

## Prayers

### To God

*Weekly theme: Pray for the Lord's protection*

*When are you at your most vulnerable? It can be hard to ask this question because we avoid thinking about those things that make us emotional. However, if we are willing to do this, trusting that God is in control of everything, then we can prayerfully ask for the powerful and effective protection of His love which will help us in times of real need.*

### For myself

**Lord Jesus Christ, You are awesome! You understand me where I do not; You heal me where my body fails; You put words into my mind when I do not know how to speak; You create good things out of situations I cannot face; You lead me in paths I would not dream of walking! Take my life, Lord Jesus Christ, and do with it what you please! AMEN**

### For others

*Pray about the concerns being voiced internationally about the data stored about each one of us in our interaction with the internet, and the potential use of this. We will all have differing opinions but also different understandings of this difficult subject, so if possible, pray with someone else and talk about it a bit before you pray.*

## Meditation

Lord God, touch my life with love;  
Wrap me in the stillness of peace,  
Clothe me in the purity of holiness,  
Calm this spirit in gentle simplicity,  
Meet me within the mysteries of life,  
Shine within the depth of my being,  
Free me from bondage of the mind,  
Draw me to your sources of healing,  
Mend my bone and restore my flesh,  
Lift my soul to heights of faithfulness,  
Recreate my hope, my faith, my love,  
Lord God, redeem this child of Yours,  
Forever, and forever: so be it; AMEN

# Bible Passage

## Genesis 3:14-19

<sup>14</sup> The LORD God said to the serpent,

***'Because you have done this, out of all animals and wild creatures, you are cursed. You will crawl on your belly and eat dust for the rest of your life. <sup>15</sup> I will create antagonism between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.'***

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said,

***'Your difficulties in childbearing will be much greater, and you will struggle to give birth. You will yearn for your husband, yet he will dominate you.'***

<sup>17</sup> And to the man (Adam) he said,

***'Because you listened to what your wife said, and ate of the tree from which I had expressly forbidden you to eat, the ground is cursed because of you! You will struggle to eat from it all the days of your life; <sup>18</sup> it will produce thorns and thistles for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> You will obtain your food by the sweat of your face until you return to the ground, for you were taken out of it. You are dust, and you will return to dust.'***

## Review

All actions have consequences, and this part of Genesis 3 is about the consequences of the first sin of the first man and woman. The story so far reveals the sin itself; the serpent tempted the woman to do what God had forbidden, and first she and then her husband succumbed. Then, yesterday, we read about how sin breaks down relationships (3:8-13); so from a place of perfect relationship with God (2:22-25), the man and the woman were now separated from their Maker and acting on their own, without His guidance. Meanwhile, God was searching for his loved creation, already seeking out what was lost. So now we read about the painful consequences of sin, and God exercises the awful task of declaring this to the serpent, the man and the woman. It is all difficult stuff, but tomorrow, in the final part of Genesis 3, we will read about the steps God took to stabilise the world He had created after the Fall. Each step of this story is significant, and each one speaks to the human condition today.

The whole of today's passage is written in Hebrew poetry, and presented to us as a speech of God. It is sometimes suggested that the three speeches to the serpent, the woman and the man take the form of curses, and some even suggest the order of this reflects the power of these curses; the worst for the serpent who (as Satan) will ultimately be destroyed (3:14,15), the next worse curse for the woman in the risks of childbirth (3:16), and lastly the curse of work and mortality on 'man', a curse that some think of as merely a function of life (3:17-19). But this is not the case. First, the serpent is indeed cursed by God (3:14) and later, the ground is cursed (3:17); but strictly, neither the man or the woman are cursed. The Lord announces penalties for the woman and the man, not curses (3:16-19), and all three are addressed simply in the order they appear within the story of the Fall (3:1-7). We should be cautious about reading into the story what is not there.

The three statements by God in this passage are important. The first one is against the serpent, and the command to crawl on the ground has been regarded by some as the remnant of an ancient story explaining the characteristics of creatures. We should not however, imagine that ancient literature is full of stories like Rudyard Kipling's 'Just So' stories about the reasons for animal characteristics, because it is not. Such an idea is pure imagination. We must look more carefully at exactly what the Scriptures say.

God's curse against the serpent here in Genesis 3 is a punishment that separates earth and heaven, keeping the source of evil, the serpent (Satan) firmly attached to the earth, not the heavens, thus allowing for a powerful message of hope. God's words are prophetic; *'I will make antagonism between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel'* (3:15). At the very least, the serpent represents evil in the world, and news is given that the *'offspring'* of the woman, clearly one individual, will one day *'strike your head'*, that is, of the serpent to kill and defeat the enemy responsible for the sin and temptation of humanity. This is a clear prophesy of the defeat of evil. There is more for us to study in these words, but we can at very least say that the message of the New Testament Gospel is that Jesus Christ has done precisely this.

The second statement by God gives the woman a penalty, which is an intriguing combination of difficulty in childbirth, passion for her husband and the subjection of domination. The verse within which all this is said (3:16) has been argued over extensively, and each part of it can be debated at length. Difficulty in childbirth is clearly a feature of human childbirth and very different for the mother than for other animal; modern medicine has improved care at childbirth immeasurably and some would see this as mere science at work while others see it as the gift of God in midwifery, used properly. But there is more. The contrast between a woman's 'passion' for her man and the domination under which many women consequently live is the stuff of drama and film; it is experienced differently in different cultures, but the Biblical statement here is fascinatingly true to the life experience of many. One thing must be said, however, which is that it is surely impossible to say that this passage advocates the subjection of women by men; this is a sad consequence of the fall, and those who are 'in Christ' must rise above it.

The third speech of God is directed at the man, at 'Adam'. He meekly accepted temptation from his wife (3:17), and his penalty is hard work and a battle against the earth he has to work to gain his food and therefore live. The perfect creation was fruitful, and all the man had to do was to look after it and eat of its provision (see 1:27-29), but this perfection has now gone. The ground, being cursed (3:17), will not yield its proper abundance (3:18) and the story of a man's life will be the story of his pursuit of food and provision. It is not too difficult to see how this works out even today in the economies of the world, for despite their complexities, we are all completely dependent upon the provision of food.

There is no doubt that these words of God have much more to reveal to us, or that they reflect a highly realistic appraisal of true life, even today. God declares to men and women the true consequences of their Fall, and He does it not so much with wrath but with deep sadness. The serpent has been cursed and will be destroyed; but despite everything, the man and woman are still loved by God. We hear little of God's love here except perhaps in the prophecy of 3:15, and God will one day save His people and bring them into a new relationship with their God.

## Discipleship

### ***Application***

#### ***Celebrating God's redemption from the Fall in Christ***

It is not insignificant that a central act of Christian worship is the remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection in a simple meal of foods which give 'life'. Further, it is no small part of this meal to remember that sin and death came into the world through the Fall. This meal is the Lord's Supper, also called the Communion or Eucharist. Its celebration testifies that the power of the curses and condemnation of God following the Fall have been taken away by Jesus.

This simple act of remembrance does not simply address the man's problem from the Fall of food and eating. It is a celebration that the Church has always insisted is open to men and women without distinction, and whatever its policies and practices in other areas, there can be no domination of one by another when kneeling before God to receive bread and wine. Throughout history, when God has moved in powerful ways to bring His people back to the truths of the Gospel, there has been an associated revival in the practice of various forms of eating together, in remembrance of what God has done in Christ.

### ***The curses of God and His pronouncements - part of Scripture's picture***

I make no apology for connecting this passage with the truths of the Christian Gospel, for it is like a seed within this early passage of the Old Testament, and reminds us that God's Word is all 'one'. Without the work of Christ, the stories we read in Genesis 3 would have not much more significance than one of many explanations of human behaviour on offer, along with a 'just so' story about a snake. In the light of what God chose to do as a consequence of the Fall, the whole text bursts into life.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- How do you see yourself reflected in this passage? How do you see other people in the light of your reading of this passage? Let the Lord God open your heart and mind to the possibilities of His grace, to overcome problems and the 'curses' of life.
- Pray for those who live off the land today and do not have the opportunity to do anything other than live a hard life of labour. Ask the Lord to help you discern whether there is anything you can do to help others who live off the land.

### ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. Does the serpent deserve to be cursed? What does the curse of the serpent mean in terms of the evil in the world?
2. Does this passage of scripture help us understand the love of God, and if so, in what ways?
3. How do the troubles of man and woman within this passage reflect those of people today?

## **Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus, You were there at the beginning of time, graciously present in the creative work of the Father and awaiting revelation as a child, one day to be the Saviour of the World. Keep us firm in our faith, strong in our hope, and constant in our love for You and for other people, and in this way show our gratitude for all You have done for us. AMEN