For of a truth death was no necessary part of the divine operation, since for those who were placed in paradise a continual succession of all good things streamed forth; but because of transgression the life of man, condemned to lengthened labor, began to be wretched with intolerable groaning; so that it was fitting that an end should be set to the evils, and that death should restore what life had lost. For immortality, unless grace breathed upon it, would be rather a burden than an advantage. And if one consider accurately, it is not the death of our being, but of evil, for being continues, it is evil that perishes. That which has been rises again; would that as it is now free from sinning, so it were without former guilt! But this very thing is a proof that it is not the death of being, that we shall be the same persons as we were. And so we shall either pay the penalty of our sins, or attain to the reward of our good deeds. For the same being will rise again, now more honorable for having paid the tax of death.’ (Ambrose of Milan, *On the Psalms* 47 – 48)
- vii. Maximus the Confessor (580 – 662 AD), the great Byzantine theologian and commentator on Gregory of Nazianzus, says, ‘The phrase, “And now, lest he put forth his hand and take from the Tree of Life and live forever,” providentially produces, I think, the separation of things that cannot be mixed together, so that evil might not be immortal, being maintained in existence by participation in the good.’ (Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassios*, Question 44.5)
- viii. What does this tell us about the life that could have been if Adam and Eve didn’t fall into sin? They could have experienced life as getting deeper and fuller and richer by doing the good that God had called them to as His image-bearers and His life-bearers. And

then they would have understood that God really is good and trustworthy and wooing them more deeply to Himself. Then they would have asked God about the tree of life, and He would have invited them to eat from it. They would have become immortal physically. Somehow this tree is connected to the very life of God. It's not just physical, but relational. They would have freely chosen to always choose God, relationally.

- c. So God is actually exercising mercy. Death is a consequence, but it is also a protection. Death is not the final word.
 - i. Illus: Tolkien's view of death in *Lord of the Rings*. It is a kind of gift. We have the 'gift of mortality.'
 - ii. This also means that God's true solution to sin and death is resurrection. This is why the Jews alone developed the sense that we are not just souls trying to escape the bad physical body, but that we are both soul and body seeking to be fully reunited
 1. ⁶ The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain;
A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow,
And refined, aged wine.
⁷ And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples,
Even the veil which is stretched over all nations.
⁸ He will swallow up death for all time,
And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces,
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth (Isaiah 25:6 – 8)
 2. See also Isa.53:8 – 10; Ezk.37; Dan.12:1 – 3; Job 19:25 – 27
 - iii. That means that the cycles of death (Gen.3:17 – 19) are not permanent and eternal!
 1. Illus: 'All evidence points to there having been, in the earliest religious thought, a vision of the cosmos that was profoundly cyclical. The assumptions that early man made about the world were, in all their essentials, little different from the assumptions that later and more sophisticated societies, like Greece and India, would make in a more elaborate manner. As Henri-Charles Puech says of Greek thought in his seminal *Man and Time*: 'No event is unique, nothing is enacted but once...; every event has been enacted, is enacted, and will be enacted perpetually; the same individuals have appeared, appear, and will appear at every turn of the circle.' The Jews were the first people to break out of this circle, to find a new way of thinking and experiencing, a new way of understanding and feeling the world, so much that it may be said with some justice that theirs is the only new idea that human beings have ever had.'¹
5. Obviously, God bars the way to the tree of life to prevent them from eating from it.
 - a. This seems to be the rupture between heaven and earth. Notice that the literary section of Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 begins with 'the genealogy of heaven and earth.' This is how they came to be separated.
 - b. Notice also that the two cherubim appear again over the lid of the ark of the covenant in the Tabernacle of Israel.

¹ Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (Thorndike, ME: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p.13 – 14



- c. What did this symbolize? That God stood at the threshold of heaven and earth in the midst of the Tabernacle/Temple. Israel was on the earthly side of that threshold. God was on the other side. And God stood to meet them there. He wanted to communicate with them and keep relationship with them and all humanity.
- d. What happens to the presence of God at this threshold? Does God always stay there? No.
 - i. ^{John 20:11} But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; ¹² and she saw *two angels* in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.
 - ii. So Jesus was the new threshold of heaven and earth, in his own body. He is the person in whom God came to earth and lived among us.
 - iii. That completes the image that John was painting of Jesus being the dwelling place of God: ^{John 1:14} And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [literally, *tabernacled*] among us, and we saw his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- e. So this rupture between heaven and earth was not a permanent act. God always intended to overcome this rupture. He always intended to be the human champion and defeat evil, to clothe us with his own cleansed human nature, and to regain for us immortality!!