

Illustrations of Immanuel: A Serpent Cursed

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November 30, 2025

Genesis 3:14-15 ¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. ¹⁵ And 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."

I woke up this morning and realized that for the first time in about a week, I had no pie. This was a little disappointing. Adam and Eve woke up the morning after our text with a much greater disappointment. They could never return to the garden. They could no longer walk with God in the cool of the evening. They were destined to die. Until their death, they would live with all the sorrow and suffering of a sinful, dying world. Yet, they also had God's promise, and that promise gave them—and us—hope: hope for a return to a world where righteousness dwells.

What does God mean when He says the serpent will go on its belly?

Does this mean that, prior to this, serpents had wings or legs? Christians have been asking this question for 2,000 years, and the Israelites probably asked it for another 1,500 years before that. When God first inspired Moses to write Genesis, there were likely Israelites in the wilderness who wondered, "Did the serpent originally have legs?" Then someone else would say, "Of course not," and an argument would ensue.

The answer is: we don't know, and there is no way to know. The Bible doesn't tell us. You are free to believe what you want, but you are not free to waste your time insisting you are right.

When we argue about things like this, we miss the point of the passage. The Bible makes it clear that God wasn't really talking to the serpent at all—He was talking to Satan. Satan chose the form of a serpent to deceive Adam and Eve. God uses the image of a serpent to picture the destruction of Satan. The serpent crawls on its belly, but more importantly,

Satan will crawl on his belly. His power to deceive will be limited by the Word of God, and he will be crushed by the Son of God.

We know—and this is our theme for Advent this year—that this passage is an illustration of Immanuel. It is not an ancient fable about how the serpent lost its legs. It is a picture of how God would send His Son into the world, and through that Son, crush the head of the serpent (the devil) and set us free from sin.

Even though this curse is spoken to Satan, these words are meant for Adam and Eve to give them hope at this crucial and dark moment in their lives. These words are also meant for us, to give us hope when we face disappointment, suffering and death.

The curse of the serpent is an illustration of Immanuel's victory over Satan—an illustration that gives us hope when we wake up disappointed because of our sin and death. Let us consider what this promise teaches us about the hope we have.

This Hope Comes Only Through Judgment

Without judgment, there is no hope of salvation. The head of the serpent will be crushed, and the seed of the woman will die. God brings judgment on sin and gives hope to Adam and Eve by promising judgment on Satan and on sin. The promise of the gospel comes only through judgment; without judgment on sin, there is no gospel.

The common attitude in our society is that we want all the gospel with none of the judgment. We want all the love of God without any of His wrath. It is commonly believed that if God were good, everyone would be saved.

But God doesn't work that way. From the beginning, His salvation comes not by ignoring sin, but only through judgment on sin.

Romans 3:26: "To demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

There must be judgment, but the hope our text gives us this morning is that this judgment is not pronounced on us, but first of all on Satan. Satan's head will be crushed; he will be destroyed.

However, that is not enough, since Adam and Eve also participated in the sin. Thus, judgment is also pronounced on Jesus, who takes our place and receives the judgment we deserve.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22: “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

There must be judgment, for without judgment there is no salvation. But those who, in Christ, accept God’s condemnation of their sin also receive forgiveness through Jesus, who died for us. It is Jesus’ heel that is bitten, not ours. There must be judgment, but in His mercy, judgment falls on Jesus instead of on us.

This Hope Comes in the Fullness of Time

This hope was not immediate. God says He will send the seed of the woman but gives very little detail about how or when this will happen.

Adam and Eve sinned. They were cast out of the garden, and were doomed to die. But this promise reassured them that they would not suffer forever, that one day they would return to the garden and to righteousness and holiness. At first, Adam and Eve seemed to think Cain was the promised seed.

God gave them very few details about when or how this would happen. The only thing Adam and Eve knew was that the Messiah would be born of a woman. This was enough for them. They had the promise that God would save them from their sin, and they lived by faith in that simple promise.

Later, God revealed more detail: the Messiah would come from Abraham, then from Jacob, then from Judah, then from David. Isaiah explains He would be born of a virgin. Gabriel explains how that is possible when he appears to Mary.

But the simple sentence in Genesis 3:15 was enough for many saints. Think of all the saints like Job and Noah, who persevered with nothing more than this one simple promise.

We always want to know when and how. We want God to give us a date and tell us exactly when He will come again. But these things haven’t been given to us, and they aren’t necessary.

In the fullness of time, God’s Son will come again, as He came 2,000 years ago. In the meantime, we live by faith in the promise we have.

This Hope Comes Only Through Division

God says, “I will put enmity”—that is, war and hatred—“between your seed and her seed.” This enmity is a picture of how Jesus would come and do battle with Satan. Satan would attempt to destroy Jesus on the cross, but it is Jesus who would crush his head. It is through Satan’s own efforts to destroy the Christ that Christ will be victorious. The serpent strikes, but when he strikes, the heel of God crushes his head.

This enmity also warns us that we, too, will be at war with Satan and the seed of Satan. The seed of Satan is the lie he told to Eve and all those who believe and follow that lie.

Remember what the lie of Satan is: “You would be better off without God.” If you eat the fruit, you will be like God. You won’t need God anymore. You will know for yourself what is good and what is evil.

That sounds exactly like our society. We don’t need God. We are better off without Him. Religion only causes trouble. We can decide for ourselves what is good and what is bad. It shouldn’t surprise us when so many in the world are opposed—even at war—with Christ and His church.

Jesus Himself said, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” There will be enmity and hatred with those who are the seed of Satan. As much as we might want to be friends with both Christ and the world, it is not possible. If we stand with Christ, we will be hated by the world.

Christ came not to make friends with Satan and his seed, but to destroy the works of darkness.

In these verses, God beautifully pictures the hope we have in Jesus. He came to suffer the punishment for our sin, so that we don’t have to. He came to make war on Satan and his lies, and was victorious over them. He came so that, through Him, we might be restored to the garden and to the righteousness of God.