

THE FIRST PROMISE OF THE GOSPEL

Text: Genesis 3:15

Belgic Confession Art 17

Readings: Gen 3:1-15, Gal 3:1-18; Revelation 12

Theme: God describes conflict between the people of God and those of Satan but promises that Satan will be defeated.

Purpose: To explain the conflict between the people of God and those of Satan and to put our hope in Jesus Christ who has and will defeat Satan.

At some time or other all of us make promises to other people.

A mother promises to make a special birthday cake for her daughter.

A father promises to take his sons to an important rugby game.

Parents promise to take their children to the zoo.

A husband promises to take his wife out for dinner.

Sometimes we might even *add* promises we have made. This husband might promise his wife that after they have gone out for dinner they will then go to a movie.

We know how important it is to *keep* your promises, to do what you have said you will do.

Today we are going to consider **the first promise God made** in the history of the world, a promise he made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He made this soon after they had disobeyed his command and had fallen into sin.

They knew they had sinned and so they hid from him. But God knew where they were and he knew they had broken his command and had eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

God then announced the punishments that would come on the man and the woman because of their sin. He did not curse them, but he did curse the serpent: "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals" (v 14). Snakes are one of the most hated animals in the world. We recoil from them and are afraid of them. They are a symbol of all that is horrible and repulsive.

God said to it (v 14); "You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life." We don't know where snakes lived before this or how they moved. Maybe God was simply sending it back to the ground where it had always lived, but now its life in the dust was a symbol of its humiliation. Children, some of you might know the character *Lowly Worm* in the Richard Scarry books; the serpent was given a *lowly* position, biting the dust.

God then went on to warn the serpent that there would be an ongoing conflict between his offspring and that of the woman, and that one day the serpent would be crushed. Adam and Eve were listening to these words and for them this was a promise, this was good news. God took the initiative in salvation and promised to help his people. Here he lit the lamp of prophecy, a lamp that he kept burning ever brighter until the coming of Jesus as the Messiah.

We will explore this promise by considering its parties, its progress and its person.

1. In this promise God identified **TWO PARTIES**, two groups, two communities – the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman.

a. The **offspring of the serpent** refers all who follow Satan. The serpent represents the devil, the father of lies, the murderer. Satan was speaking through the serpent.

The word translated offspring is the Hebrew word for "seed". This does not mean seed or offspring in a physical sense as the direct children of Satan, because he can't produce children. Rather it refers to a spiritual likeness; it describes all those connected with Satan - the evil angels and all the men and women who take his side throughout the history of the world; those who identify with him, who join him.

b. The **offspring of the woman** refers to those who believe in God and who side with him - the angels of the Lord and his people, the church of all ages and all places. They have been called out of darkness and into his marvellous light; they worship and serve God.

The genealogies of the book of Genesis concentrate on these people of God and show that God continues the seed of the woman. These family trees follow the line of Seth, and then go on to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Judah.

The history of the world can be described as the conflict between these two communities, as the enmity between these two kingdoms.

2. THE PROGRESS OF THE PROMISE

a. One way to trace this progress is to observe **God's ongoing protection** of his people, of the seed of the woman.

There were many times when it seemed as though the line of the people of God would not continue because of the enmity and violence of Satan and his people.

Abel was killed by his brother Cain, but God raised up Seth (Gen 4:8,25). Sarah was barren, and so was Isaac's wife Rebekah, and so was Jacob's wife Rachel, but each time God provided a son. Jacob and his family were starving in Canaan but God provided for them through Joseph who was second in command in Egypt.

Later on the Egyptians cruelly oppressed the people of Israel but God protected them and eventually led them out under the leadership of Moses.

Later still the Babylonians ransacked Jerusalem and burnt it to the ground and carried off many people into exile; but 70 years later God brought some of those people, a remnant, back to the city. A little later Haman tried to destroy all the Jews throughout the Persian Empire but God protected them through Esther and Mordecai.

All through the Old Testament God protected his people, the offspring of the woman.

b. As well as this God also kept adding **further promises** to the one he had first given to Adam and Eve.

The end of the book of Genesis Moses recorded how Jacob spoke to his son Judah and promised that the sceptre would not depart from this tribe until it came to whom it belonged (49:10).

Later God spoke through the pagan prophet Balaam promising that "a star will come out of Jacob, a sceptre will rise out of Israel" (Num 24:17).

The prophet Isaiah gave many wonderful prophecies about the coming Messiah who would be called Emmanuel, the Branch of Jesse's stem, the key to the house of David, the Wonderful Counsellor and the Prince of Peace. Micah spoke about a ruler over Israel whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (5:2). And Malachi closed the Old Testament prophecies by speaking about the "sun of righteousness" who would arise with healing in his wings (4:2).

3. This brings us to **THE PERSON** all these prophecies were pointing to, the person who fulfilled all the promises of God, including that very first promise of the gospel.

a. We have seen that the **seed** that God promised to Eve referred to her godly offspring, to the people of God; but it also pointed to one person, the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul wrote, "The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed' meaning one person, who is Christ" (Gals 3:17).

Jesus himself knew that all these Scriptures - the law, the prophets and the psalms - all testified about him (John 5:39f; Luke 24:25ff).

b. The enmity which had been present in all of history between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness eventually focused in **two representatives**, one from each kingdom – Christ and Satan. Just as David and Goliath fought representing Israel and the Philistines respectively, so Christ and Satan did battle representing the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. They came face to face, head to head! This is described in the symbols and visions recorded in Revelation 12.

Satan's attack on Jesus began soon after he was born with Herod's terrible murder of all the babies in Bethlehem.

Some 30 years later, when Jesus was about to begin his ministry, Satan came to him in the wilderness with three attractive temptations, but Jesus resisted them and rejected what Satan had to offer.

Jesus himself attacked Satan and his kingdom as he cast evil spirits out of people, as he preached the kingdom of God, as he rescued people out of Satan's grip!

The conflict came to a head after only three years of Jesus' ministry when Satan prompted Judas to betray Jesus, he urged the chief priests to kill Jesus, and twisted Pilate's arm to order his crucifixion.

c. The cross was the decisive point in the battle. This was the centre-piece of the conflict.

At the time it seemed like a terrible defeat; it looked as though Satan had won.

But in dying for the sins of his people Jesus won the battle. In offering himself as the sacrifice for sin he achieved a great victory. The apostle John wrote, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8b). In this conflict Satan struck Jesus on the heel, but Jesus crushed the serpent's head.

The words "crush" and "strike" translate the same Hebrew word. The NIV uses different words because a blow to the heel is painful whereas a blow to the head is fatal. On the cross Jesus endured the anguish and torment of hell, and then he died. But the blow Satan gave him was not fatal. Paul wrote; "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." (Col 2:15). This was not a battle fought between two equal and opposite forces; no, the Lord Jesus was far superior, far stronger, and he won that conflict and will win the last battle!

Jesus proved this victory over Satan by rising from the dead. That proved that sin had been paid for and that Satan had been defeated.

We sing of that with these words:

Sin's bonds severed, we're delivered;

Christ has bruised the serpent's head;

death no longer is the stronger;

hell itself is captive led.

Christ has risen from death's prison;

o'er the tomb he light has shed. (SttL 310)

But the battle is still on. The 6th of June each year is the anniversary of D-Day in 1944 when the allied forces launched a massive invasion of the beaches of Normandy, a battle that turned the tide of World War 2.

Christ's victory on the cross is the Christian D-Day; that was the turning point in the battle, that was a decisive victory.

But we are still fighting, waiting for V-Day, for the last battle, the final victory, the ultimate triumph of Christ that will take place when he returns!

A battle is still going on between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. All through history there will be this opposition, this struggle, this warfare between God and Satan, light and darkness, good and evil.

The enemy is strong; he is cornered and so dangerous, and can do great harm. Watch out for him, keep alert, be on your guard, pray that you will not fall into temptation.

But at the same time you need to be confident and hold on to God's promises. Remember that we are on the winning side.

Jesus said, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt 16:18).

The apostle Paul, addressing the church living in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, assured them writing, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom 16:20).

The apostle John wrote about this in the last book of the Bible informing us that that ancient serpent, who is the devil, Satan, will be thrown into the lake of burning fire, along with all his evil angels (Rev 20:10).

In the Garden of Eden, near the beginning of human history, God gave Adam and Eve **the first promise of the gospel**.

All through the Old Testament God kept expanding on that promise, adding more revelation, shedding more light, building on the truth already given, until all these promises were all fulfilled in birth of Jesus the Messiah.

That first promise has grown to gather up all the promises of the gospel which are ours through faith in Christ: the promises of life, victory and hope in the name of Jesus Christ.

Be assured that God has, and will, keep all his promises in and through Jesus our Lord.

Amen