

GOD'S RESPONSE

We should pay attention to God's character in Genesis 3. Often I will hear that the Old Testament God is full of wrath and anger and the New Testament God is one of mercy and grace. This argument is not new. Marcion (2nd Century A.D.) went so far as to argue that they were different gods. He was, of course, deemed a heretic. Read correctly, the Old Testament is drenched in grace and judgement is certainly not lacking in the New Testament, especially in the words of Jesus.

- **Gen. 3:9-11**
 - What does God do? Does He immediately condemn and mete out judgement?
 - By no means!
 - He asks questions first pursuing the man, "Where are you?"
 - First indication of the God who is merciful and gracious and slow to anger.

Genesis 3:14 – "The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life."

- It is often asked, "Is then when snakes began slithering along on their bellies?"
 - No. Collins remarks, "A good reader who recognized this would not be inclined to see Genesis 3:14 as falling on members of the suborder *Serpentes*, of the order *Squamata*, of the class *Reptilia*. This is too literalistic and would miss the point of the passage." (Collins, Gen. 1-4, 163) He goes on to say, "Most Israelites, would have known, just as we know today, that serpents do not literally "eat dust," but mice, lizards, other snakes, etc...Dust is not part of the nutritional diet of snakes!"
- The details of verse 14 further suggest we should not read this literally about the habits of snakes:
 - It is rhetorically high (set as poetry in English Bibles)
 - When the expression eat dust occurs in a curse it refers to humiliation and defeat
 - See Mic. 7:17; Is. 49:23; Ps. 72:9

Genesis 3:14

“The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, **and dust you shall eat** all the days of your life.”

Humiliation and Defeat

“they shall lick the dust like the serpent” (Micah 7:17)

“may his enemies lick dust” (Psalm 72:9)

- Based on the biblical context, we should understand “on your belly you should go” not as referring to the mode of mobility of snakes, but to cringing in defeat.
- This verse then is not about the habits of snakes, but of God’s victory that is further elucidated in the following verse (Gen. 3:15).
- Otherwise, reading this literally, we would have to presume the following verse (3:15) is about an ongoing battle between humans and snakes! Jesus did not die on the cross for a battle between humans and snakes – but a battle between light and darkness, life and death, and good and evil.

Genesis 3:15 – “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

- There will be strife and a battle waged between the two different sets of offspring.
- The text tells us nothing about who the serpent’s offspring might be, since the mutual bruising is to involve the serpent himself, and not the serpent’s offspring.
 - If we understand the serpent as the mouthpiece of a Dark Power, whom later texts would call Satan; then it seems we should understand the serpent’s offspring to be those who are seduced into his darkness.
 - Perhaps this lies behind Jesus’ insult to the scribes and Pharisees who resist him in Matt. 23:33: “You serpents, you brood of vipers.”

- Consider also John 8:44-45
- “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.”
- Consider: There are two different family lines in the Story – to which do you belong?
- We will start to witness the development of these two different family lines and their differing characteristics will be evident by the time we reach Genesis 12.

Protoevangelium

- Genesis 3:15 contains what is often referred to as the *protoevangelium* or *the first gospel* (*proto* is Greek for “first” and *evangelium* is the Greek word for “gospel” or “good news”). Here we are again we meet God’s grace as He promises to defeat the Evil One.
 - What is the promise (i.e. the good news)?
 - That one will come from the woman who will be fully human and yet powerful enough to defeat the Evil Power who deceived the woman.
 - This promise of offspring or child who will defeat evil is why Genesis – and the Bible – is so interested in offspring and genealogies (those long lists of names most of us skip over!)

Jumping ahead to Genesis 3:21, we continue to witness God’s care and provision for the couple:

Genesis 3:21 –

- God replaces their pathetic fig-leaf loincloths with something more durable. If you’re going out to where there are thorns – you want more than a fig leaf covering your stuff!

Genesis 3:22-24

- Expulsion from the garden is ultimately an act of mercy – God cannot stand the fact of them being confirmed in their rebellious state.

- The broken sentence here indicates strong emotion (cf. ESV which terminates the thought of Gen. 3:22 with a dash).
- The Tree of Life would have presumably (sacramentally) established the couple permanently in their new fallen condition. Therefore God blocks access to the Tree of Life with warrior angels and does not again grant access until humanity may be established in our healed, glorified state (Rev. 22:2).

GOD'S RESPONSE Summarized

- While there are certainly dire consequences for the human couple, God's judgement is mitigated – He could have scrapped all of creation at this point and been within His rights for doing so! But He doesn't. Instead...
- God's words and actions are ultimately tinged with mercy and grace
 - God does not immediately condemn – He asks questions. (Is He giving Adam and Eve a chance to repent and restore the relationship?)
 - In the middle of this incredible betrayal against God, God delivers a beautiful promise to make things right again and defeat evil (Gen. 3:15)
 - God provides clothes for the couple and prevents them from being confirmed in their sinful state.
 - Blocks access to the tree of life as God cannot imagine having humans confirmed to live eternally in this new sinful state