

# THE DEVIL'S BURDEN

by Ray C. Stedman

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In our present series in Genesis 3, we have come to one of the most encouraging passages in all the Scriptures. It is the word of God to the devil, after the Fall of man. It is a word for those times when we feel that the cause of righteousness is absolutely hopeless. Who of us has not experienced times like that? There are thousands of Christians today who are privately reflecting the philosophy in the limerick we often quote,

Our race had a noble beginning,  
but man spoiled his chances by sinning.  
We hope that the story  
Will end in God's glory  
But at present the other side's winning.

This passage we are looking at is a very clear denial of that, and, as we look at it, we shall see why the limerick is untrue. We have already seen that immediately following their Fall, God took Adam and Eve, as it were, by the hand and lovingly but firmly led them, protesting their innocence, back along an examination of what had happened, until they faced their disobedience and each one confessed the specific words, "and I ate." We saw last time that this is what God does with each of us. He brings us back, sometimes gently, sometimes more vigorously, to the place where we will take a look at what we have done, or what we are, or what our attitudes are, and say, "Yes, Lord, it was wrong; I did it." This is the only ground of help. Only there can God's redemptive love begin to heal us.

When Adam and Eve acknowledged their guilt we saw that God immediately became their defender. His first word is to the tempter, and it is one of scorching judgment. This is exactly in line with the promise given us in the first letter of John. John says, "but if any one does sin, we have an advocate [a defender] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;" {1 Jn2:1b RSV}. As long as we defend ourselves, his defense is of no avail to us, but when we are ready to stop defending ourselves, we have a perfectly adequate defender with the Father. It is this same glorious defense you find exhibited here in this scene -- the Friend of sinners stood that faraway day in the Garden of Eden.

Now the Lord God speaks to the devil.

**The Lord God said to the serpent,  
"Because you have done this,  
cursed are you above all cattle,  
and above all wild animals;  
upon your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life." {Gen 3:14 RSV}**

We have already seen in this series that this is not a snake he is addressing, but a shining one, which is the literal translation of the Hebrew term. Later on in the Scriptures the word is used of snakes and serpents as well, but we have seen that its primary meaning is that of a shining one. Paul reminds us that the serpent appeared to Eve as an "angel of light" {2 Cor 11:14}, and it is this one of whom the snake has become a symbol.

Thus these words addressed to the tempter are not a reference to the fact that snakes go around on their bellies. True, they do that, but they do not literally eat dust, as the Word here says. This is figurative language, as we have found used so many times through these accounts in Genesis. The words depict and describe humiliation and utter degradation. To this day one of the most humiliating things that anyone can be forced to do is to lie on his belly in the dirt. It means pride has been brought low; he is humiliated, shamed. This has forevermore entered into the language as an expression of humiliation.

These are most significant words to the devil. In Isaiah 14 is a passage that describes the fall of the devil. Most Bible scholars feel that these are words that describe the devil as Lucifer, the Day Star, Son of the Morning, the angel who was created first among all the angels of heaven. In the pride of his heart he began to say to himself, "I will be like the Most High, I will act like God," {cf, Isa 14:14}. You can see how identifiable this is with the shining one who appears in this account in the garden, for it is this same thing that he suggests to Eve. "If you eat of this fruit," he says, "you will be like the Most High, you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

As far as we can judge, the fall of Satan occurred a long time before this scene in the garden of Eden. But it seems strongly suggested here that when Satan fell there was an immediate result in his own person which transformed him into a being of malevolent hatred against God, and perhaps there was later a time when repentance was possible, though it seems likely that at this period of the history of our planet the devil had passed beyond that stage, yet it is apparent that judgment had not yet been pronounced upon him. The significant thing about this is that here we have the divine announcement to the devil of the ultimate judgment that would befall him. Here he learns, perhaps for the first time, that his judgment would occur on this planet, that here in this scene where he had so successfully derailed humanity through its first parents, he was to be put under an eternal curse, and the nature of it is to be continual humiliation and repeated failure.

The next time you are watching a TV western and you hear the hero say, "All right, you snake, crawl out on yore belly!" or perhaps, "Jest give me a chance and I'll make him lick the dust!" you'll know that you are watching a Sunday school lesson in action! At least this incident may help us answer the question that many have asked, "What is it that keeps these westerns going? Why are they so popular?" They always have the same plot, they have the same basic characters, and they invariably have the same ending; why then do people love to watch them so much? Is it not because they dramatize the eternal battle of the ages, the unconscious struggle that goes on in each of us? We want the "good guys" to win because we believe what God has said here, that it is the devil's due to end up always in humiliation and defeat.

"But," you say, "that may be true in westerns, but that's not true in life. In life it's not the good guys that win; it's the evil ones." In life you find ruthless power triumphing over good, while the good end up as victims; victims of senseless tragedy and of brutal might. What about those six million Jews who died under Hitler? What about the Negroes and Mexicans and other people of darker skins who have been persecuted, hounded, smashed and killed, in so many places in our world today? What about the looting and burning of villages in Vietnam? Is this an example of the devil's ultimate humiliation? What about the rape and murder of women and children in so many hell-spots of the world? You say, "All this is evidence that the devil's defeat is but a fairy tale. It works out in fiction, but it doesn't occur in fact."

Yet the declaration of this passage is that it does occur in fact, it is true. It is the devil's burden that he shall always end up as the defeated one, the humiliated one, fallen on his belly in the dust, eating dust in degradation and humiliation. The problem is, we don't wait till the end of the story. We do on television, because it only lasts a half-hour; but in life we turn it off before it gets through. But look on and see how this account tells us exactly how God proposes to accomplish the devil's humiliation.

**"I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your seed and her seed;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel." {Gen 3:15 RSV}**

This is surely one of the most remarkable verses in the Bible. It was called by the early church fathers the Protevangelium, which means "the first preaching of the gospel." It is the clearest promise, first appearing in the Bible, of the coming of a Redeemer. There are several unusual features about this remarkable verse which reveal the divine hand.

First, you, notice that it predicts an unending enmity to exist between two classes of humanity. Here is the beginning of the two divisions of humanity into which the Bible consistently divides the race throughout its whole course. Its first manifestation is that of enmity between Eve and the serpent, between the tempter and the

woman. "I will put enmity between you and the woman." says God. This is certainly understandable. We can see why Eve would detest this one who had betrayed her by his lies, and as the effects of the fall would become more and more evident in her own life she would feel a continuing abhorrence against this one who had so cleverly and ruthlessly led her astray. On the other hand, the enemy would surely hate her because she was now the object of God's love and his hand of protection was around her. But also, you will note, it was not enmity merely between the woman and the devil but between his seed and her seed, i.e., the devil's seed and the woman's seed.

Without a doubt we have here a most remarkable prophecy of the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are those today who tell us that the virgin birth is an unimportant doctrine, but it is one of the most important doctrines concerning our Lord. Here we have a most remarkable prophecy which cannot be explained in any other terms than that it finds fulfillment in the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus. This concept of the seed of the woman is unique. Nowhere else in the Bible do you find such an expression occurring. Everywhere else in Scripture descent is reckoned through the male line. It is the seed of the man that is the line of descent and all the genealogies of the Bible trace the line of descent through the male. The father's name is given and when the mother's name is given it is only incidental, as referring to the wife of so-and-so.

We continue this in most societies today. Even today families bear the man's name. When a couple gets married, it is the woman who drops her name and takes her husband's name, and the name of the ensuing family is the man's name because it is the male's seed which is the line of descent. But here we are distinctly told that the one who is to bruise the serpent's head is the seed of the woman. Now in all of human history there is only one who can fulfill that condition, Jesus of Nazareth.

Remember the opening words of Matthew's gospel where we are told that when, Joseph found that Mary was with child even before they had come together, honest man that he was, gentle man that he was, "he determined to put her aside privately," {cf, Matt 1:19}. That was the kindest thing he could do, the most gracious way he could handle the situation, because he knew the child was not his. But an angel appeared to him to tell him that "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit," {Matt 1:20 RSV}. That passage is clearly part of the original gospel of Matthew. Luke has a reference to the virgin birth as well. Thus in the gospels it is clearly established that Jesus was born of a virgin, of a woman but not of a man, the seed of a woman.

So the seed is Christ. Here is this most remarkable prophecy, most impressive, which looks across the centuries to the day when Jesus would be born of Mary in Bethlehem. Paul makes an oblique reference to this truth in his letter to the Galatians where he says of Jesus that "he was born of a woman." But all of us are born of women; there is nothing remarkable about that, if that is all he meant. But there is a clear implication here that this was an unusual condition, that Jesus was born of a woman and only a woman. All this is confirmed in Genesis 3 by the masculine pronoun which follows the statement, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head..." That masculine pronoun definitely indicates that the fulfillment of this promise, the seed of the woman, would be a man, born of a woman.

From our vantage point of twenty centuries away we understand what this meant. In Old Testament times they could not see what was involved in this, but now we know it meant the humble birth at Bethlehem, the silent years in Nazareth, the darkness of Gethsemane, the opposition of Jerusalem, the hatred of Judas and Pilate and Caiaphas and Annas, the blood and death of a cross -- all that was the bruising of the heel. Then there came the bruising of the head of the serpent in the glory of the resurrection morning. This whole promise is clearly fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

But it is not only Christ, for now we know that "the seed" was not only an individual, but a people, against whom the enmity of Satan would continue throughout the whole of the age, for the whole history of the race. Thus the seed is not only Jesus but all who are "in Christ" as well, both Old and New Testament believers. The division here between two classes is not along racial lines or physical lines (there is no physical paternity of the devil) but it is along spiritual and moral lines. In the next chapter we learn that Cain was the first of "the seed of the devil," but the Pharisees of Jesus' day were Cain's brothers, because Jesus said to them, "you are of your father, the devil, and the works of your father you will do," {cf, John 8:44}. The Pharisees of our own day belong to the same classification or division. On the other hand, Abel, Cain's brother in the flesh,

was the first of "the seed of the woman," redeemed humanity. You and I who trust in Jesus Christ today are the brothers and sisters of Abel, members of that divine family who have, by faith, become part of the seed which is Christ.

Paul undoubtedly refers to this verse in Romans 16. In writing to the Christians in Rome, he says to them, Verses 19 and 20:

**For while your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, I would have you wise as to what is good and guileless as to what is evil; then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. {Rom 16:19-20a RSV}**

There is the bruising of the serpent's head, to be accomplished not only by Christ but for those that are "in Christ." Again Paul unquestionably refers to this passage in the very first verse of Second Timothy where he says,

**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus, {2 Tim 1:1 RSV}**

In verse 9 he amplifies that. He speaks of God,

**... who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our own works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, {2 Tim 1:9 RSV}**

The phrase, "ages ago," is literally, "before the age-times." He here refers to a promise that God gave of life which would come through an individual, and which was given before men began to count time. This could only refer to this promise in the Garden of Eden of the coming of a Redeemer who would be the seed of the woman and the source of life to men. Paul uses a similar phrase in the opening words of the letter to Titus. He speaks of those who, "in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago [before the age-times] ..." {Tit 1:2 RSV}.

The situation then is clear. All those who have come into this race through the normal line of progeneration from Adam, as the seed of Adam, were born into the control of the devil. But God is calling out a seed of promise. Any who exercise faith in this promised One, whether it be faith before he came or faith in him now, are "in Christ" and are also the seed of the woman. Between these two (the devil's seed and the woman's seed) is enmity -- unending enmity.

We can see it even with us who know Jesus Christ and are Christians. Even in us we find this enmity breaking out. Scripture describes it as the flesh warring against the Spirit and who of us has not felt it? Perhaps even now you are sensing this unending struggle. We know what God wants of us, we are learning how to walk in the Spirit, and yet oftentimes we desire to walk in the flesh -- and we do. There is an unending enmity between these two, and therefore we are constantly exposed to attack and temptation because of it.

It extends to individuals as well. Galatians speaks of "the children of the flesh" who persecute "the children of promise." We well know that the world hates the truth of God, and seeks to ridicule it and to stamp it out; the world bans the Bible and burns the saints.

But then a remarkable thing happens -- this is the great thrust of this passage. The devil's burden is that the victories which he achieves become also his defeats. There is this strange twist by which the victories that the devil accomplishes are turned by God's power and wisdom into the place of his utmost defeat. He succeeds in bruising Christ's heel; but that bruised heel is what finally crushes the serpent's head. You can see this so clearly in the cross. It was the bruising of the cross that made possible the smashing triumph of the resurrection. You can see it also in the events of our own lives and in the events of world history.

Take the matter of the dying of those six million Jews under Hitler. That is a terrible thing! We can hardly contemplate such a hideous thing occurring in our world. Yet it was that event, ghastly as it was, that made

possible the birth of the nation Israel today and set the stage for the fulfillment of promises which had lain unanswered in the Scriptures for century after century. The attempt of the enemy to stamp out the people of God, this strange nation, marked out by God as peculiarly his own among the nations of the earth, was turned into defeat and is now used to establish them in the land of promise.

You know how the distortion of truth in the stupid rituals and empty ceremonies of the medieval church in Martin Luther's day, in a most remarkable way prepared the hearts of Europe for the blazing glory of the Reformation. People were so disgusted by what they were seeing, their hearts were so empty, they were so fed up with materialistic indulgences and external approaches to God, that they were simply crying out in desperation for a note of reality. When Martin Luther nailed the ninety-five theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg, he struck a spark that caught fire throughout the tinder of Europe, tinder prepared by the devil. It was the devil's efforts that made possible the blazing fires of the Reformation.

We look back thirty or forty years and long for the days when youth were content with getting an education, finding a job, making money, going to church every Sunday, and fulfilling the moral demands of life. We think "Oh, those were the good old days before youth got so wild and rebellious and so uncontrollable, etc." But we are blind to the frequent hypocrisy of those days, to the empty materialism, to the blurring of human values that was so common and so widely accepted. True, the devil has used this rebelliousness to push youth into revolt, but that is not the whole story. The glorious fact is that because of the rebellion of young people today there is a growing spirit of honest searching after truth that will not be denied. Young people are fed up with superficial answers, and they will have nothing to do with the shallow, empty, materialistic gas they have been fed by a previous generation, but they look desperately for reality. Surely this is the greatest hour our nation has ever known to talk to young people about Jesus Christ. I remember those dark days of the depression when the Christian cause was regarded with scorn in intellectual circles. You could hardly bear a Christian witness on campus without being labeled a militant fundamentalist and turned off by everyone. But now the campuses are wide open to hear what Jesus Christ is saying to men. There has never been such an hour. And who set it up? The devil did!

I always rejoice in that account in Philippians of Paul's arrest by the emperor, Nero. Paul is in prison, chained day and night to a Roman guard. I can never read that passage without having to laugh with joy at the skill God demonstrates in turning that situation to his own glory. And Paul catches it. He says, "These things that have happened to me have really served to advance the gospel," {cf, Phil 1:12}. What had happened? God had chosen the most wicked and monstrous emperor the Roman Empire ever knew -- the wretch, Nero -- and had appointed him to head the Committee For the Evangelization of the Roman Empire! He set him to the task of searching out the Empire to find the finest young men of the land and bring them to Rome, then, every so often, he was to pick out one of the finest of these and chain him to the Apostle Paul for six hours. You can predict what the result would be. One by one these young men were coming to Christ -- the finest young men of Rome. It is undoubtedly from this band that many of the young men came whose names are recorded in the New Testament. When Paul closes this letter to the Philippians he says, "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household," {Phil 4:22 RSV}.

I do not think there has ever been an hour such as we are living in today in which the truth of this passage is more evident. God is turning the tables on the devil. Satan is overreaching himself today as he always does. It is his fate to end up as those villains used to do in the old western melodramas: having trapped their victims and thinking they're on the very verge of success, the hero arrives and saves the day, and the villain stomps off, muttering through his mustache, "Coises! Foiled again!" This is the devil's burden.

We are concerned about Vietnam today, and yet, in my judgment, if this nation stands a chance of recapturing its honored and favored position before God and being blessed again as we once were blessed, it will be because of the war in Vietnam. I do not mean military conquest. I mean that the bloodletting going on there, the ghastly things that are taking place there, are sobering this nation as nothing has for a long time. We are beginning to face again what this world is like, and to listen once again to the voice of God speaking through our confusion and darkness. It is the fact that we find ourselves unable to disengage ourselves from that conflict, though we cannot put our finger on the reason why, that is making us once again listen, stop, think, and hear the words of God. If anything can save us in this late hour of American history, it will be that conflict that is raging out there -- perpetrated by the devil but overreaching himself, like always does, to see it turned

into an instrument by which God would dispel the darkness and confusion of a nation.

You can see this principle in your own personal lives. Which of you has not had some experience similar to that of the Apostle Paul who had that nagging, wretched, thorn in the flesh given to him, prodding him and probing him. How he hated it, and asked God to take it away. But God said, "No, I won't. My grace is sufficient for you," {cf, 2 Cor 12:9}. As Paul pondered that, there came a realization of what God meant, and he writes it down for us. He says, "I see now that it was given to me by God. It was the 'messenger of Satan.' True. Yet God allowed it to come and God permitted it to remain. in order that I might be kept from becoming proud and thus no longer useful to God. It is this that humiliates me, humbles me, makes me depend upon God and not myself, and therefore," he says, "I will glory in my infirmities, for out of weakness I am made strong," {cf, 2 Cor 12:7-10}.

That is the devil's burden. Do you know anything more encouraging than that? The God we serve is the kind who is continually taking the worst the devil can do and turning it into glorious victory. You will find that principle running through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, and especially in Genesis and Revelation. This is Christianity, entirely different from the principles by which the world seeks to work out its problems. Perhaps it has been best expressed to us in the words of the poet, James Russell Lowell:

Though the cause of evil prosper,  
yet 'tis truth alone is strong.  
Truth forever on the scaffold.  
Wrong forever on the throne.

It does appear that way, doesn't it? It looks as though truth is pinned down, crucified; and wrong sits forever on the throne. Evil seems to rule and reign and walk with unhampered tread across the lives and hearts of millions of people. Yet the poet is right, "Yet that scaffold sways the future..."

It is not the throne of evil that ultimately succeeds, it is the cross, the place of apparent despair and defeat, the place of poverty and emptiness and nothingness.

Yet that scaffold sways the future,  
and behind the dim unknown  
Standeth God amid the shadows,  
keeping watch above his own.

That is the devil's burden. Aren't you glad you're not on his side-or are you?

### **Prayer:**

We pray, Father, that you will take the scales from our eyes that we might see life as you see it, that we might look at the events of our day, not from the puny viewpoint of the flesh, but rather from the viewpoint of these great and eternal visions which allow us to see things as they really are. Help us to remember that no approach of the enemy needs to succeed, that we are called to be victors in Jesus Christ. "Sin shall not have dominion over us, for we are not under law but under grace." Let those thundering words strike our shackles off and set us free, Lord Jesus, we pray in thy name, Amen.

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