

# The Serpent and the Seed

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> 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." (Gen 3:14-15 ESV)

Genesis 3:14-15 ESV

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## **Fear of Snakes and Loss of Limbs**

It is not uncommon to find sermons on our passage starting with an **illustration** like this: Researchers have discovered that **women are four times more likely to suffer from phobias of snakes** than are men. A psychologist at Carnegie Mellon University conducted experiments on 11-month-old infants.<sup>1</sup> Boys and girls were each tested for how they reacted to pictures of snakes, spiders, flowers, and mushrooms. Girls looked at the pictures of snakes and spiders much longer than boys did after first seeing a picture of a snake or spider paired with a picture of a fearful face. But they did not have such a reaction when the face was put with the flowers and mushrooms. Thus, it was concluded that women are born with a kind of template which causes them to fear these creatures much more than men. This experiment concluded that women's DNA developed this fear in order to safeguard their offspring from dangerous things. Of course, how can you not think of Indiana Jones at a time like this, but I know that **Indiana Jones** with his fear of snakes is not a real person. That said, I still wondered after reading this why men were not supposed to be caring enough to develop such a fear in their DNA?

Well, after the illustration is given, and not wanting psychology to win the day, the preacher often launches into an alternative, "biblical" explanation. **Genesis**

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<sup>1</sup> David H. Rakison, "Does Women's Greater Fear of snakes and Spiders Originate In Infancy?", *Evolution and Human Behavior* XX (2009): <http://www.psy.cmu.edu/~rakison/rakisonEHB.pdf>

3:15 says that God put the fear of snakes into women as a curse, for it says, “I will put enmity between you [the snake] and the woman.” Thus, the fear of snakes in women comes because Eve was deceived by a talking snake, so God cursed her.

This kind of application is just bad, wrong-headed, and misses the whole point of the passage. It is exegetically inexplicable. First there is the grammar. The verse does not say that women will *fear* snakes; it says that God puts “enmity” here. The word for “enmity” (*'ebah*) is not “fear,” but a kind of “hostile disposition” that one has towards a foe or an enemy. Good examples of enmity are the kind of religious hostility that exists in Ireland between Catholics and Protestants or the racial hostility that exists in the Middle East between Jews and, well, everyone else. That is what enmity is, not fear. Also, it does not talk about “women” (plural), but “the woman” (singular with the definite article). In other words, it is talking about Eve, not all women.<sup>2</sup> Then there is the basic fact that even if the word meant “fear,” not all women are even afraid of snakes. Neither are all women angry and hostile towards them.

So how does this kind of application happen? The most basic problem is its failure to read the Bible and to know its characters and its story, or to at least care about them to tell the story right. Without those things, what else is left to talk about? So we speculate with clever theories that miss the point. This kind of problem often rears its head in applications from the previous verse as well.

That verse says that God cursed the serpent by making it crawl on its belly. So, without taking the time to read how the language is used elsewhere, many people have taught that the curse was the physical removal of the legs and feet of snakes, which he originally gave them at their creation.<sup>3</sup> Of course, this goes along with a naturalistic reading of this “snake,” that he is just a regular animal God created to live here with us. This is most certainly not the point.

There is one main story of the Bible. This story is the classic, true story of Good vs. Evil. All Christians understand this on one level, otherwise they couldn't be saved. This is Christmas week, and the whole world remembers the story on a basic level. But we have forgotten that the story is much bigger than Christmas, and that it goes all the way back to the beginning. Recently, I've seen more and more movies that end disturbingly, with evil winning and the audience left frustrated and

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<sup>2</sup> We will come back to the point that Eve represents a particular lineage, which is both physical and spiritual in the Bible.

<sup>3</sup> O. Procksch: “Its earlier way of life appears to have been different”; or Th.C. Vriezen, “The presumption clearly is that in primeval time the serpent walked upright on paws.” Cited in Claus Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 259.

without hope. I suppose this shows only that the Christian worldview is being eclipsed by much darker ones. The biblical view tells the story of how God allows evil to exist—for a time. Yet, he promises he will destroy it and all those who practice it. In a Christian worldview, good stories begin with something like “Once upon a time” and they end “...happily ever after.” All humans long for this, because something has gone terribly wrong. Today, I want to tell you that story.

## **The Curse of the Nashash**

I will do so from two verses: **Genesis 3:14-15**. They are the first of three arrows (**vv. 14-19**) fired at the serpent, the woman, and the man respectively, after the evil they committed in the Garden of Eden. The genre is classic Hebrew poetry,<sup>4</sup> the purpose of which is to reinforce the story through repetition, rhythm, word-plays, comparison, and simplicity.

Today we are looking at **the curse** God placed upon the **Nachash**. If you will remember back to **Genesis 3:1**, we looked at how this creature is not a reptile from the animal kingdom being possessed by the devil, but rather is the devil himself. “Nashash” describes a **shining being**, a seraphim/serpentine-like being, and a being that possesses the dark craft.<sup>5</sup> He is a heavenly being known to us as Satan or the Devil, for in the story he accuses (devil) and is the adversary of God and man (satan).

In my mind, these are two of the most important verses in the Bible, which is why I want to spend a whole week talking about just these two verses. **Vs. 14** together with Revelation 20, form the bookends of the prophetic defeat of evil and the devil. Genesis 3:14 describes his “curse.” **Vs. 15** then predicts how his defeat will occur. A war will take place, one with great hostility. Both verses are technically part of the **curse** of the **Shining One**, even though vs. 15 has been called the “**First-Gospel**” (*protoevangelium*), because it gives the very first revelation of the coming of a great warrior who will crush the head of the serpent. Very good news indeed.

### *Above all Beasts*

God turns to the Nachash first, because he is the instigator of the whole sordid affair. Also, the man blamed the woman and the woman blamed the Shining

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<sup>4</sup> [http://ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com/ancient\\_hebrew\\_poetry/2007/08/symmetry-asymme.html](http://ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com/ancient_hebrew_poetry/2007/08/symmetry-asymme.html)

<sup>5</sup> Though fairly common today (for example, “Nachash” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*; Michael Heiser, “The Nachash and his Seed: Some Explanatory Notes on Why the ‘Serpent’ in Genesis 3 Wasn’t a Serpent,” available in PDF online: <http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/nachashnotes.pdf>), since the sermon on Genesis 3:1a, I came across the interpretation of the snake as a “shining one” that goes back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. His sources must be older. See E. W. Bullinger, “The Serpent of Genesis—Appendix 19,” in *The Companion Bible*, 1921.

One, so judgment comes in reverse order of that. This forms a chiasmic structure that puts the curse of Satan in the middle, giving it the prominent place in our minds, and the central place in this part of the story.<sup>6</sup> What does God do?

It says, “The LORD God said to the Nachash, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field’” (Gen 3:14a).

Now listen to it in a more rhythmic translation:

Cursed are you  
Out of all behemoths  
And out of all the beasts of the field.

There is a wordplay with the very first phrase. “Cursed are you” is *arur ... mi-kol*. Back in Gen 3:1 it said *arum mi-kol*, “more shrewd than.” Or more cheesily, because he was shrewd, cursed is this dude.

The curse says that the Nachash will be cursed above all livestock, above the beasts of the field. Or, to put it another way, he will be made lower than the livestock and beasts of the field. Based on the second part of the verse, “...on your belly you shall walk, and dust you shall devour all the days of your life,” many people read this spatially or physically. That is, he will be shorter than all other animals. Indeed, he will no longer have legs and feet, but will have to slither along the ground, the lowest of all animals. This is not the meaning.

Instead of seeing God taking away the limbs of snakes (and how does this punishment even fit the crime using God’s own measuring stick of judgment: an eye for an eye?), it is better to see snakes as having always looked like they look now. They have always slithered; they have never had feet. This was an image God built into creation to display and personify coming evil. So, snakes become an illustration of something much, much worse. This curse consists of two parts. The first is a being brought low. The second is a judicial sentence to die.

If you will remember, God created the natural world of living creatures in a hierarchy. Man was at the top and told to rule and have dominion. Angelic beings would rule the spiritual realms; humans would rule the physical realm. Animals are thus “below” mankind in this hierarchy, and on earth, heavenly beings were too. We sometimes think of the lion as “king of the jungle.” There is a kind of hierarchy

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<sup>6</sup> A. God questions Adam (Gen 3:9-12)

B. God questions Eve (Gen 3:13)

C. God curses the Nachash (Gen 3:14-15)

B<sup>1</sup>. God judges Eve (Gen 3:16).

A<sup>1</sup>. God judges Adam (Gen 3:17-19).

between animals too. But man rules them all. So the idea here is that if Satan finds it this important to interfere in our realm, because all that he had been given in the heavenly realm was not enough, then fine. He will be forced to deal with our planet for all time. But he will now be given a position so low that even the beasts of the field will be considered more important, more authoritative than him. Think about how angry this curse would have made him. Here is the most glorious created being of all, being stripped of his glory and authority such that God will consider dumb animals more highly than he.

Dust as humility is found elsewhere the Bible. In Isaiah, “**Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet**” (Isa 49:23). In the Psalm, “**May desert tribes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust!**” (Ps 72:9). Humiliation. This is the meaning of the image of crawling on your belly. It is a groveling, a humiliation, a curse. This is part of what is going on in **Isaiah 14:12** when it says, “**How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!**”

Satan Brought Low		
Genesis 3:14	Isaiah 14:12, 15	Ezekiel 28:8, 14, 16, 17
The LORD God said to <b>the serpent</b> , “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock, and above all the beasts of the field; <b>on your belly you shall go</b> , and <b>dust you shall eat</b> all the days of your life.	How you are fallen <b>from heaven</b> , <b>Day Star, son of Dawn!</b> How you are cut <b>down to the ground</b> ... you are brought <b>down to Sheol</b> , to the far reaches of the pit.	They shall thrust you <b>down into the pit</b> , and you shall die the death ... <b>guardian cherub</b> ... I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God. . . <b>I cast you to the ground</b> .

### *A Belly Full of Dust*

The other part of the verse is that Satan is being sentenced to die. It is the opposite of **1 Cor 15:53**. Here, **the immortal puts on mortality**. This is the meaning of the image of **eating the dust** all the days of your life. You can’t take this literally, because snakes do not eat dirt. They eat other animals. It is a metaphor for death.

Rather, think of it through the lens of our pop-music. “**Dust in the wind, all we are is dust in the wind.**” What does this mean? It means we are going to die. Or this one, “**Another one bites the dust.**” What does this mean? It means someone has died. Dust as death. It is the same in the ancient world.

In our own story, **Adam will return to the dust**, meaning, he is going to die, just like the Helel, the Shining One. “**In the Gilgamesh Epic, Enkidu on his**

deathbed dreams of the netherworld and describes it as a place with no light and where ‘dust is their food, clay their bread,’” a description also known from the *Descent of Ishtar*.<sup>7</sup> These are most likely considered characteristic of the netherworld because they describe the grave. Dust fills the mouth of the corpse, but dust will also fill the mouth of the serpent as it crawls along the ground.”<sup>8</sup>

So Satan is not only going to be made lower than animals, he is going to die. We find this in **Psalm 82** when it talks about all of his heavenly cohorts in crime. It says, “**All the foundations of the earth are shaken**” (5) because of the wicked spiritual beings. “**Like men you shall die**” (7). You find it in Isaiah, “**On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven ... They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished ... In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing *nachash*, Leviathan the twisting *nashach*, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea” (**Isa 24:21-22; 27:1**). We find it in the NT. Jesus says that **the eternal fires were created for the devil and his angels** (**Matt 25:41**). Revelation says that he will be **thrown into the Lake of Fire** (**Rev 20:14**). This is his curse, and how unbearable it must be. How it must make him rage, knowing that he was immortal, knowing that now his time is short.**

But **it does not happen all at once**. This is critical to understand. God did not cast Satan into the flames of hell at that moment. In fact, as we will see later in Genesis, for a time, God actually made Satan to be the very prince of the world, who could offer them to Jesus at the temptation and get away with it. To this very day, men bow down to Lucifer and worship him as their god. In fact, the deceiver of the whole world has created a million religions that all lead to the same place: the worship of himself. The whole world was thrown into darkness, given over to his power and influence. And this is because the curse does not only include him, but mankind. And so, all seems the opposite of this curse.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld* (COS 1.108): “To the dark house, dwelling of Erkalla’s god | To the house which those who enter cannot leave | On the road where travelling is one-way only | To the house where those who enter are deprived of light | Where dust is their food, clay their bread | They see no light, they dwell in darkness.” *Nergal and Ereshkigal* (COS 1.109): Nergal set his face towards Kurnugi | To the dark house, dwelling of Erkalla’s god | To the house which those who enter cannot leave | On the road where travelling is one way only | To the house where those who enter are deprived of light | Where dust is their food, clay their bread | They are clothed, like birds, with feathers | They see no light, they dwell in darkness.

<sup>8</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Ge 3:14–15.

If this is true, then what hope is there today? What makes Christianity any different than the other religions of the world? Many will be thinking about it this very week, but will not understand how profound it truly is. Traditional songs of Christ's birth seem to get it. "O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine own from Satan's tyranny."<sup>9</sup> "To save us all from Satan's power, When we were gone astray ... To free all those who trust in him, From Satan's power and might."<sup>10</sup> "He comes, the pris'ners to release, In Satan's bondage held."<sup>11</sup> "Homeless, weary, sighing, weeping, Over sin and Satan's sway?"<sup>12</sup> "This little babe, So few days old, Has come to rifle Satan's fold."<sup>13</sup> "Gabriel's message does away, Satan's curse and Satan's sway, out of darkness brings our Day."<sup>14</sup> Let us now see how they got here.

## The War of the Seeds

This is where **vs. 15** comes into view. It is one of my favorite verses in the Bible, and one of the most important, for this is the very first gospel. "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." The word "seed" is *zera*, and it is translated as "offspring" by the ESV and others. Either choice is fine, but I long for consistency of translation, so that we can see what is being said not only here, but throughout the Bible. (so in what follows, I will quote the KJV, because it has this).

Let's look at the basics of the verse. This verse continues as part of the curse of the Nachash; yet it becomes a great blessing for mankind, **particularly for Eve**. Based on this promise, later she will give birth to the first son, Cain, and she will proclaim, "This is the man" (**Gen 4:1**), obviously thinking that he is the seed who would crush the Serpent. She would be greatly disappointed. Yet in another son (Abel), the promise would echo through the corridors of time, in his blood that was shed which foreshadowed the blood of Another (**Heb 12:24**).

The verse says that God puts enmity between the woman and the Shining One. As soon as God is finished with the pronouncement, there would clearly be plenty of hostility to go around. Yet, it goes deeper. For into the very fabric of the universe, God is weaving hostility between the *seed* of the serpent and the *seed* of the woman. This is the reason why evil persists. God does not do away with it all at

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<sup>9</sup> *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.*

<sup>10</sup> *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.*

<sup>11</sup> *Hark, the Glad Sound.*

<sup>12</sup> *Who Is This So Weak and Helpless?*

<sup>13</sup> *This Little Babe.*

<sup>14</sup> *Gabriel's Message.*

once. This describes a war. It is a war between the heavens and the earth, between the principalities in heavenly places and the image bearers created to serve God's holy temple, and ultimately, between Yahweh himself and all who oppose him. This is why the Apostle says that we fight against them (Eph 6:12).

We must come to grips again with this most basic of all doctrines in Scripture. Heavenly beings are real. Many have fallen into sin. And they have been cursed to hate mankind. They seek our utter obliteration. They know their own end is near, and they desire to take us down to the pit with them, to be with them, forever, where they will rule us in the underworld. All of the wars, murders, and lusts, and sins of men have this verse as their source,<sup>15</sup> even when we fight ourselves. How so?

### *The Seed of the Serpent*

Here we need to consider [the seed of the serpent](#). Who are they? The Bible explains that there are [spiritual seed](#) of Satan and [physical seed](#) of Satan. This corresponds to the seed of the woman as well. We come up against the spiritual seed first. His name is [Cain](#). 1 John says, "[We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother](#)" (1Jo 3:12), adding, "[Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning...](#)" (3:8). Jesus tells the Pharisees, "[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](#)" (John 8:44). Each of these refer to a spiritual father rather than a biological one.

Think of this in terms of a giving over, or in the words of Deuteronomy, "allotment." Originally, God was the spiritual father of the human race. He created us after his image. So, the lineage of Christ refers to Adam as the "[son of God](#)" (Luke 3:38). But there came a time when God said, "Enough is enough," and he gave the nations over to the spiritual beings to rule over them. To those whom God had taken out of this dark tyrannical rule through election God warns, "[And beware](#)

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<sup>15</sup> *Going Deeper*: It seems to me that if the ancients were right about linking the heavens to the heavenly beings, the world gone wild in famines, plagues, and disasters also has its roots here. Not that God is not sovereign over such things or cannot be directly involved when he wants to, but that in his providence, he has put such things under the control of heavenly beings to look over them, take care of them, and use them appropriately. It is a strange thought, but when we think about the plagues of revelation being opened by heavenly beings, when we think about locusts coming out of the pit and other such images, we suddenly find ourselves face to face with such ideas. One of the main points about Scripture is that despite their reckless use and abuse of their positions of power, Yahweh is still Omnipotent and able to overcome them. This is particularly true in the story of the Plagues of Egypt, where God shows himself greater in each plague than the gods of Egypt.



lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven,<sup>16</sup> you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven” (Deut 4:19).

In a very real sense, we all became children of the devil. Satan becomes the spiritual father of humanity through adoption. God gave us up, Satan took us in. Now he is the anti-priest, the anti-father that is embodied in the false and corrupted religions of the world. And it is in servitude to his will. As the old Christmas songs demonstrate, the church used to understand this. We will discuss this more when we come to the story of the Tower of Babel.

The physical side of this, that the Shining Ones will have a biological seed, is a major story in Genesis, but it does not first appear until Genesis 6:1-4. It is such a strange idea to many people that it will not do to do anything more than mention it here. We will deal with that when the time comes.

The point of this is all the same, however. As our father, he stokes the fires of original sin in us all the more. As those born as slaves to sin, we desire to please our master, to do what will make him happy, and this is the great horror of being trapped in sin with no atonement and reconciliation, no repentance and forgiveness. When we see if for what it is, such a family is a horror show like the family in Texas Chainsaw Massacre, only worse (and you don't have to have seen the film to get the image). It is a family in ruins, a family at odds, a family at war, a family of hate and rage, or sloth and pride, or lust and greed, of envy and gluttony, of wrath and violence, total debauchery and careless immorality. And this is the family each is born into. Even if you have Christian parents, you are not born a Christian, but a child of the devil. You must be saved out of that family and put into another.

### *The Seed of the Woman*

Had God left us in this state of gracelessness, the human race would have perished from the earth millennia ago, victims of our own violent self-destruction.

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<sup>16</sup> This refers to spiritual beings, not physical/material objects: "You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you" (Neh 9:6). "And Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left..." (2Ch 18:18). "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" (Dan 4:35). "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God" (Luke 2:13).

You and I would not have been born to have hear this message. But there is more to the prophecy, and thank God for it. For it also tells of a [seed of the woman](#).

The first thing to point out is that this seed [does not include all people](#), for as we have seen, all people by curse are the seed of the devil. Rather, this seed is chosen out of that one, created anew, created from nothing. Our father Adam was created from dust, but this seed is born of the Wind—the Holy Spirit of God.

But like the Serpent, her seed is [both physical and spiritual](#). Both are chosen by election, but the corporate election of a physical people is but a symbol of the individual election of the spiritual people. The spiritual seed are [born of faith](#) in Jesus Christ, and all those of faith enter into newness of life, as we will see in other sermons that Adam and Eve, and Abel and Seth each did. (And yes, they had faith in Christ, for they spoke with him face to face in the Garden). But this seed is also [physical](#). The idea has always been that the two would perfectly overlap in every individual. But sadly, this has not always been the case.

Let us [trace the promise](#) of this seed by thinking of Scriptures that talk directly to the prophecy. The prophecy comes, in each case, through [covenant](#), and what we are dealing with in Genesis 3:15 is also covenantal, but now it is not the covenant of works, but a [covenant of promise](#), a covenant which signals a greater covenant to come.

Let me read again our verse, “[And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise they had, and thou shalt bruise his heel](#)” ([Gen 3:15](#)).<sup>17</sup> Next we think of [Noah](#). “[And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you](#)” ([Gen 9:9](#)). The promise to the woman now comes to a man. In Noah, the promise is both physical—for he is directly descended from Eve, and spiritual—for Noah is a man of faith in Christ.

Next we come to [Abram](#). “[And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him](#)” ([Gen 12:7](#)). Again, the promise is both physical and spiritual, and the two meet in the man of faith who would become Abraham. The covenant part becomes explicit later, “[And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee](#)” ([Gen 17:7](#)). Each covenant promise of a seed is built upon the foundation of the first promise to Eve.

After this, the covenant goes to [Isaac](#), “[Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these](#)

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<sup>17</sup> The following references are all KJV.

countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father” (Gen 26:3). Then it goes to Jacob, “And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I *am* the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed” (Gen 28:13).

Let us pause for a moment and think about Jacob so that we can think about the physicality of the seed. Jacob’s name is turned into Israel. God covenants with Israel the nation in the days of Moses. This covenant is given to all Jews, regardless of faith. It is at this point that we begin to see a splitting of the physical and spiritual in that God covenants with physical people who do not all believe in Christ through faith alone. They still receive temporal, temporary blessings (and curses), but these do not receive the eternal rewards to which those point.<sup>18</sup>

The point here is to say that in Genesis 3:15 there is a promise of physical wars that will be fought, wars that come from this hostility and the corporate election of God in Israel. This is a major theme of the entire Pentateuch and on into Joshua and Judges and the Kings. It is a type of the greater war to come. I simply want to point it out to you here, so that you will understand that the foundation of the wars in the first five books of the Bible and beyond are rooted here.

Now, the word *zera* acts a lot like our word offspring. It can refer to one or many. In fact, in our verse, it refers to both. This is not an *either/or* as so many have tried to make it throughout history. It is a *both/and*. The problem is, if it refers only to many, then it refers to a fallen group of sinners that will never in fact win this war. The whole prophecy would be nothing but wishful thinking. It might make you feel good for a while, but at the end of the day it would be empty.

In the early second century, Irenaeus wrote this of our passage:

Christ completely renewed all things, both taking up the battle against our enemy and crushing him who at the beginning had led us captive in Adam, trampling on his head, as you find in Genesis that God said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and the seed of the woman. He will be on the watch for your head, and you will be on the watch for his heel.” From then on it was proclaimed that he who was to be born of a virgin, after the likeness of Adam, would be on the watch for the serpent’s head. This is the seed of which the apostle says in the letter to the Galatians, “The law of works was established until the seed should come to whom the promise was made.” He shows this still more clearly in the same epistle when he says, “But when the fullness of time was come, God sent his Son, made of a

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<sup>18</sup> This happened all along, I suppose, for Esau was not a man of faith, but God blessed him mightily, and Ishmael was not a man of faith, but God gave unto his mother a covenant.

woman.” The enemy would not have been justly conquered unless it had been a man made of woman who conquered him. For it was by a woman that he had power over man from the beginning, setting himself up in opposition to man. Because of this the Lord also declares himself to be the Son of Man, so renewing in himself that primal man from whom the formation of man by woman began, that as our race went down to death by a man who overcame, and as death won the palm of victory over us by a man, so we might by a man receive the palm of victory over death.

(*Against Heresies* 5.21.1).

Christ is the Seed to which all other seeds point. Some have not liked this interpretation, but it is exactly where the Scripture heads. The remarkable prediction in **Numbers 24:5-7** refers to Jacob, but then to someone else saying, “He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.” The targums of Genesis 3:15 point to this as well saying, “Nevertheless there shall be a medicine for the sons of the woman, but for thee, serpent, there shall be no medicine: but it is to be that for these there shall be a remedy for the heel in the days of the king Meshiha.” (PsJ and JTE). Jesus is the Great Physician and King Messiah.

Similarly, to David it says, “And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom” (**2 Sam 7:12**). Psalm 89 adds, “Thy seed I will establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations” (**89:4**). This is the kingly line through which Jesus Christ would be born. The seed is truly the golden thread that weaves the whole Bible into one great story.

There seems to be a prediction of **particular women as well**. Notice again, the focus is on the woman, not the man. Later, of Judah we read, “And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee to this young woman (speaking of Ruth, the grandmother of Jesus)” (**Ruth 4:12**). Earlier, the promise came to Sarah, that she would have a son Isaac. Much later, in the days of Herod the great, the promise comes to Mary. Her birth would be more miraculous than even Sarah’s, whose womb was dead because she was 90 years old. But Mary was a virgin, and a daughter of Eve. So it says, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman...” (**Gal 4:4**). Paul has in mind **Genesis 3:15**. As he says previously, “That Seed is Christ” (**Gal 3:16**).

*Bruising and Striking*

Jesus is the great and final seed that will win the war. How does he do it? Two ways. They are rather ironic. Both use the word “bruise.” This is a fascinating word. It can mean to bruise, or, like a snake, it can mean to “strike.” This word anticipates the greatest conflict in coming war.

There is a cognate in Arabic that actually means to polish or “make shine.”<sup>19</sup> So this is a play on the Shining One. The word is *shuph*, and it is related to the word *shephiphon*, which is used one time in the Bible, in **Genesis 49:17**. In this verse, it is parallel to *nachash*. “Dan shall be a serpent (*nachash*) in the way, A horned snake (*shephiphon*)<sup>20</sup> in the path, That bites the horse's heels, So that his rider falls backward” (NAS). Thus, Calvin says, “I have no doubt that Moses wished to allude to the name of the serpent” (Comments on Gen 3:15).

You see, the *Nachash* was actually going to be an unwitting agent in his own defeat. I believe this was kept intentionally cryptic in the OT, by God, so that he would not be able to figure out the plan. Yet, looking back on it, it is marvelous in our eyes. The serpent will bite/snap/strike/bruise his heel. I am thinking here of a particular strike, a venomous attack that ended up in the death of the Lord Jesus. For it was Satan who entered Judas, and it was the Devil who inspired Peter. He incited men to kill Jesus Christ. And they put him to death on a tree. It is so remarkably similar to the cause of our own death: a tree.

But this was only a striking at the heel. It did lead to death, but only temporarily. In Christ, the mortal puts on immortality. And through the striking of the heel, the Son of God crushes the head of the Horned Serpent in his resurrection and ascension. If they would have known this, they never would have been Jesus to death (**1 Cor 2:8**).

One of the chief works of Christ’s death is the oldest theory of the atonement known as *Christus Victor*. It was really the only theory of the early church, and is making a bit of a resurgence in our day, unfortunately, at the expense of the substitutionary death of Christ. This theory relates to the **kingly office** of Christ,

<sup>19</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999), 1446.

<sup>20</sup> The word is onomatopoeic, really the hisser. In ancient times, notice how the serpent and the king and the shining beings were imaged together.



just like the penal substitutionary theory relates to his **priestly office**.<sup>21</sup> In this way, they are friends, compatible and each necessary. *Christus Victor* is the idea spoken about in the songs. Christ wins the victory over the Serpent. This victory is available because Christ came as the seed of the woman, born of a virgin, very man of very man.

It is available because Christ struck the death blow to the Serpent, dying on the cross, rising from the grave, ascending into power at the right hand of the Father in heaven, where he is enthroned above all names, principalities, thrones, and dominions in heaven. Jesus is the only rightful ruler of heaven and earth. His is a glorious kingdom of summer and light. But it is not automatic that anyone enters it. You must trust in this Seed by faith alone. The victory is his, not yours. In him, you may share in the spoils of his victory, but only in him.

The war has been won. The church has been saved from Satan's power. The promise is being fulfilled, "**Dust shall be the Nachash's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain**" (Isa 65:25). In the future, we will be saved from his presence. The Scripture says, "**The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet**" (Rom 16:20).

There is an old song call the *Quem pastores laudavere* ("Whom Shepherd's Praised"). It says, "The star of Jacob now is risen, stills the longing heart's desire, breaks the ancient serpents head, shatters hell's dark reign." Luther asks, "What is it now to be a 'Lord'? It is this, that He has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death and all woe. For before, I had not yet had any Lord, nor King, but had been held captive by the devil's power, doomed to death, ensnared in sin and blindness... Now, therefore, those tyrants and gaolers are all crushed, and in their place is come Jesus Christ, a Lord of Life, righteousness, all good and holiness, and He snatched us poor lost men from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and brought us back to the Father's goodness and grace."

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<sup>21</sup> Here we have yet another both/and, rather than the either/or that so many have tried to make the atonement throughout history. By the way, the promise of the seed is also given to the priests. **AARON**: And they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in unto the tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy *place*; that they bear not iniquity, and die: *it shall be* a statute for ever unto him and his seed after him. (Exo 28:43 KJV); **PHINEHAS**: And he shall have it, and his seed after him, *even* the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel. (Num 25:13 KJV); **LEVI**: And the seed of Levi was chosen for the priesthood, and to be Levites, that they might minister before the Lord, as we, continually, and that Levi and his sons may be blessed for ever; for he was zealous to execute righteousness and judgment and vengeance on all those who arose against Israel. (JUB 30:18 OTP). This is fulfilled spiritually, however, in the lineage of Christ through the order of Melchizedek, and not biologically, as Jews thought it would be. Jesus' biological lineage, at least the one that counts as it concerned the Jews, is through the kingly line.