

GENESIS 3:15 AND THE PROTEVANGELIUM

by

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Historically, Genesis 3:15 has been interpreted as a Messianic prophecy. In recent years this has been questioned as to its validity. The attack has been centered upon the serpent and who or what it represents. It will be the purpose of this author to examine the text in light of its historical, contextual, grammatical, and exegetical considerations and to arrive at a conclusion regarding the serpent and its relation to a Messianic interpretation of the passage. Finally, the author will answer objections to the view he has reached in the preparation of this paper.

The verse comes at the beginning of the Word of God. Its place in the canon and more specifically in Genesis shows its great import. If this verse is truly a Messianic prophecy its context must be considered. The text follows directly the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden. In this brief section, God declares the punishment that is to be dealt to Adam, Eve, and the serpent. It is appropriate that at this crucial time God gives to the man and woman a ray of hope and alludes to a victory over the evil one.

A survey of the various interpretations indicated a wide realm of thought on this verse. Liberal critics, Roman Catholics, Jews, as well as Conservative scholars each have a particular view of this verse. Conservatives, while divided into several camps, have nevertheless been reluctant to discount the Messianic interpretation.

A study of the grammar in the text indicates three words to be key considerations. The word אֵיָנָהּ and its usage in Numbers and Ezekiel demonstrated that the personality given the serpent is more than that of a mere animal. The word נָחָשׁ and its New Testament counterpart and their usages have shown a compatibility with the Messianic view. Finally, the word שָׁרִיפ when translated consistently did no damage to the Messianic idea. A possible allusion in Romans is questionable but is certainly not damaging to the interpretation.

The objections answered demonstrate the credibility of the Messianic interpretation. The background of the critics, the New Testament information, and the context of the curse itself are all considered. The Liberals have raised the most serious questions. The information given Adam and Eve in the Garden was able to be understood and the seed of Satan is mentioned several times in the Bible.

It is the conclusion of this author that the traditional view of the passage is the most correct. The passage is definitely Messianic. The understanding of the snake must be literal but a secondary reference to Satan is correct.

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INTRODUCTION

Messianic prophecy begins with the dawn of human history. The history of mankind opens with sublime tragedy--the original sin of our first parents, and with their expulsion from the garden of Eden. They bear with them from Paradise the Magna Carta of human history; they enter into the world to engage in a lifelong struggle whose issue is death and victory. From their Creator's hands they received the protevangelium, the glad tidings of redemption.¹

Until a few years ago this statement would have probably been uncontested. Down through history men of the Scriptures have taken Genesis 3:15 to be more than a curse from God. It has traditionally been held that this verse was prophetic. Its prophecy not only involved the nature of the serpent, but it also told of the doom of Satan and the coming of the Messiah. Today this whole realm of thought is under attack. Men wish to simplify this entire matter as that referring only to snakes and women.

There is to be endless hostility between snakes and men, the one crushing the head of the other whenever the opportunity arises, and the snake striking at the heel of man. Ancient zoology is often strange to us, and there is other evidence to show that the old Hebrew believed that the earth was the normal food of

¹Charles Augustus Briggs, Messianic Prophecy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886), p. 71.

snakes. It is certainly true that most snake bites are inflicted on the foot.¹

Another critic has stated, "The whole brood of serpents, and the whole race of men."² In this statement, Skinner is simply suggesting that the whole passage in Genesis 3:15 is speaking of nothing more than the natural feelings of dislike between women and snakes.

This paper will look at this argument from one particular aspect. It will study the serpent mentioned in the passage. It appears that most who deny this passage to be the protevangelium, do so because of the denial of who or what the serpent is. This paper will demonstrate that when God addressed the serpent in Genesis 3:15, He also addressed Satan. This passage clearly predicted Satan's downfall and can be considered the protevangelium.

The serpent will be studied in relation to the historical setting and historical viewpoints of previous commentators, in light of the text itself, other Scriptures; and finally answer some common objections to the protevangelium.

¹T. H. Robinson, Abingdon Bible Commentary, Genesis (New York: Abingdon Press, 1929), p. 223.

²John Skinner, Genesis, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), pp. 79-80.

CHAPTER I

CONTEXTUAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF GENESIS 3:15

In the study of any topic it is first necessary to examine the whole and then proceed to the particular. In this section the context which surrounds Genesis 3:15 will be surveyed briefly. One must first see the milieu from which this verse comes. After this is examined, then the study of the particular verse can be initiated.

The verse under investigation comes from the book which is universally called "Genesis" in the English. "This name is a transliteration of the Greek word γένεσις, which constitutes the regular title form of old in the Septuagint and was taken over by Jerome into the Vulgate--Liber Genesis."¹ Later the name came to be used of only the first book of the Pentateuch. However, the proper Hebrew title which is בראשית perhaps is the most appropriate. Its meaning is: "in the beginning."²

¹H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942), I, 5.

²Ibid.

The Authorship of Genesis

In examining the authorship of this book it is necessary to realize that this book is one of five parts in a section of the Bible known as the Pentateuch. It has generally been agreed that Moses was the author of Genesis and most of the Pentateuch.¹ However, the authorship of this book has come under some attack in the last two centuries.² This attack came about in 1750 and has since been seen as the Graf-Wellhausen theory.³ This theory holds to the idea that the Pentateuch was composed of four major documents, which actually reflected the historical conditions between Davidic and exilic times.⁴ This whole concept has confused Israel's religion and their relationship in history. This theory has been modified somewhat in recent years and has regarded the Pentateuch as essentially Mosaic in that these documents were orally transmitted.⁵

Perhaps the best evidence of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch comes from within the Pentateuch itself. Many of the verses in the Pentateuch seem to indicate that

¹John J. Davis, Paradise to Prison (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 21.

²The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, 1974 ed., s.v. "Pentateuch, The," by Samuel J. Schultz.

³Ibid. ⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid.

Moses wrote many of these passages and also suggests that he probably wrote more (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; 34:27; Num. 33:2; Deut. 1:1; 17:18, 19; 27:1-8; 31:9; 31:24).

The New Testament also supports the authorship of Moses in which Christ Himself refers to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch (Matt. 8:4; 19:7; 23:2; Mark 1:44; 7:10; Luke 5:14; 16:29; 20:37; John 3:14; 5:45; 6:32; 7:19; 7:22, 23). The apostles also agreed (Acts 3:22; 13:39; 15:1, 5, 21; 26:22; 28:23; Rom. 10:5; 1 Cor. 9:9; 2 Cor. 3:15).

Since the book of Genesis contains events which transpired prior to the time of Moses, the date of this book and its writing are hard to determine. It appears that the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers would have been written in the form of a journal.¹ However, the nature of Genesis would not be comparable to this. Instead, Genesis is an introduction and could very well have been written sometime during the Wilderness Wanderings as Leupold has suggested.²

One would expect much of the person who composed these first great books of the Bible. This is very realistic and logical. Moses truly is a significant person

¹H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, I, 8.

²Ibid.

and the Pentateuch reveals this.

He was one of those master-spirits, in whose life the rich maturity of one historical period is associated with the creative commencement of another, in whom a long past culminates, and a far-reaching future strikes its roots. In him the patriarchal age terminated, and the period of the law began; consequently we expect to find him, as a sacred historian, linking the existing revelation with its patriarchal and primitive antecedents. As the mediator of the law, he was a prophet, and, indeed, the greatest of all prophets: we expect from him, therefore, an incomparable, prophetic insight into the ways of God in both past and future.¹

The Creation of the World

In the first two chapters of Genesis the creation of the world is stated in a logical and precise form. Genesis stretches from this point until the migration of Jacob's family into the land of Egypt. In between these two points is reported the creation of man and his fall. This is followed by the first birth and murder of a human being. From this point the destruction of the population of the earth is described in relation to the Great Flood. Following the flood comes the call of the patriarch Abraham and the tracing of his descendents. All of this eventually leads to Jacob and his family in Egypt.

It is the first part of the book of Genesis which

¹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. by James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), I, 20.

is of major concern to this study. The first chapter starts with the creation of the heavens and the earth. This very starting point is of great significance.

Genesis commences with the creation of the world, because the heavens and the earth form the appointed sphere, so far as time and space are concerned, for the kingdom of God; because God, according to His eternal counsel, appointed the world to be the scene both for the revelation of His invisible essence, and also for the operations of His eternal love within and among His creatures; and because in the beginning He created the world to be and to become the kingdom of God.¹

Another author agrees with this and states:

The opening verse of Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and the remainder of chapter 1 brings us immediately into the world of space and time. Space and time are like warp and woof. Their inter-woven relationship is history. Thus the opening sentence of Genesis and the structure of what follows emphasize that we are dealing here with history just as much as if we talked about ourselves at this moment at a particular point of time in a particular geographic place.²

In the first chapter is the brief description of the creation week. Each day of the week is described as to the events which transpired. In each day the reader sees what God has created. At the end of the six days it is noticed that God has created everything. God is pleased with what He has created and declares it to be

¹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. by James Martin, I, 33.

²Francis A. Schaeffer, Genesis in Space and Time (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p. 15.

good (vs. 31). In this first week God has created all that exists on earth as well as the earth itself. Man has also been included in this creation and was the last creature to be created.

In the first part of the second chapter the last day of the creation week is reported. On the seventh day God rested. There is no creative activity performed on this day. The reader receives no other indication that creation continued beyond this week. Apparently God was able to create all that He desired to create in these six days. Nowhere in the Bible is God found to be creating anything again.

In the second chapter there is an interesting insight presented in the creation of man. It appears that God focuses the readers' attention on the creation of man and that man is to be seen in a different light, even beyond the statement "in our own image," in 1:26. In Genesis 1 the attention is on the spiritual attributes of man. The phrase in 1:26 indicates this. The second chapter deals with the physical nature and needs, both moral and social.¹ This shows the reader the practicality of the Bible. This second chapter reveals to the reader

¹John C. Whitcomb, Jr., professor of the class "The Book of Genesis." Notes from the class lecture of November, 1976.

that man had responsibilities in the Garden of Eden. Along with these responsibilities comes the joy of living in the Garden. Man is permitted to eat of every plant and tree in the Garden except for one. In verse 17 God stated that man cannot eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God stated that the penalty for eating of the tree would be death.

The final section of the second chapter deals with the creation of the woman and the first marriage on earth. In verses 21-22 God put Adam to sleep and took a rib from him with which He formed the woman. In verses 24-25 it is seen that the man and woman were joined together and their nakedness was not something of shame. The last part of the chapter indicates to the reader the state within which Adam and Eve existed during the short time they were in the garden. The last part of verse 25 serves as an excellent summary of their relationship prior to the fall in chapter 3. "To wit, of their nakedness, as having no guilt, nor cause of shame, no filthy or evil inclinations in their bodies, no sinful concupiscence or impure motions in their souls, but spotless innocency and perfection, which must needs exclude shame."¹

¹Matthew Poole, A Commentary on the Holy Bible (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), I, 8.

The Immediate Context of Genesis 3:15

At the close of chapter 2 the reader realizes that the Garden of Eden is the perfect situation. There is nothing which the inhabitants of the Garden needed.

The man, whom God had appointed lord of the earth and its inhabitants, was endowed with everything requisite for the development of his nature and the fulfillment of his destiny. In the fruit of the trees of the garden he had food for the sustenance of life; in the care of the garden itself, a field of labour for the exercise of his physical strength; in the animal and vegetable kingdom, a capacious region for the expansion of his intellect; in the tree of knowledge, a positive law for the training of his moral nature; and in the woman associated with him, a suitable companion and help. In such circumstances as these he might have developed both his physical and spiritual nature in accordance with the will of God.¹

Even with the perfect situation that existed, the fall of man was to be. The instrument of the fall was to be a member of the animal kingdom. The serpent is the animal that is used to tempt the woman. The woman was apparently not familiar with her surroundings, and therefore, was not suspicious when she heard the serpent speak. It is through this avenue of speech that Satan is able to tempt the woman and she took of the tree which was forbidden by God in the previous chapter (v. 17). Satan is very clever in his dealing with the woman. Satan first cast doubt upon the Word of God (vv. 1-3). Next Satan

¹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. by James Martin, I, 91.

distorted God's Word (v. 5). Finally Satan denied the Word of God openly (v. 4).¹ All of this was seen by the woman and she gave in to the temptation. Not only did Eve take of the tree, but she also gave to Adam. Immediately both of these people knew that they had committed a sin. This is seen by their reaction. In verse 7 the Word of God relates that the man and woman knew that they were naked. "They knew it before, when it was their glory, but now they knew it with grief and shame, from a sense both of their guilt for the sin newly past, and of that sinful concupiscence which they now found working in them."² The man and woman made coverings for themselves and hid when they heard the voice of God walking in the Garden.

At this point in the narrative the realization that there has been a change in the relationship between God and man is obvious. Man has tried to hide from God because of the terrible wrong which he has committed. What will be God's response to the sin which was committed? The punishment was stated previously but now the attention is upon God and His initiating of that punishment and all

¹John C. Whitcomb, Jr., professor of the class "The Book of Genesis." Notes from the class lecture of November, 1976.

²Matthew Poole, Commentary on the Holy Bible, I, 9.

its implications.

As God approached the man and woman, He questioned them and more, is revealed about their attitudes. They were afraid for they knew they had done wrong. Also, Adam tries to blame the woman for what has happened. At this point God addressed the woman and she stated that the serpent was the one which had tempted her. It is at this point that God directed His attention to the serpent. In verse 14 God cursed the serpent. Because the serpent was the instrument used in this great sin, God brought a curse upon the serpent which would have lasting results. The serpent was to crawl upon its belly and was to eat of the dust of the earth. Its existence was radically changed and it served as a reminder to others of this terrible event.¹

It is after this event that God then turned to the woman and stated her punishment. Along with her punishment came a curse upon Satan which will be proven in the remaining sections of this paper. God also addressed man and the punishment which Adam and Eve experienced was very great. Not only were they to face death, but they experienced hardships which are still quite evident today.

¹Matthew Poole, Commentary on the Holy Bible, I, 10.

From this point Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden and with them went their sin and its results. Later in the same book this sin would be so great that God would cause a flood to wipe out nearly the entire population of the earth. Yet sin would still remain and the only victory that would come would be the one alluded to in Genesis 3:15.

CHAPTER II

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS SUMMARIZED

A general survey of materials which have dealt with the passage under consideration indicated the wide range of interpretations that exist. The views which were presented range from the literal to the symbolic interpretation of Scripture and reflect the thoughts of many writers. The most common of these interpretations will be presented in this chapter. These interpretations will be summarized and some of the scholars who adhere to these positions will be presented.

The Spiritual Progeny View

This view simply states that the offspring of the woman and the snake are figurative and thought to be understood in the spiritual sense. One of the best explanations of this particular belief is given in The New Bible Commentary. It states, "Beyond the woman, the whole family of the true humanity, becoming her spiritual seed by faith, will stand in continuing conflict with those descendents of fallen Adam who abdurately manifest

spiritual sonship to the devil."¹

Those who usually adopt this view very seldom take this position alone. There is usually some room left for a secondary interpretation.² Two such authors who hold to this view are E. J. Young³ and Paul Heinisch.⁴

The Natural Progeny View

This view explains the seed of the woman to be the offspring of Eve. This would then include the entire human race. The seed of the serpent would then be the offspring of the serpent being all like reptiles. This would include the entire snake population. Therefore, the conflict in Genesis 3:15 would be a struggle between mankind and snakes. This position would disagree with any attempt to understand Genesis 3:15 as containing the first promise of the Gospel.

¹D. Guthrie, ed., The New Bible Commentary: Revised (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 85.

²David W. Miller, "Pseudo-Protoevangelium In Genesis 3:15," Unpublished Master of Divinity Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1975, p. 6.

³Edward J. Young, Genesis 3 (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), p. 116.

⁴Paul Heinisch, Theology of the Old Testament, trans. by William Heidt (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1950), p. 304.

Most of the scholars who adhere to this view are students of liberal thought when it comes to Biblical criticism.¹ Those who follow this view are Dillman,² Skinner,³ Morgenstern,⁴ and Speiser.⁵ Morgenstern gives an excellent example of the reasoning behind this position.

The story seems to imply that the serpent originally walked erect, and only through the curse came to crawl on his belly. This too, is the explanation of the ancient rabbis. Christianity sees in the serpent the devil, the power of evil. Judaism, however knows nothing of the devil. Such a conception of a power of evil, independent of and opposed to God, would contradict Judaism's fundamental teaching of the absolute oneness and omnipotence of God.⁶

After citing the historical positions of these groups Morgenstern comments directly on Genesis 3:15 saying, "The basis of this folk-tale is, of course, the natural human horror of serpents."⁷

¹Miller, "Pseudo-Protoevangelium In Genesis 3:15," p. 5.

²A. Dillman, Genesis, trans. by B. Stevenson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), I, 158.

³Skinner, Genesis, p. 81.

⁴Julian Morgenstern, The Book of Genesis (Cincinnati: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1919), p. 61.

⁵E. A. Speiser, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1964), I, 24.

⁶Morgenstern, The Book of Genesis, p. 61.

⁷Ibid.

The Messianic View

This view sees the ultimate prophecy as referring to Jesus Christ. This position takes each reference to seed as an individualistic interpretation. The word would directly refer to a single person. Thus, the seed of the woman would refer to Christ. However, the seed of the serpent is not as certain. One view is to designate the seed of serpent as referring to the Antichrist.¹

Usually there is much attention given to the genealogies by those who adhere to this position. These are important because of their link to the object of this prophecy. Therefore, all the genealogies would point to Jesus Christ and the channel by which Christ would come would be the seed of woman. Some proponents of this belief are Chafer,² Hoyt,³ Barnhouse,⁴ Patrick,⁵ Wordsworth,⁶

¹Herman A. Hoyt, The End Times (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), pp. 44, 118.

²Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), II, 302.

³Hoyt, The End Times, p. 118.

⁴Donald G. Barnhouse, Genesis (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), I, 23.

⁵R. Patrick, A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testaments and Apocrapha (Philadelphia: Frederick Scofield and Co., 1877), pp. 19-21.

⁶Christian Wordsworth, The Holy Bible with Notes

and Strong.¹ Albertus Pieters explains best this position when he says:

It is a very great promise. On the surface, this message speaks of nothing but men and snakes; but it takes a wooden head and a cool heart to see nothing more in it. It is not Messianic in form, which is perhaps the reason why it is not quoted as such in the New Testament; but it is Messianic in essence. We see at once that it is so when we remember that the 'seed of the woman' must have a leader in this conflict, that such a leader has been found in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that He was born of a virgin; thus fitting, as no one else can ever fit, the unique description: 'the Seed of the Woman'.²

The Multiple Reference View

This is a mixture of all those who would not hold to one of the previous views mentioned. This would include those who would see the natural progeny view as possible, but would also like the liberty to have a secondary reference especially in connection with the word seed.³ There is another group who would see the primary reference of the woman's seed as referring to believers of

and Introductions (London: Rivingtons, Waterloo Place, 1865), pp. 20-23.

¹Augustus Hopkins Strong, Systematic Theology (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1907), pp. 667-68.

²Albertus Pieters, Notes on Genesis (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1943), p. 88.

³C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. by James Martin, I, 101.

God with the secondary meaning belonging to the personal Messiah. Some who would hold to this position are Leupold,¹ Stevens,² Livingston,³ and Murphy.⁴ Calvin Roy, in a critical monograph, has an interesting twist to this view. He sees the primary consideration as to Christ and the Antichrist with the secondary interpretation as referring to their spiritual seed.⁵

The Roman Church View

This verse is of very much importance to the Roman Catholic Church. Much of their interpretation deals with their belief that this verse relates greatly to the doctrine of Mary. One Catholic author describes what is understood by the traditional Catholics regarding Genesis 3:15.

According to the wellnigh unanimous interpretation of the Fathers, beginning with St. Justin Martyr and St.

¹H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, I, 164.

²Charles H. Stevens, "The Last Gentile World Ruler" Prophecy and the Seventies, ed. by Charles Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 223.

³George Herbert Livingston, The Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1969), I, 46.

⁴J. G. Murphy and Warren F. Draper, The Book of Genesis (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1873), pp. 120-24.

⁵Calvin W. Roy, "'He Shall Bruise Thy Head, And Thou Shalt Bruise His Heel.' Genesis 3:15," Unpublished Critical Monograph, Grace Theological Seminary, 1951, p. 68.

Ignatius of Antioch, the 'serpent crusher,' is a determinate person, namely our Divine Saviour Jesus Christ Himself, and the woman whose enmity is destined to prove fatal to the serpent, is the Blessed Virgin Mary. These two persons are opposed to two other beings, viz., the serpent, who is none other than Satan, and his 'seed,' i.e. his clientile of sinners. God Himself has 'put enmity' between these two pairs, Christ and His mother on the one side, and Satan and his followers on the other side,--an enmity which will ultimately end in victory for the former and destruction for the latter. Mary, being on the side of Christ, with the same enmity between her and Satan as that which exists between the latter and her Divine Son, must also share in His triumph. This would not be the case had she, even for a single moment, been tainted by original sin; for in that hypothesis Satan would have triumphed over her, and she would have been, at least temporarily, his friend and ally, and the Protogospel would consequently be untrue. It follows that, viewed in light of Christian tradition, the Protevangelium foreshadows not only the victory achieved by Christ through the atonement, but implicitly also the Immaculate Conception of His Blessed Mother.¹

As just stated the interpretation of this verse seemingly gives support for the Catholic concept of the Immaculate Conception.

The modern Church of Rome reads Ipsa here in her Version, and applies this prophecy to a woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary; and she now cites this text as a ground for her new dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which she endeavored to make an Article of faith by the Decree promulgated in St. Peters Church at Rome, by Pope Pius IX, on December 8, 1854, in which the Bishops of Rome said that the Blessed Virgin was pre-announced by God, when He said to the serpent, 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman.' The Pope's words in that decree are: 'Sanctissima Virgo, per Illum, Venenatum caput Serpentis Immaculate pede

¹Joseph Pohle, Mariology, ed. Arthur Preuss (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1914), pp. 61-62.

contruit,' and the Virgin 'of the Immaculate Conception' is represented by the Church of Rome in statues and pictures as bruising the head of the serpent under her feet.¹

However, the Catholic Church bases all its claims on a mistranslation. Leupold² and Calvin³ both point out that Jerome translated the Hebrew incorrectly. Calvin spares no feelings in stating that the Papacy had deliberately deceived the people because they knew from the beginning that the translation was in error. John King explains best the problem of the translation.

See the Vulgate, 'Ipsa conteret,'--She shall bruise. The following judicious note from Professor Lee's Hebrew Lexicon confirms the criticism of Calvin:-- 'The attempt that has been made gravely to justify a blunder of the Vulgate, which here reads ipsa for ipse, is a melancholy proof of the great neglect of the study of Hebrew in this country. Any one acquainted with the first elements of the grammar would see that, to make the Vulgate correct, we must substitute תשופד for תשופה, and תשופנה for תשופנו,'--that is, both the form and the affixes of the verb would require alteration, in order to accommodate themselves to the change of gender.⁴

The Jewish View

It appears that the Jews cannot agree on how to

¹Christian Wordsworth, The Holy Bible with Notes and Introductions, p. 21.

²H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, I, 170.

³John Calvin, Genesis, ed. John King (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), p. 169.

⁴John Calvin, Genesis, ed. John King, p. 170.

interpret Genesis 3:15. The two basic beliefs that are found either support the Messianic idea or see the whole story in Genesis 3 as an allegory.

It appears that the Jewish Church supported the Messianic view.¹ Leupold comments that this is stated in the Targum from a very early date.² However, other Jews since that time have had different understandings. Kohler states that the Messianic interpretation had never really reached a great acceptance among the Jews.³ Kohler continues by saying that the story of the fall of man is an allegorical description of the childlike innocence which man must leave behind in order to attain true strength of character.⁴ This whole idea was perpetrated by rabbis in the Talmud and Midrash. This would strike down any doctrine of original sin.⁵ If the Jew does not believe in hereditary sin and the corruption of flesh, he would then minimize any action that took place in the Garden of Eden. This is what happens and the Jew sees the account as teaching the struggle between good and bad.⁶ The conflict

¹H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, I, 169.

²Ibid., p. 170.

³K. Kohler, Jewish Theology (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1968), p. 193.

⁴Ibid., p. 220. ⁵Ibid., p. 223. ⁶Ibid., p. 193.

comes when the serpent, who is later identified as a demon or Satan tries to seduce man. Man must then make a choice between good and evil.¹

The importance of the Jewish belief to this study is that the Jew consistently identifies the serpent with Satan.² The Jews do not agree with the Church as to the nature of Satan, however. Yet, their view of Satan being the person of the serpent would tend to support a view of Genesis 3:15 which would hold to the curse as referring to Satan as well as the serpent.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE VERSE TRANSLATED AND EXEGETED

The translation of Genesis 3:15 is the first step that was undertaken in this study. This writer has translated the verse in the following manner:

Enmity I will put between thee and between the woman,
and between thy seed and between her seed; and he shall
bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

This translation will be used throughout the remainder of this paper.

In the translation of the passage there must be consideration of any variant readings. Such variant readings often affect the translation and meaning of the verse, but in the case of Genesis 3:15, there were no major variant readings listed.¹ This would seem to indicate that the Hebrew text as given by Kittel would be reliable. However, there were some questions raised in regards to a translation made from the Hebrew text. The Vulgate has an incorrect translation of אֵרֶן in an attempt

¹Rudolf Kittel, Biblia Hebraica (Stuttgart, Germany: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937), p. 4.

to support the doctrine of Mary. This however has been shown to be incorrect.¹

In the consideration of this verse one assumption will be made. The nature of the serpent will be understood as being a literal serpent. Hengstenberg does an excellent job of showing that the serpent referred to in the passage was one of the creatures which dwelt in the Garden of Eden.² While the appearance of the serpent was altered in Genesis 3:14, the fact still remains that the serpent was a creature God had created during the creation week. It was this which was used to deceive the woman in the Garden. Any attempt to understand this creature to be anything but a literal animal in the Garden will not be accepted.

In the examination of the verse certain words will be studied. The words chosen by this writer have been considered on the basis of their dual usage. These words are אֵיכָבָה, זָרַע, and שָׁמֶץ. These words are used both in referring to Eve as well as the serpent. In the curse which was issued by God, the link between the woman and the serpent is seen. This writer will examine these words

¹This problem has been dealt with in the previous chapter on pages 20-21.

²E. W. Hengstenberg, Christology of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1970), p. 14.

in order to demonstrate that this passage is the prot-evangelium. The usage of these words in relation to the woman, as well as the serpent, indicates the personality which was behind the serpent. The common translation and meaning will indicate that the serpent was not the only one being referred to in this curse. God was also directing this curse at Satan.

The Word אִי־בָּהּ And Its Link To Personality

In looking at the text there is one key support for the Messianic idea. It deals with the word אִי־בָּהּ, which is translated "enmity" by most translators. This whole argument shows carefully that this passage cannot be simply referring to a war between men and serpents. There is a personal relationship to be understood.

In one reputable lexicon the word is translated as "enmity, personal hostility."¹ This is also supported by Gesenius.² In translating this in the Septuagint it is found with the same basic meaning. The word used is

¹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles Briggs, A Hebrew And English Lexicon of the Old Testament (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), p. 33.

²William Gesenius, Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures trans. by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), p. 811.

ἐχθρα, speaking of personal enmity and hatred.¹

All of these facts seem to support the thought that the word which is translated as "enmity" in Genesis 3:15 has the sense of applying to personal beings. Not only is its meaning important but so is its position in the verse itself.

Kittel defines the word ἐχθρα as "Hatred, hostility, as an inner disposition as objective opposition and as actual conflict between nations, groups, and individuals."² He also states that, "It is not common in the LXX. In the canonical books it is mostly used for hatred and enmity between individuals, in the apocryphal books for hatred and enmity between nations."³

The object, 'enmity,' stands first for emphasis. Now enmity is a term not applicable to dumb beasts. Its scriptural use limits it, like its verb root, to enmity between persons or morally responsible agents. This fact alone, as well as the sequel, rules out the idea of mere hostility, which is not enmity, between man and serpents.⁴

¹William F. Arndt and Wilbur F. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 331.

²Gerhard Friedrich, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), II, 815.

³Ibid.

⁴H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, I, 164.

The complete meaning of this verse comes to light even more so as the verse continues. Satan as the tempter becomes clearer as God states the severity of this curse.

Besides, this statement emphasizes that it is God who will not suffer this enmity to die down: 'I will put.' God wants man to continue in undying opposition to this evil one and He arouses the enmity Himself. This He does first in the case of enmity on the woman's part.¹

The whole idea of God placing enmity between the woman and Satan shows the severity of the action that the woman had taken. The confidence that she had once shown to this serpent has now been turned to enmity. This does not make God the author of evil, but rather shows God's way of dealing with the particular situation at first. It also demonstrates the personality behind this serpent. "When therefore, God not merely confines the serpent within the limits assigned to the animals, but puts enmity between it and the woman, this in itself points to a higher, spiritual power, which may oppose and attack the human race through the serpent, but will eventually be overcome."²

The essence of this personal quality being necessary in this word enmity is not foreign to the rest of the

¹Ibid., p. 165.

²C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. by James Martin, I, 101.

Bible. Not only does the meaning fit properly in Genesis 3:15, the meaning is very appropriate in the rest of the usages in the Old Testament.

All other usages of אֵיבָהּ in the Old Testament are in connection with relationships between persons--Numbers 35:21-22 (the manslayer and cities of refuge); Ezekiel 25:15 (Philistines); and Ezekiel 35:5 (Mount Seir, the Edomites). The strong probability is that a similar sense is called for in Genesis 3:15.¹

The study of the word אֵיבָהּ must be considered important when examining the personalities in Genesis 3:15. Here the text is crucial to the whole problem. While it might be allowable to use this word or its verb form in the sense as simply meaning hostility, it is not consistent with other Scripture usages. This whole argument shows carefully that this passage cannot be simply referring to a war between men and serpents. It demonstrates that there is a personal relationship here and that the serpent is not solely the object of the curse, but that the tempter is very much in the picture as well. The inclusion of Satan in the curse seems appropriate and fits the text well.

¹Charles L. Feinberg, "The Virgin Birth in the Old Testament," Bibliotheca Sacra, 117:46 (October, 1960), 314.

This understanding of the word in question also answers the logical question of why God would simply curse a snake. It does appear that there is much more behind the curse. The reasoning which holds to a simple serpent curse has a slight problem. True, women do have problems with snakes. But snakes are not the only creatures to which man demonstrates some "hostility." The very same reactions are felt with regards to spiders and mice. In the case of spiders they are truly feared and dreaded as snakes are, and can be just as deadly. While it may be true that hostility between the two parties in Genesis 3:15 is intended, yet to use that explanation as the only teaching of the passage has problems.

The personal character and activity of the snake suggests more than the simple curse. One author says:

The serpent is evidently something more than the animal serpent. There is intelligence, conception, speech, and knowledge higher than that of the man or the woman. The woman knew that she had to deal, not with a mere serpent, one of the animals under her dominion, but with a higher power, a spiritual intelligence, who had entered the garden in hostility to her Creator, with the avowed purpose of delivering man from bondage. As the Creator assumed human form in order to the creation and training of the human pair in the garden of Eden, so now a hostile spirit assumed the form of the serpent in order to deceive and ruin them. There is nothing in this primitive poem to indicate that the author attributed to the animals of Eden powers of reasoning and speech. The author would rather, by attributing the naming of animals to man, and by showing that man could find no companion among them, imply that the powers of reasoning and speech

were endowments of man which the animals did not possess.¹

The whole comment is consistent with the grammatical study of the word enmity. The fact of a personal being involved in the curse, rather than simply the serpent indicates the possibility of the Messianic prediction.

The Word זרע And Its Consistent Usage

Another problem in the grammar which must be considered is the word seed. The usage of the word זרע is commonly translated as "offspring" or "descendants." Usually this word is ascribed to man, but with a few exceptions to animals. The problem that exists is understanding this word in a consistent usage in Genesis 3:15. Leupold shows the necessity of being consistent in the passage.

There would be something supremely trivial about this solemn utterance if it did no more in the expression, the serpent's 'seed,' than to think of generations of serpents as yet unhatched. There must be meant the children of the evil one who are of their father the devil and will do the lusts of their father (John 8:44). If 'seed' must refer to a whole class and so is used in the collective sense in the one half of the statement, then 'seed' (again zera) in the second half or parallel member of the statement must be used collectively for the descendants or posterity of woman.²

¹Briggs, Messianic Prophecy, pp. 72-73.

²Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, I, 165-66.

This statement suggests that the scope of the curse is much broader. This word if properly understood suggests that the curse involved the offspring of the persons in the text in a very general sense. Hengstenberg agrees with the analysis of seed and writes:

. . . We must understand her posterity in general. According to this explanation the sense is as follows: 'True; thou hast now inflicted on the woman a severe wound, and thy associates shall continue to assault her posterity. But with all thy malice, thou and thy associates shall be able to inflict on mankind only curable wounds; while on the contrary the posterity of the woman shall one day triumph over thee, and make thee feel all thy weakness.'¹

One must also consider that the idea of Satan's seed is not foreign to the Word of God. One of these references is found in John 8:44. In speaking to the Pharisees Christ related the true fact of their offspring. They claimed that they were of Abraham's offspring. Christ told these hypocrites, "You are of your father the devil." This does not mean that they were created by Satan. This is in reference to their spiritual condition.

Now comes Jesus' explicit assertion of the kinship of His enemies with Satan. He has previously hinted at it, but now He affirms it in set terms. They take their origin from the devil their father. Consequently they set their will on doing his evil desires. They voluntarily choose to do his will. . . . Their difficulty was not primarily intellectual, but spiritual.²

¹E. W. Hengstenberg, Christology of the Old Testament, p. 22.

²Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 463.

Lenski has no doubt that this refers to the spiritual condition. "The fact that moral and spiritual relationship is referred to the clause with καί places beyond question."¹

This view is also supported by Acts 13:10. Paul is in Salamis and is confronted by a magician called Elymas. Paul refers to this man as a son of the devil. In 1 John 3:10 the concept of God's children and Satan's children are contrasted. The whole purpose is to help believers distinguish between the two groups.

None of these passages prove conclusively that the use of seed in Genesis 3:15 means Satan's offspring, nor do they affirm that the verse is truly the first presentation of the gospel. However, they do demonstrate two important facts. If Genesis 3:15 does recognize the enmity between the woman and Satan, the source behind the serpent, then it is true that Satan does have offspring. This has been affirmed in three different passages. Not only does Satan have offspring, but the reader is well aware that this offspring is of the spiritual nature. This would help define those who are referred to as the seed of the serpent.

¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), p. 649.

The seed of the woman in this passage would no doubt refer to mankind. The possibility of it referring to the Messiah must be considered in light of other Scriptures. In Revelation 12:1-5 there is a clear reference to Christ as being born of a woman. In Galatians 3:16, 19 Christ is directly referred to as "your seed." More of this subject will be explained in the next chapter.

The Word שרר And Its Exegetical Considerations

The word שרר involves quite a bit of conflict in the study of this passage. The word שרר has only three possible citings in the Old Testament. The other two references are Job 9:17 and Psalm 139:11. However, according to Brown, Driver, and Briggs the third listing of this word is probably not a correct use of the word שרר.¹ Because of the limited usage of this word in the rest of the Old Testament, arriving at a consistent translation of this word is a problem, especially in Genesis 3:15 where the word is used twice, once referring to the woman and her seed, and once referring to the serpent and its seed.

Brown, Driver, and Briggs² and Gesenius³ agree that

¹Brown, Driver, Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, p. 1003.

²Ibid.

³William Gesenius, Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures trans. by Samuel

the translation of the word in Genesis 3:15 should be "bruise." Gesenius however disagrees with this translation when referring to Job 9:17. He suggests the idea that this word can be translated "to attack, to fall upon." This kind of word usage opens up the possibility that the same word can have two different meanings in the same passage. This is suggested by Koehler and Baumgartner.¹ They translate the word as "bruise" when referring to the action of the snake against the woman. When the activity of the woman is the subject, "snap, snatch", is the accepted translation. This is supported by Wifall² and Von Rad.³

The problem with the translation is brought right into the argument of whether this is just snakes and women or whether this does refer to the Messiah and the conflict with Satan. If the serpent's action is less than that of the woman it would seem to suggest that the woman is victorious and would support the traditional view of Genesis 3:15 being the Protevangelium.

Prideaux Tregelles, p. 811.

¹Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., Lexicon in Vertis Testament Libros, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), p. 956.

²Walter Wifall, "Genesis 3:15--Protevangelium," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XXXVI: 3 (July, 1974), 364.

³Gerhard Von Rad, Genesis, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 89-93.

Leupold takes this whole thought to its logical conclusion. He writes:

That the battle is actually fought to a decisive conclusion appears from the verb employed and from the manner in which it is employed. The verb shuph decidedly means 'crush' (K.W.), a meaning which even Skinner finally decides it is 'better to adhere to.' Of course, as Luther clearly shows in his translation, we have a zeugma (K.W.) in the use of the word: the head is crushed but the heel is bruised; Luther: zertreten vs. stechen. This is too obvious to require lengthy defense: for when man steps on a serpent's head, a crushing results; but when the serpent strikes while the contest is on, only a sting on the heel or a bruising results. But at the same time a crushed head spells utter defeat. A bruised heel may be nursed till healed, and if the bite has been poisonous, the poison may be removed by sucking or cauterizing.¹

To Leupold the destruction of the serpent is definitely forecast. The victor of this conflict will be the woman. The fact that the battle does have a winner is the force of his argument.

The struggle is not to be interminable. It does end in complete defeat of the serpent, who is here, to cap the climax in establishing her identity, again addressed as 'thou', a form of address involving, where moral issues are at stake as here, a being with moral sense and responsibility, i.e. Satan himself. But we cannot stop short of this point.²

The fact that שָׁפָה can be translated several ways makes it difficult to rely solely upon the original language in this part of the argument. However, the fact that

¹Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, I, 170-71.

²Ibid., I, 167.

Barrett allows for the possibility by stating, "There may be an allusion here to Gen. iii. 15, though if so, Paul must be referring to the Hebrew text, for the Septuagint translates differently."¹ He continues by giving the import of the Romans passage, "In any case, Paul is looking forward to the final defeat of the prince of evil, and believes that this defeat will take place soon."²

In examining the verse in Romans the word translated "crush" is the key. Here the Septuagint supplies some valuable information. The word that is translated "crush" in Romans 16:20 is not the same which was used by the translators in Genesis 3:15 in the Septuagint. The word in Romans is συντρίψει. The word in the Septuagint for Genesis 3:15 is τηρήσει. There is a bit of difference in its meaning.

The difference is quickly seen when one translates the verbs. The word συντρίψει comes from the verb συντρίβω which is translated "to shatter, smash, or crush."³ This is supported by Arndt and Gingrich⁴ and

¹C. K. Barrett, The Epistle to the Romans (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957), p. 285.

²Ibid.

³G. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1968), p. 434.

⁴William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early

the word could still be consistently translated "bruise" without doing any harm to the Messianic idea that must be remembered.

In connection with the study of the word bruise comes the comparison of Romans 16:20. Many have used this verse to support the thought that Satan is the one behind the serpent and God is directing His words to him as well. However, there is a slight problem with a comparison of this nature.

The New American Standard Version translated the verse as: "And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." The similarity of this verse to the one under question cannot be denied. The question that must be asked is whether the author of the verse in Romans had the verse in Genesis under consideration when he wrote the passage. Also, the verse in Romans used the word crush, and its link to Genesis must be examined.

Many authors feel that this verse in Romans is a strong allusion to Genesis 3:15. Murray,¹ Lenski,² and Bruce³ are among those who take this position. C. K.

¹John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), II, 237.

²R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1945), p. 923.

³F. F. Bruce, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), p. 278.

Kittel.¹ One lexicon notes that the primary Hebrew equivalent of this word was שבר which means "to break to pieces."²

The word τηρήσει comes from τηρεω. The proper translation of this word is "to keep, watch over, guard."³ The primary Hebrew equivalents of this verb have been listed by Kittel as שמר and נצר.⁴

The reason for this discussion is to note the fact that both the Septuagint and the verse in Romans do not use the ordinary Greek equivalent for the Hebrew verb שרף. This however, does not destroy any relationship between Romans 16:20 and Genesis 3:15. There is still the possibility that the verse in Romans is an allusion to the verse in Genesis. The fact that the languages do not seem to promote this idea does not mean that they unquestionably deny the possibility of such an allusion. As stated

Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 801.

¹Gerhard Friedrich, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), VII, 920.

²Gesenius, Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament, 803.

³G. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament, 445.

⁴Gerhard Friedrich, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, VIII, 141.

previously, the content of the verse suggests such an allusion.

In referring back to the immediate question of which translation is best for the word קִשְׁיָה , this writer agrees with the translation which is most common--"bruise." This does not do any damage to the passage and if it is used in both instances in the passage the meaning of the passage is still clear. The victory of the woman over the serpent is clearly suggested by the type of injury she inflicts over that of the serpent's bite.

CHAPTER IV

SOME OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

Like all topics of any controversy there are those who cannot accept the traditional approach. This is the case with Genesis 3:15 and its claim as the protevangelium. Many of those who question this view are solid scholars of the Word of God. There has been much searching of the Bible to come to the "proper" interpretation. But the background of some leads this writer to question their interpretation in this matter. Before looking at some of the objections that have been raised it is necessary to look at those who have raised some of these objections and see if their motives have been proper.

Some of those who have caused the most concern have been men out of the liberal school of thought. Miller refers to this and states that many who hold to the Natural Progeny view are liberal critics of the Bible.¹ A recognition of their liberal theology and its implications is necessary before accepting any of its teaching in connection with the passage under study. One of the best

¹Miller, "The Pseudo-Protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15," p. 5.

explanations of the liberal and his theology is found in Baker's Dictionary of Theology. In an article entitled "Liberalism" Bernard Ramm gives some of the background of these critics.

Liberalism had a fourfold rootage. First, philosophically it was grounded in some form of German philosophical idealism (e.g., Schleiermacher in Romanticism; Ritschl in neo-Kantianism; Biedermann in Hegelianism). Secondly, it placed unreserved trust in the new critical studies of the Scriptures which contained implicitly or explicitly a denial of the historic doctrines of revelation and inspiration. Thirdly, it believed that the developing science of the times antiquated much of the Scriptures. Fourthly, it is rooted in the new learning and believed in a harmony of Christianity with the new learning. In this sense it is modernistic (preference for the new over the traditional) and liberal (the fight of free criticism of all theological claims).¹

One cannot deny that a background such as this would affect a critic and his view of the Bible. While this does not completely eliminate the Natural Progeny view it does question the motives of those who adhere to it. One should closely examine this view as to its grammatical and hermeneutical base as well. These all stem from the view one has of Scripture.

The Real Serpent

One of the problems that has been raised is that

¹Baker's Dictionary of Theology, s.v. "Liberalism" by Bernard Ramm.

of seeing the serpent as merely a symbolical designation of Satan. At first glance one might be tempted to say that this really supports the idea of Satan being behind the serpent. This might be true, but the manner of this argument is not consistent with the hermeneutics of this paper.

This whole view makes use of the allegorical mode of interpretation. There is a great danger in doing so. Ramm explains why this is in commenting on the subject of allegory. "This is really an assertion of the plural meaning of Scripture. Believing in the unity of the sense of Scripture eliminates all allegorizing of Scripture, ancient or modern."¹

One other problem with this view is mentioned by Hengstenberg.² If one is to use the allegory in regards to the snake and its tempting of the woman, one is forced to do so with the rest of the narrative. This would create great problems when one thinks of the many times in the New Testament where the fall of the man and the woman, therefore, all mankind is mentioned. The fall of mankind was

¹Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 111.

²Hengstenberg, Christology of the Old Testament, p. 14.

real and so was the serpent. This is proven by the first verse of Genesis 3 where it is mentioned that the serpent was the most subtle of all the beasts. This demonstrates that the serpent was real and was not just a semblance of Satan.

The Description

The description of the curse of Satan and the woman really disturbs some. If this really does refer to Satan and the Messiah, why are there no more details given? Certainly a prophecy of this importance would have said more. One of the details that those who hold to this objection want to see is which woman will be used to conquer Satan. There is no definite time or place given to this promise. Why is this so? Perhaps Leupold answers this best when he quotes Luther.

One point of view, usually overlooked but made plain already by Luther, deserves mention. By leaving open the question of just what woman the Savior was to be born, God mocks the tempter, always leaving him in uncertainty which one would ultimately overthrow him, so that the devil had to live in continual dread of every woman's son that was born.¹

The answer that Luther gave was not related in the Bible. However, the logic holds true and deserves some consideration.

¹Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, I, p. 168.

New Testament References

One objection which holds a great deal of weight is the lack of New Testament support for Genesis 3:15 being the Protevangelium. More specifically, why do Jesus Christ or His apostles not refer to this as one of the great predictions of the coming of the Messiah? Certainly, this being the very first claim would have held some importance and would have warranted comment.

This objection is best answered by understanding the nature of this verse and its content. Hengstenberg suggests an answer which could negate this objection. He says:

The answer is easy. The writers of the New Testament did not distinctly refer to this prophecy to Jesus, because it is not sufficiently definite, since it contains no direct reference to the person of the Messiah. It was natural, that the writers of the New Testament would quote the many more obvious passages. It is not however true, that the New Testament contains no allusion to this passage. See the place already referred to in the Epistle to the Romans. But that Christ and His apostles here found the Protevangelium, in our sense of the term, is plainly proved by those passages in the New Testament, from which we have shown, that they believed Satan to have been concerned in the apostasy.¹

The verse that Hengstenberg refers to in Romans was Romans 16:20 which this paper has already mentioned.

¹Hengstenberg, Christology of the Old Testament, p. 23.

when the curse, which God had denounced against the earth, began to be executed, and man was driven out from paradise."¹ He also shows how man would realize that his body had weakened and become frail. All of this would remind him of his guilt.

But the conviction of his guilt must have made him feel his need of a redemption, and thus have prepared him to welcome the promise of future victory over the kingdom of darkness. Nor was this promise important to Adam and Eve alone, but to all their posterity. The expectations of a future and glorious redemption, which are found to have existed among heathen nations, are but echoes of this and similar predictions imparted to the ancient fathers of the human race.²

The position of this verse in the narrative gives added cause to believe that the first parents understood the promise. The promise is given in verse 15 before God spelled out the dreaded details of the curse which follows in the verses afterward. The promise served as a gracious preface to the horrible things that would proceed because of their sin.

The Seed of the Devil

This was considered briefly in the previous chapter. The question that must be answered is who is the seed of the Devil? When one examines the text it appears that

23. ¹Hengstenberg, Christology of the Old Testament, p.

²Ibid., p. 24.

The answer that was given again goes back to the thought of details. It appears that the lack of details in the passage presents a problem. Yet the amount of material that would have been understood by those being addressed must be considered. The situation of fear and guilt of the man and woman would have definitely been recognized by an omnipotent God. He also knew exactly how much they could understand at that time. To give them any more information might have been fruitless, since their minds were already affected by sin. This all leads to the next objection that has been raised in regards to this passage.

What Was Understood?

If God did not give too much information in Genesis were Adam and Eve able to understand it? Truly if this had been an annunciation of the Gospel, it would have been too much for them to comprehend. One must look at the situation that has just developed in the preceding verses. Adam and Eve had taken of the forbidden fruit. They had come to the drastic realization that they had sinned and felt guilty. Their guilt is demonstrated by the fact that they attempted to hide themselves when they heard the footsteps of God. Hengstenberg comments on this guilt by saying, "This guilt must have increased greatly,

the whole of mankind would be found in the posterity of the woman. Any thought of the seed of Satan being bad men is cancelled out by this assumption.¹ Yet, there must be someone who can fit the qualifications and be opposed to the seed of the woman. The answer is that the relationship being stated in Genesis 3:15 is one of a spiritual nature. "We remark, in reply, that nothing is more common in the Scripture, than for the natural relation between father and son to be transferred to spiritual relations."² It is even found that the godly men are referred to as sons of God. In Exodus 4:22-23 the children of Israel are referred to as the sons of God. It is of particular importance when those who have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ have the distinct honor to be called the Sons of God (John 1). If this can be done when referring to God and His spiritual seed, it would seem possible when referring to Satan. It would also explain how men could be the posterity of Satan.

When one considers what the victory of Christ means, it is obvious that not only is Satan conquered, but also his followers who are none other than his spiritual seed. This is consistent with seeing Genesis 3:15 as the real first Gospel.

¹Ibid., p. 23.

²Ibid.

One should also be reminded of one other thing when considering this whole problem. The fact that Genesis 3:15 is considered by some to be the Protevangelium must also be accompanied with the thought that this comes out of comparison with other Scriptures. This fact is not borne out alone. The verse only reaches its true significance when one considers the other verses in the Bible which support such a notion. This method of Bible study is not new and is certainly not improper.

There is no question that there are passages in the Holy Scripture that are very obscure for modern man which may have been very clear to the authors of the passages. Or there may be some doctrinal suggestions in Holy Scripture that we do not know how to bring out into their full clarity of meaning . . . the Reformers proclaimed that Scripture interprets Scripture.¹

This has been the principal hermeneutic when dealing with this passage. It is true that this passage might have made much clearer sense to the author than it does to readers today. However, other passages in the New Testament come to the aid of the modern reader and show him the meaning of this passage. These passages have been placed in the Word of God for this deliberate purpose. This whole problem demonstrates the beauty and unity of the Scriptures.

¹Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, p. 105.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

A careful examination of Genesis 3:15 has led to the conclusion that the passage is best understood as the Protevangelium. This has been established by examination of the serpent and the personality behind the creature in addition to the relationship this person has in the curse and to the woman.

A study of the context--both immediate and general--also demonstrated that the Protevangelium understanding did no violence to the text and this interpretation fits the context well. The survey of the various views has shown that there is a wide diversity of opinion when considering Genesis 3:15. Yet, the traditional view held by the Jewish and Christian Church is that Genesis 3:15 is the Protevangelium.

The linguistic arguments presented concluded that the serpent must be understood as being a literal snake in the Garden of Eden. Yet, the curse had a two-fold meaning and referred to Satan as well. The study of the principal verbs demonstrated that this understanding fits well when considering passages in the New Testament.

Common objections to the traditional view of this passage were answered. The answers indicated that the seed of the serpent was of a spiritual nature and that the Protevangelium was most probably understood to some extent by Adam and Eve.

In understanding the passage as the Protevangelium the Christian is given a hope that is substantiated throughout the rest of God's Word. The final victory in this world will be that of Jesus Christ conquering the foe Satan.

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