

7. THE COVENANT MAINTAINED IN THE PROMISE OF A SAVIOUR

After the fall, the LORD tells Adam and Eve that life will have to be lived under adverse conditions and that it will end in death. But there is also the word spoken to the serpent, a message that contains promise and hope for mankind.

We read in Genesis 3:14 and 15, “So the LORD God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel’.”

There is a deep natural dislike between people and snakes. A snake is physically one of the most unattractive animals, even among reptiles, and the sight of a snake can send shivers of fear and revulsion down one’s spine. Most people abhor snakes, and a snake will either turn to flee from humans or raise itself up to strike them. We see the effect of God’s word about the enmity between man and snake literally in the realm of nature. The two cannot live together, and very few people have a pet snake. This dislike is a result of God’s decree.

But we know that there is more at stake here. The serpent was used as a means or an instrument by Satan, and it is ultimately Satan who must be dealt with. The curse on the snake is indicative of a much deeper, spiritual struggle: the ongoing, fierce battle between Satan and the woman, between their seed, between the ungodly world and the faithful church, indeed, as we know from Scripture, between Satan and Christ.

“I will put enmity...”

Through the fall into sin, the covenant of love was broken. Mankind had become corrupted and could only hate God and the neighbour. There was now enmity between God and mankind and among people. Satan could claim a mighty victory. In rebelling against God, mankind had joined the camp of the evil one and

come under his influence and power. A new covenant had come about: there was a close bond now between the devil and Adam and Eve.

The devil could triumphantly claim: I have made friends with mankind and they are now on my side in the battle against God. Now people and demons would work together against the kingdom of God. The fall led to a powerful alliance, to a covenant of hate. The devil certainly knows the importance and value of a covenant.

But God will not allow this newly-found friendship to grow and flourish. Not only will there be an aversion between people and snakes, there will also be *enmity* between the devil and the woman. It will be a perpetual enmity. God will not allow this diabolical covenant to exist, but will maintain his covenant of love. The LORD himself will keep man and Satan separated, for man cannot have one covenant with God and another with the devil.

Our Lord Jesus Christ affirmed this important truth in the Sermon on the Mount by stating, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matt 6:24). And the apostle Paul applied this truth to our lives when he wrote, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons” (1 Cor 10:21). Or as James wrote, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?” (James 4:4). God consistently, throughout Scripture, maintains the enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

The woman is addressed here for two reasons. She is the one who first gave in to the suggestions of the devil and opened the way to friendship with him. But, secondly and more importantly, she will bring forth the seed in whom and with whom the covenant must be continued. The Lord makes clear to Satan that he will not succeed in his attempt to control Adam and Eve and destroy their seed.

The woman is not able in her own strength to break free from Satan’s power. Notice that God says: I will *put* enmity between you and the woman. Mankind will time and again be an easy prey for Satan and be inclined to friendship with the world, but the LORD God will not allow it. He will keep them separated. He will uphold an antithesis between the two partners. In this way he will maintain with Adam and Eve and their posterity his covenant of love. The continuation of the covenant depends not on our ability to distance ourselves from the devil but on God’s powerful assertion: I will put enmity between you and the woman.

Offspring also involved

The enmity will exist not just between (Adam and) Eve and Satan, but will continue in their offspring (or seed). This is typically a covenantal way of speaking, for a covenant, as noted previously, is never made only with one person but in him also with his children. The enmity of which God speaks will have its consequences throughout history, in every generation.

The words “offspring of the serpent” cannot be taken in a literal or physical sense, for Satan as a fallen angel has no children. We see in the serpent’s offspring those generations of mankind that will be unfaithful to God and make common cause with Satan against the LORD. The offspring or seed of the woman denotes the generations that come forth out of Eve and are faithful to the LORD and his covenant (as explained further in chapter 8).

There is also another element here. In the case of Eve, the plural or collective word offspring is used, but this is followed by two singular words, “*he* will crush your head and *you* will strike his heel” (Gen 3:15).” The enmity which will affect entire generations will ultimately be resolved in the conflict between two main figures, the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and Satan on the other.

The struggle against the evil one, which will be carried on by faithful covenant generations, will be finally resolved in the saving work of Jesus Christ, who will crush Satan under his feet (Rom 16:20). Therefore the apostle John can write, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8).

We find this epic struggle described in Revelation 12. There a woman is about to give birth, but an enormous dragon or serpent is poised to devour the child. The child, however, escapes and is taken up into heaven. The woman flees into the desert where God take cares of her. Her child is destined to rule all the nations with an iron scepter.

This promise of God, revealed in paradise (Gen 3:15), has repercussions in all of history. It determines the final outcome of the struggle of the ages between Satan and Christ, between world and church, between covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers. This promise is therefore called the Gospel, because it gives to fallen man good news and great hope. The struggle will be hard, the pain sometimes unbearable, but the victory is guaranteed in the promise of God, who maintains his covenant of love in the coming Saviour.

Through suffering to glory

In the revelation of the Gospel in Paradise, we learn some important things that we must remember when reading the rest of the Bible. Salvation through the promised Saviour will not be an “easy fix” to man’s problems. The work of salvation is costly and demands a great price. The LORD makes this clear in the way the Gospel is formulated here.

“He will crush your head.” The only way, I understand, to kill a snake is to stomp on its head and crush it with one solid blow. Should you miss, the snake will recoil and most likely catch your foot as it swings away. The LORD here does promise a full victory over the devil, who has no hope of being victorious in this struggle. The battle is fought in the perspective of complete triumph.

But at the same time it is said to the serpent, “You will strike his heel.” This probably refers to a snake’s tendency to wait until a victim has passed by and then to strike from the back, to bite into the heel. The heel is the most vulnerable spot

of the foot, where also the main artery that runs up the leg is located. If we are dealing here with a poisonous bite, as is most likely, the venom can via the heel enter the bloodstream very quickly and cause death.

These words do not imply necessarily that the Saviour must die. Venom can be sucked out of a wound before it spreads, and a snake's bite is not always lethal. But the implication is clear: the seed of the woman, the promised Saviour, will suffer in this battle, and it could well be a battle unto death. There is no victory without personal sacrifice and suffering. It is a theme in the Gospel: through suffering to glory. "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering" (Heb 2:10).

From what follows we know the ultimate meaning of these words: our Lord gave his life on the cross of Golgotha and, in doing so, broke the power of Satan. It was done at a great price, but the Saviour was willing to pay that price in order to confirm forever the covenant of God's love.

The Gospel received with joy

We shall pay attention yet to what we find in Genesis 3:20: "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living." It is not wise to speculate about names, but whenever a name is changed, this can have an important meaning. Adam first called his wife woman, and this was to convey their closeness, "she was taken out of man" (Gen 2:23). But sin has now brought distance. Can the relationship be salvaged?

The name *Eve* has to do with the notion of life. Although death has entered into the world, Adam does believe the Gospel of life. He is certain that life will be preserved and continued, despite the terrible fall into sin and all its consequences. There will one day be a Son who will destroy the devil and break his power. This Son will come forth out of Eve. Although she was the first to sin, she will also be instrumental in breaking the power of sin. Out of her will come all that lives, also the Son who will be the Saviour. The woman who brought death is called "life," because God fulfills his promise.

The giving of this name, Eve, is Adam's believing response to God's promise of salvation. The depth of the Gospel is echoed later by the apostle Paul, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:56, 57). Death had come into the world. But the day of Christ would also come.

In the way of God's covenant of love, there is life.