

Genesis 3:20–24 — Adam Called His Wife's Name Eve

Faith in Adam's Naming, Coats of Skins as the Mark of Death, Endless Being vs. Eternal Life, the Cherubim, and Clothing Throughout Scripture

Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:20–24; Revelation 2:7; 22:1–2

“And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.”

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” (Revelation 2:7)

Adam's Naming of Eve: An Act of Faith

Adam had been listening to everything that God said — to the serpent, to his wife, and then to himself. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. As he listened to God's announcement to the serpent about the coming seed of the woman, and as he heard that his wife would have conception multiplied, he understood that time was going on — that the race was to continue — and that there was a coming deliverer. In verse 20, he calls his wife Eve, meaning life or living, because she was to be the mother of all living. That naming is an act of faith, laying hold on what God had said.

The degree of understanding was incomplete. Eve's comment at the birth of her firstborn, whom she named Cain (Acquired), suggests she thought perhaps this was the promised seed; she may have thought the deliverer was arriving immediately. She was mistaken. Abel was named Vapor or Breath, something

passing — and indeed he passed. Then Seth was named Appointed, and Seth's son Enosh means frail man. There is a progression of understanding in the names, a deepening sense of man's true condition and of the distance yet to be traveled before the promised deliverer arrived. But it began here with Adam's act of faith in naming his wife: she is life, she is the mother of all living, because God has said the seed will come.

The human race descends from one source, from Adam and from Eve. Acts 17:26 picks this up in Paul's speech at Athens: God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth. This is the origin. It means there are no sub-human races, no class of persons who are somehow less than fully human. The gospel goes out indiscriminately to every one of them, because every one of Adam's descendants is the proper recipient of the message of the coming seed.

Coats of Skins: The First Death, and What It Points To

Verse 20 is an act of faith on Adam's part; verse 21 is God's response to it. He clothes them with coats of skins. An animal died. This is, outside of the spiritual death Adam and Eve experienced at the fall, the first physical death recorded in Scripture. And immediately upon the fallen pair is put this mark of death. The significance runs through the whole of Scripture. Abel understood it: he brought the firstlings of his flock with the fat thereof, bringing death. Cain did not bring death; he brought the fruit of the cursed ground, and that was not acceptable to God. For persons to come into the presence of God without the mark of death is a heinous offense against the holiness of God. God cannot receive an approach that does not acknowledge the ground of approach.

Just think what Eve might have been tempted to say. My name means living; surely a coat of death is not appropriate for me. I should have something that expresses life. But what Eve needed was exactly what the coats of skin provided,

because she was part of a fallen race that needed the covering of a substitute's death. The first garments in the world were not for display or fashion. They were the mark that a death had occurred, that a substitute had given its life, and that the man and woman stood clothed in that. In pure righteousness, the penalty of their sin should have fallen on them. In grace, it fell on a substitute — pointing forward to the Lord Jesus, who bore the sentence himself so that God's righteousness is fully satisfied and his love freely expressed.

Notice that the coats of skin were entirely the Lord God's work. Jehovah Elohim made them and clothed them. There was no human input, no part of the work that came from man's effort. Our salvation is entirely God's provision. Joseph sending his brethren home with garments and wagons provided everything they needed to come to him. The prodigal son had the best robe put upon him; it was the father's robe, not one the son brought. Isaiah 61:10: I am clothed with the garments of salvation. The theme of God's clothing, God's provision of what is suitable for his presence, begins here in Genesis 3 and runs to Revelation 19 — the bride clothed in fine linen, bright and clean, which is the righteousnesses of the saints, wrought in them by Christ through the Spirit.

Clothing as a Theme Through Scripture

What God provides as clothing says something about both the giver and the one clothed. Colossians 3:12–14 uses the same imagery in a moral register: put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering. These are moral qualities that are to be put on as a garment. The old man and the new man in Colossians are not the old and new natures; as W.J. Patterson pointed out, they are generic terms — the old man is Adam, the new man is Christ. There are only two men. Put on the new man means put on Christ; externally, baptism carries this meaning (as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ), but it is also to be true inwardly in the believer's conduct and character.

Behold the Man: The Knowledge of Good and Evil and No More

In verse 22 the Lord God says: behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil. That statement does not end with a period and a triumphant observation that man has attained something great. It ends with a stop and a concern: and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever. He became as God in this one respect only — knowledge of good and evil. But God has that knowledge in conjunction with inherent holiness, which repulses the evil and cleaves to the good. What man acquired was the knowledge in conjunction with inherent sinfulness, the exact opposite. So the resemblance to God was only in the knowledge, and that knowledge without holiness is not a gain but a catastrophic loss.

The sentence in verse 22 is grammatically peculiar — it trails off, as if the thought is too awful to complete: and now, lest he put forth his hand and take of the tree of life and eat and live forever — therefore the Lord God sent him forth. J.N. Darby's translation preserves this unfinished character, as though the prospect is too dreadful to state fully. Endless being in a fallen state — the entire human race perpetuating itself as sinners forever, never dying, never coming to judgment — was to be prevented. And it was prevented.

Endless being is not the same as eternal life. Scripture consistently uses eternal life to mean something happy and positive, inseparably connected with knowing God and with Christ himself. All men will have endless being — those cast into the lake of fire have endless being, but no one would call that eternal life. When the scripture uses eternal life, it has in mind a quality and a fellowship, not mere duration. Eternal life is Christ; it is in the Son; it is had by those who are joined to him.

The Cherubim and the Flaming Sword: Governmental Justice, and the Tree of Life Reopened

He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way to the tree of life. The cherubim are the executors of God's justice and government. They appear woven into the veil of the tabernacle; they appear on the mercy seat, looking down upon the blood-sprinkled covering, at rest because the blood brings rest to divine justice respecting sin. In Ezekiel 1 they are the wheels of God's governmental throne. In Revelation 4 their features are mixed with those of the seraphim, pointing to judgment with mercy. But here they stand in the character of God's justice, guarding the way to the tree of life against any fallen man's approach.

The flaming sword turned every way. There is no loophole. Man is always looking for loopholes in justice — the whole army of lawyers that labors to find gaps in the law of the land is a reflection of this perpetual human project. But the sword of divine justice turns every way; there is no getting through it by cleverness or persistence. Yet this is not the end of the story. To the overcomer at Ephesus the Lord promises in Revelation 2:7: to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. The way that was shut in Genesis 3 is reopened — not to fallen man on his own terms, but through the overcomer who has recovered first love for Christ himself. The tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God is Christ; and the way to him is through death, through the cross, through union with him who is himself the tree of life.

What man lost in the garden is not restored to an identical form but taken up and glorified. God never merely restores. Christ always brings in something higher. The tree of life in Revelation 22 stands on both banks of the river of life proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb, bearing twelve fruits, its leaves for the healing of the nations. This is infinitely beyond what was in Eden. Everything where man fails, Christ takes up and makes good to God's glory.

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.