

PREFACE

In the theater—predominantly in the writing of plays and in the actor embracing his or her character—there is something referred to as *subtext*. The subtext for a character is not so much written into the dialogue, or even directions, but is worked out by the individual actor to bring background and depth to the character.

- Where was he born?
- What was his upbringing like?
- What events in his life formed the person he is now?
- What tragedies did he experience that added depth and maturity to his personality today?

Subtext—however it is established by playwright, actor, or director—is critical for bringing to life on stage (or on-screen) a fully formed, believable character in the story.

The first two verses of our text today are fairly straightforward and understandable from the printed page: In v20 “the man” gives his wife a second name; in v21 Yahweh God makes “garments of skin” for the man and woman to replace their inadequate “fig leaves” for covering their nakedness. We require little commentary for us to understand the events described by these two verses.

Both, however, are replete with meaningful *subtext*, information—even supposition—that adds meaning and depth to the straightforward narrative.

Read Genesis 3:20-21.

Before we examine the text I want to add a cautionary note. As we move into this passage we will discover opportunities with which commenters have run riot with their ideas about Adam and Eve’s level of faith—in my opinion assuming far, *far* too much about what was in the minds of the first couple. For example, here is what David Guzik concludes from v21 (“God... clothed them.”): “This indicates that Adam and Eve were saved. Adam had faith in God’s promise of a Savior, and God provided a covering for them through a sacrifice. We will see Adam and Eve in heaven.”

That’s quite a step—and for me a step too far. We can draw analogy or illustration or foreshadowing from this account that *points to* salvation in Christ, but let us not dare to declare with such assurance *that* level of faith and understanding—even prescience—in this primal couple.

Guzik *may* be correct, and we will discover even better possibilities in our passage, but let us be cautious about chiseling those possibilities in granite—e.g., “We will see Adam and Eve in heaven.”

v20

Now the man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.

We have already learned that the word “man” and the name “Adam” are virtually the same word in Hebrew: *adahm*. Here, because the original text includes the definite article—“*the* man” (*ha adahm*)—it should be translated as such, and not with his proper name “Adam.”

As I said, this is the second “name” given to the woman. The first we find in Chapter Two.

Read Genesis 2:23.

(From Session 20)

The etymology behind the words “Woman” and “Man” is more complicated and convoluted than the text and the traditional explanation make it. For example, the margin notes in my Bible explain that the Hebrew for “Woman” is *Ishsha*, while the Hebrew for “Man” is just *Ish*. Luther writes, “Hence it is that Adam gave the name, ‘woman,’ *Ischa*, or ‘man-formed female,’ *virago* or *vira*, [in the Latin] to Eve.”

The idea here is that if we think of the word “Man” in the sense of *mankind*, the “Woman,” as the various etymologies reveal, is different, yet of the same genus. She came *from* man, so she is man, but she is a different sex (through the miraculous transformation by God the surgeon), so she is a Wo-man—not *Ish*, but *Ischa*. The feminine of *Ish*.

Now the man gives his wife a second name: “Eve.” Most of our Bible versions will include a footnote that explains that Eve means “living,” or “life,” but, again, there is more to it than that.

If I may be permitted to invent a word, there is a “forewardlookingness” to this name Eve. It does not mean “the living one,” or even the “life-receiving one”; the name is not about her, as a person, as much as it is about what she is for humanity itself, mankind—as the verse itself explains: “...because she was the mother of all the living.”

Yet even though the name anticipates the future, it is rendered in the Hebrew perfect tense, which means it refers to *an action that is already completed*. All our common versions render this “was”—the closest we can come in English to the Hebrew perfect tense—all except the NIVs, which read “would become.” No, here I believe there *are* grounds for assigning a measure of faith to Adam—much as we will see in Abraham on Mt. Moriah. The writer to the Hebrews explains for us that even without understanding *how*, the patriarch could obediently sacrifice his only son, because he trusted in God’s promise of generations through Isaac.

Then behold, the word of Yahweh came to him, saying, “This one [Ishmael] will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” And He brought him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your seed be.” Then he believed in Yahweh; and He counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:4-6)

Read Hebrews 11:17-19.

Adam took Yahweh God at His word, that his wife would bear seed that will be victorious over the serpent’s seed (v15), and that even though her pain will be now amplified, she “will bear children” (v16). Hence the woman is *right now* “the mother of all the living.”



Even if this be an act of faith and trust in Yahweh on the man’s part, I cannot subscribe to the exalted level of understanding and prescience in Adam that some commenters express. Taking God at His word can still be an infantile level of faith—in fact, it is *more* eloquent when it does *not* understand everything that will follow, for that is the very definition of faith (Hebrews 11:1).

Adam Clarke takes issue even with the name “Eve,” claiming that a more accurate and literal translation would be “Life,” as the Septuagint does indeed render it: “And Adam called the name of his wife Life, because she was the mother of all living.”

Then Yahweh God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and He clothed them.

Of these two verses, v21 seems to be the one where the commentators throw off all restraint (and good sense) to see in the fact that Yahweh God killed an animal or two to clothe the man and woman not just the future Mosaic covenant with its blood sacrifices, but the sacrifice of Christ for the atonement of believers' sins. Again, for us today we can heartily see this anticipating or illustrating God's future sacrificial system, but to place all this in the mind of Adam is a bridge too far in my estimation—in the mind of its author, Moses, of course; but not in the mind of the first man.

Everything going on in v21 is the result of sin—the result of the man and woman's disobedience—yet with a measure of grace mixed in.

Their original, hastily man-made coverings had been fig leaves (v7), which were not just inadequate, and would have to be often replaced, but some have pointed out that these fig leaves would have had a prickly quality—not conducive as a covering for one of the more tender portions of the anatomy. These, too, were bare loin coverings (the word means a girdle), so Yahweh God made for them something more long-wearing and substantial. The Hebrew is *kuttonet* (koot TOH net), which refers to a larger shirt-like tunic, rather than a smaller loin covering.

Just as pain can be a good thing, warning us off from harm, shame can be a good thing wherever sin is present. Yahweh affirms their sense of shame by giving the couple more substantial coverings. But I cannot go along with those who draw from this that a sense of shame that required covering the body was part of God's original ideal. There is no indication at all that earlier He was bothered by their nakedness; it was not a barrier to their communion with Him. No, it was only after sin was introduced into the equation that shame was introduced. Once shame was present, appropriate covering became necessary.

As we have discussed, with sin came death where it had not existed before. And the first instance of death on the earth was of the animal(s) killed to supply the skins the couple would now wear to cover their shame.

It is possible that, as Adam Clarke writes, “It is very likely that the skins out of which their clothing was made were taken off animals whose blood had been poured out as a sin-offering to God; for as we find Cain and Abel offering sacrifices to God, we may fairly presume that God had given them instructions on this...” That is possible, but we have no word to that effect in the first three chapters.

I favor the more balanced approach to this verse by Keil & Delitzsch.

*K&D: By selecting the skins of beasts for the clothing of the first men, and therefore causing the death or slaughter of beasts for that purpose, He showed them how they might use the sovereignty they possessed over the animals for their own good, and even sacrifice animal life for the preservation of human; so that this act of God laid the *foundation* for the sacrifices, even if the first clothing did not prefigure our ultimate “clothing upon” (2Co_5:4), nor the coats of skins the robe of righteousness. (emphasis added)*

Though man would remain vegetarian until after the Flood, his rebellion against God gave entrance to death—first of the beasts, and second of his own.

v22

We’ll just begin our discussion of the rest of Chapter Three in this session, finishing it in our next session.

Then Yahweh God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us to know good and evil; and now, lest he send forth his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever—”

I confess that this verse has always troubled me. Every time I read it it seems that Yahweh God comes off sounding whiny and petulant—even extraordinarily defensive against mere humans. Upon closer examination, however, that is not the case; in fact, as we will see, the second part of v22 represents an act bathed in mercy.

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The motive of Yahweh and the Godhead behind this statement is a matter of debate; it is one of those passages where, because it seems to be so curiously out of character for the One speaking, some have gone to extravagant lengths to explain it away as sarcasm or irony. But that, too, seems grossly out of character for Yahweh God—and especially in this dramatic, earth-changing moment.

Read Genesis 3:2-5.

The serpent did not say that by eating of the tree they would become gods, but *like* God, they would then know good and evil. And v22 proves that the serpent did not lie. He wanted the woman to infer from his words that this new knowledge would be a perfectly splendid new attribute, that the man and woman would in the eating obtain a precious quality otherwise inaccessible. Again, he was partially correct: it was otherwise inaccessible, but it would decidedly not be a good thing.

Based on the common—and quite sensible—interpretation of the *second* part of this verse, I agree with Leupold, who alone (at least in my reading) hears not sarcasm or irony in the words of the first part, but instead, *sadness*. It *grieves* their Maker that His children are no longer innocently good, but now, in an instant, are already well versed in both good and evil. Obtaining the knowledge of both, they immediately chose evil, and this brings profound sadness to the Godhead.

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But this sadness (on the part of the Godhead) produces not more wrath, but mercy. God has poured out His justice, His punishment on the man and woman and serpent for their decisions and actions—all sprinkled with grace—but now He dispenses mercy.

They have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; that is done, and cannot be reversed. But they have not yet eaten from the tree of life—a tree the eating from which would grant them immortal life. Considering their present condition, just imagine what that immortal life would be like. It would not be eternal bliss, but eternal misery.

We will continue our discussion of this verse and the remaining verses in Chapter Three in our next session.

SESSION 31

An Altered Existence, part one Genesis 3:20-22

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