

Genesis 3:8-24 “Dust to dust”

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In my family, I'm the youngest of 3 brothers. One brother is 2 years older than me. The other is 7 years older. When I was a teenager, occasionally my parents would feel it was safe to leave all three of us at home alone while they went out for dinner. I'm not sure why they thought that was OK. None of our behaviour would have indicated to them that this was a sensible idea. Yet they did!

When they did go out and leave us alone, we would play football. At night. In the hallway. A hallway that was 8 meters long and 90 centimetres wide.

Then, at around 10pm, we hear the car arrive in the driveway. And I run. It's 2 hours past my bedtime, so I run. Into my bedroom, jump into bed, and pull the covers up so they couldn't see the sweat dripping down my face.

I KNEW I would be in trouble. So I hid.

Hiding is what you do when you don't want to be found or exposed. When you don't want someone to know what you've done.

In Genesis 2:25, we read: “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”

Now, the man says to God in 3:10,

- “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

God is out for his daily walk in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day, but something has changed. The man and woman are hiding, because they realised they were naked. And God says:

- “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

Why is nakedness suddenly bad? Is it wrong? Is it evil?

- **Nudity**

Genesis 3 begins by explaining to us WHAT sin is – when we question God's word. When we wanted to be LIKE HIM rather than being “in his image”. Now, in the second half of the chapter, we hear the **results** of sin.

And it begins with nakedness. But this is about more than nudity. This is what we call, in the Bible, “**allegory**”.

- **Which means that this is a story with a deeper meaning.**

Yes, they were literally naked and covered themselves up. But this is about more than nudity. This is about being **exposed** before God.

They cover up their nakedness and hide. God finds them and exposes them.

“Did you eat from the tree? God says.

The man says: “The woman gave it to me!”

The woman says: “The serpent deceived me!”

Then God turns to the snake and begins with the curses.

- **Snakes**

Now again, literally, we could look at this and say:

Because of their evil craftiness, snakes are bad – especially talking ones. And now, they crawl on the ground, and bite people’s heels and people squash their heads.

Literally, there **is** hostility between humans and snakes.

But there is no literal mention of Satan here. All we’re getting here is a bad feel for snakes.

But there is much more when we look at the context of the whole Bible. There is a **deeper meaning** for the snake. This is about MORE than just a snake.

Let’s go to Revelation 12:7-9. This is the scene of a battle in heaven between the angels and a dragon. The battle is lead by Michael, God’s lead archangel, who is fighting against a dragon, who is identified later as Satan – let’s read:

- 7Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9The great dragon was hurled down—**that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray**. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

The dragon, a fallen angel, is the ancient serpent, the devil.

Satan is the snake. This is not just about snakes and people. There’s a **deeper meaning**.

This is about a spiritual battle. Satan has come between God and humanity. Now there is now a **continuing** battle – evil is striking our heels every day. The snake gives us an image of how Satan works in this world – like a snake.

Satan does announce himself. He doesn’t tap us on the shoulder and say: “Hi. I’m Satan. I’m just going to give you an evil thought to turn you away from God. Are you ready?”

No. He **STRIKES!** At the heel. STRIKES from behind. This is not the image of a domestic dog who looks at you as if to ask: “Do you want to go for a walk?”

No. If you've ever been bitten by a snake, you probably never saw it coming!

Here is the deeper meaning. We now live in a world of evil. We hide from God. We feel exposed. And Satan attacks us when we're not looking.

But the curse also comes between the man and woman, and between humanity and the earth.

- *16To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."*

Childbirth is now MORE painful.

On top of that, woman has a "**desire**" for her husband, who takes on a "ruling:" attitude. This is the curse at work. Before the fall, there was no domination. No suppression. But because of the curse, the relationship between a husband and wife has been upset.

These two words – desire and rule – give us a picture of a battle (like in Genesis 4:7 – Cain versus sin). Marriage is now a battle. Full of the conflict of "desire and rule". These words are descriptive of a broken relationship. But they are not prescriptive. In other words, it doesn't HAVE to be like this.

- If you put metal near salt water it will rust. That's what happens. So if you don't want it to rust, you protect it. You paint it. You clean it. You look after it. You don't let the **natural** state take over. Because of the fall, our NATURAL state for husband/wife relationships is one of rule and desire. But as Christians, we fight **against** that natural sinful state of conflict. Why? Because we can! And we should.

Then God turns to the **man** and says:

- *"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life."*

Again, this is not GOOD. This is not the way God wanted it to be. To a certain degree we **cannot** overcome this completely. It's out of our control to bring the whole of creation completely under control. There is now a broken relationship between humanity and creation.

So the curse reveals that we've damaged our relationship with God, with each other, and with the creation itself.

But there's one more thing:

- **Death.**

Again, is this literal? God said that when they eat from it, they will certainly die. But they're still walking around! Adam was 130 years old when he had Seth. Then he lived another 800 years. (Gen 5:3-4). Again, there is a **deeper meaning** for death than just physical. It's about MORE than death.

What happened the moment they ate the fruit? Their relationship with God, with each other, with creation – died. Then they were cast out of the garden.

Yes, death will now literally come. But death has already arrived. The death of relationship. The death of trust. Their DEATH is bondage, curse, alienation.

- **Summary (x2)**

So on the surface, we have **naked bodies, bad talking snakes and death** that doesn't seem to come for about 1000 years.

But looking more deeply, we have **humanity exposed** before God. We have a constant **struggle with evil** biting at our heels every day. And we have the **death of relationships**.

So what hope is there?

What's amazing in this passage is that the personal name of God – Yahweh, translated as LORD – is added back again. The snake doesn't use it. Eve doesn't use it when she talks to the snake. But now it's back. The personal name of Yahweh is back. Because this is personal.

God walks through the garden looking for them. He doesn't just throw them out. He seeks them. And finds them. He passes judgement. But **then** He makes animal coverings for them. He clothes them. And what else? Now that they have sinned, he makes sure they don't eat from the tree of life – so they will not remain in that sinful, fallen, cursed state forever.

What does all this mean for us?

We are all exposed. Satan is always attacking. And death is certain for every one of us.

- God will judge. **But he will also show mercy.** So there is no point hiding. And why would we?

The rest of the book of Revelation tells us how God provides the child who will crush the serpent's head once and for all. (The one referred to in Genesis 3:15.) Jesus is the one who will crush Satan and restore peace between us and creation, between us and each other, and between us and God, and put an end to death.

If we are hiding from God, even if we are hiding a *part* of our life from God, we might think we're only hiding from his judgment. But we're actually hiding from his mercy.

Let's pray.