

Amazing Truths of the Pentateuch (5)
When the Garden of Eden Closed its Gates
Genesis 3:8-24

Introduction:-

One of the great pleasures of life is to visit a beautiful garden in order to experience something of its wonder and beauty. In the UK, some long-lost classic gardens have been rediscovered, and even restored, with the same structural planning, flowers and plants, making their long-lost appeal possible for a new generation. In our passage today, we learn how the Garden of Eden or Delights (God's first Garden), finally closed its gates to Adam and Eve, and what the implications of this action were for the rest of humankind. Let us now examine this passage more closely.

1. God's First Question within the Garden (verses 8-13)

This section begins with the words that the man and his wife "heard the sound" (literally "voice") of the Lord as he was walking in the Garden in the cool of the day (literally "the wind of the day"). Was the sound of the Lord's walking equated with the sudden rustling of wind as when the Lord finally appeared to Job in the whirlwind at Job 38:1? But even more interesting here are the words "hear/sound" and "voice", which in the Book of Deuteronomy relate to God's appearance at Mount Sinai as a precursor for Israel to receive and obey the law (e.g. Deut 5:25). Therefore, it is hardly incidental that at the outset of this account, which will finally lead to the pronouncement of God's curses for disobedience, that a subtle but painful reminder of the single requirement for obtaining God's blessing - "to hear/obey the voice of the Lord God", should be made known. The fact that Adam and Eve "hid" from the Lord among the trees was confirmation that their newly acquired gift of knowing good and evil ran counter to God's notion of good. It could not stand with integrity and blessing in the presence of God. Then verse 9 records God's very first question in the Bible - "Where are you?" But note that it is particularly addressed to Adam, possibly because it was to Adam that God originally gave the command not to eat from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the Garden (2:16-17). And so in this sense, true justice from the Judge of all the earth is served. But, Adam will also become the head and representative of sinful and disobedient humanity apart from God, whose sin will be reversed by the obedience of the Second Adam, Christ (Romans 5:12-19). Coming back to verse 8, the Garden of Eden was to be a place of direct communion and intimacy with God, as well as service. Then verse 9 suggests that God always seeks humans out, with the question "Where are you?" Of course, its purpose here is rhetorical, because God has perfect knowledge of where we are, at all times, which further suggests that the purpose of the question was not for the sake of information, but rather to elicit a proper response from man which will lead to confession and repentance. And so, the first question of God may not only be seen as one of approaching judgment, but also one of fellowship, love, and restoration. And this remains as God's searching question to our lives today - "Where are you in terms of my Will and Word for you to today?" Finally in verse 11, God responds not to Adam's "fear" in hiding from him, but rather to the issue of his "nakedness", which goes back to the Tree that God had commanded Adam not to eat from. If only Adam had "feared" God in the right way, he would not have to hide from him. On this basis, Adam had now fully revealed the source of his sin, which amounted to mistrust in the goodness of God, through the breaking of a commandment of God, which would lead to separation from God, as well as spiritual and physical death. Then in the remaining verses 12-13, a process begins of deflecting blame, or "passing the buck" in the order of man, woman, and Serpent (without direct question).

2. God's First Curse within the Garden (verses 14-19)

In this section, the guilty parties are judged in reverse order to that of the previous interrogation by God. Each party, beginning with the Serpent, is addressed directly by God, but only the Serpent and the ground were cursed in a direct way, making this a virtual double curse for the Serpent, for the Serpent must also eat the dust of the ground all the days of its life. Thus the "more crafty" nature of the Serpent (Hebrew - arum), becomes the "more cursed" (Hebrew - arur). Part of the curse of the Serpent is a promise at verse 15, considered a "Messianic" text, with the Septuagint version (LXX) translating "He" singular will crush your head, and you will strike his heel, anticipating Christ's victory over Satan that believers will share (Rom 16:20; Rev 12:9). Next, the woman will experience "greatly increased" pain in childbirth, and in spite of this situation, she will still long for or "desire" the sexual intimacy of her husband (cf. 4:7). And so the word "desire" is better understood within the context of the woman's judgment, than with concepts such as independence or control. Next, the "rule" of the husband is first introduced here as a result of the Fall, and could be a more general reference to "Patriarchy", which would be a departure from what was intended in creation at Genesis 2:18-25. Finally, in verses 17-19, God allocates the most extensive sentence to the man, on the basis of verse 17. This is most important. Disobedience and sin disrupts and distorts every kind of relationship between God, humans, and the environment. The ground from which he was formed is cursed. Work now becomes "toil", and the ground will produce thorns and thistles, as well as plants. Nothing will become easy, but in spite of this, food would become available in order to sustain life (grace). Finally, Adam is reminded of the certainty of physical death, in his return to the dust of the ground from which he was taken (2:7). Spiritual death began at verse 6 where moral autonomy was preferred over the wisdom of God.

3. God's First Banishment from the Garden (verses 20-24)

At the beginning of this last section, in verses 20-21, we find an interlude of grace. First, God himself will cloth man's nakedness - He ultimately does this in the Cross, and unless God provides our clothing, we are lost. Secondly, Eve will become the mother of "all living", indicating that the image of God in man is not totally lost (2:7; 9:6). However, verse 22 poses a problem. What does it mean? It is here recognized that the humans could eat and not die, if they eat of the Tree of Life. Therefore, expulsion from the Garden becomes necessary for death to occur. Further, man's fallen state cannot be perpetuated continually. Finally, notice that God "drives" man from out of the Garden in order to work the ground from which he was taken (verses 23-24). Finally, sanctuary symbolism ends the passage, with the mention of Cherubim with the flaming sword of God's judgment guarding the way back to the Tree of Life.

Conclusion:-

What is this final episode telling us? First, sin drove Adam and Eve from the Garden, in terms of a broken commandment at the centre of the Garden, and the quest for moral autonomy which followed. Thus sin at its primary level involves a broken relationship with God, resulting in a separation from God. In this sense, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Is there a way back? This may be seen in God's first question, "Where are you?" Through Christ, the second Adam, life can begin again. In Christ, we may eat from the Tree of Life again (Revelation 2:7; 22:2-3,14,19). The Father looks out for the wandering son, and welcomes him back to the feast (Luke 15:11-32). May we know that blessing today.