

The Reign Of Death

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Date: 18 October 2026

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[0:00] Genesis chapter 3, verse 8. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, where are you? And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself.

And he said, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? And the man said, the woman who you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree and I ate.

And the Lord God said to the woman, what is this that you have done? And the woman said, the serpent deceived me and I ate.

And man, we'll stop there. This summer I read about the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann was a Nazi war criminal.

[1:16] He was standing trial in 1960 in Israel for his role in sending millions of Jews to their deaths in concentration camps.

One key witness in the trial was a Holocaust survivor named Yehel Dinor. Dinor, upon entering the courtroom, saw Eichmann for the first time since he had sent him to Auschwitz.

And Dinor was suddenly overcome with emotion. He collapsed to the ground and began to sob uncontrollably. Later on, a reporter interviewed Dinor and asked him what it was in that moment that had overcome him and caused such great distress.

And his answer was sobering for us. It wasn't fear of Eichmann, but fear of being Eichmann that overcame him.

He realized in that moment as he looked at this great oppressor of him and murderer of millions of others that he was just a man, just an ordinary man like himself.

[2:39] And he thought if one man is capable of such atrocities, then surely all men must be capable of such things.

The reporter concluded the interview with a sobering summary. Eichmann is in all of us. James Johnston, in his commentary on the Psalms, wrote about this story.

It's where I was first introduced to it. And he added this note at the end of the story. He says, Dinor did not break down and collapse because he saw the horror of sin in one man.

He broke down because he saw the horror of sin in humanity. Eichmann is in all of us because all of us are in Adam, he wrote.

And Adam and Eve sinned against God. And as their children, all of us have inherited their sin nature. We are sinners by birth.

[3:44] And the proof of this is that we are so easily tempted to sin just as they were. And when we begin to examine further in this study of Genesis 3, this is an inescapable reality.

We all sin in Adam. And we all sin in the same way as Adam. And it's the record of this original sin that we covered last week in verses 1 to 7.

And today, though, our text covers the immediate aftermath of that fall. And again, these verses are functioning something like a mirror into our own souls.

Each of us realizing that we do exactly as Adam and Eve do right here in the verses that we've just read. As we work through this section and then the next section here in a couple of weeks, I want to try and make a distinction here.

It's not an entirely firm distinction. There's overlap. But I do want to make something of a distinction between what we would refer to as the consequences of Adam's sin and the effects of Adam's sin.

[5:05] I'm not trying to overcomplicate it. Of course, there's overlap here. But here's what I mean in the distinction. By consequences, I mean those punitive judgments of God that are in response to our sin.

And I think we see those most clearly in verses 14 to 24. We'll get there in two weeks. Next week, we hear from Austin. Two weeks from now, we hear 14 to 24.

When we get to that passage, what is it that we find? We see that God is actually issuing a curse on the serpent, a curse on the ground. He then explains the consequences, the judgment that will come upon the man and the woman.

He expels them from the garden. All of those are punitive judgments from God. They're the consequences that God is pouring out on Adam and Eve. But that's a little bit different than what we read in 8 to 13 or see unfolding in the narrative of 8 to 13.

Here, I think maybe it's better to understand effects of sin. And by effects, I mean those natural results of sin's power and presence in Adam and Eve immediately following their fall.

[6:20] That's what I want us to focus on this morning. Here's another way to think about it. In chapter 2, God said that on the day that they eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he says it in 2:17, on that day you shall surely die.

But then we get to chapter 3 last week and we read those first seven verses and we see them doing exactly as God had commanded them not to do. Eve and then Adam, they take the fruit, they eat the fruit, but then they do not die.

How are we to understand that? They continue to live. Death then, we understand, should not be reduced to the mere extinguishing of the body.

Of course, that's part of the consequences. God is going to tell Adam later on in chapter 3 that because of all of this, you are from the dust and to the dust you shall return.

There will be an extinguishing of his body eventually. But yet, we find here that death is somehow already reigning. Said Ian Duggett, we read this last week, in the Bible, death is the reversal of life, not of existence.

[7:42] Adam and Eve's experience of life in its fullness immediately diminished as their sin exposed them to shame and fear.

What we find in the aftermath of the fall is that death immediately began to reign in Adam and Eve through the pervasive power of sin.

And these are what we're calling the effects of sin. This is the natural result of sin's presence and power as death immediately begins to reign in Adam and Eve.

And all of this is evident in their feelings of guilt and shame, but it's also evident in the choices that they made as God confronted them. Their hearts here, in 8 to 13, if you slow down and ponder it, their hearts are suddenly hardened.

They're filled with fear. Their corruption has spread to every part of their being. In truth, they had just died, just not in the way that they expected that death would come.

[9:07] And it happened immediately. Writes Kent Hughes, In an instant, the original couple passed from life to death, from sinlessness to sin, from harmony to alienation, from trust to distrust, from ease to dis-ease.

It did not take a day. It took a millisecond, he writes. It's immediate. They're dead. And we see this truth echoed throughout the scriptures, don't we?

Ephesians 2, Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 2 that we are dead in our sins and trespasses. And then immediately he says that this is a living death.

We are dead. And the evidence of that death is that we live according to the flesh and the lust thereof and are under. Now, not future wrath, but the present wrath of God.

We're dead. Adam's dead now. Eve is dead. And what was true for them after the fall, we understand then to be true for each and every one of us from the beginning of our existence.

[10:27] Death reigns in us as death reigned in them. And still, when we get to these verses, there is hope.

Still, we find in God there is mercy to be offered. And so let's look at it and see where we can find that mercy and that hope.

Notice first, I want you to see them hiding from God. Hiding from God. This is one of the effects of the fall. Verse 8. Charlie is still young enough.

Our little Charlie Grace is still young enough to get excited when I come home. Ashlyn and Harper are well beyond that phase of their life.

Julie is well beyond that phase of our marriage. But Charlie's not. In fact, it's so fun for me. It makes me want to have another kid just because I know Charlie's going to be out of this before long.

[11:54] And I want to have another one just so that I can keep this going. It's going to be lost before long. There are times when I can pull into the driveway at the end of the day and be gone all day here or there. And it's quiet enough in the house that she can hear the car come in the driveway.

And she hears me shut the door. And as I'm walking up to the front door, about to put my key in. And as I'm putting the key in, she hears all of these things and she puts it together. Dad's home. And I can hear her in the house.

Daddy's home. I'm going to open the door. I can walk in the house. Julie and Ashlyn and Harper don't even realize that I've come in the door.

But not Charlie. Immediately I'm met with one. You know what it is. It's that giant hug. Right? It doesn't matter if she's seen me already yet today.

It doesn't matter. It's that giant hug. It is a blissful and joyful reunion between a father and his precious little girl. And that's exactly what Adam and Eve would have experienced up until this point.

[13:00] Whenever God had manifested his presence in the garden. Joy. It was all theirs. Joy. Excitement. Blessing.

Communion. Fellowship. It was all theirs. To walk with God in Genesis is an expression often used to indicate this intimacy of fellowship that comes as a result of one's righteousness before God. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, all noted in their righteousness for walking with God. And that Adam and Eve recognized the sound of the Lord God, we're told in verse 8.

Suggest that they were well accustomed to the daily delight of communing with God. But all of that joyful excitement is suddenly lost.

It's gone. Why? Death has begun to reign through sin.

[14:09] And when they heard that familiar sound of God's manifest presence in the garden, rather than run to him in delight, they hid from him in fearful despair.

God had made the garden as a kind of temple, a holy place in his creation.

He puts the man there and he creates the woman to complement the man and to be there together in order that they might enjoy him and he might take pleasure in them.

But the presence of God no longer delighted them. It only terrifies them. And they attempted to hide.

They go deeper into the garden. They attempt to hide from God. It's the first sign that death was beginning to reign. God has not yet confronted their sin.

[15:12] In fact, no one has confronted their sin. Yet their sense of guilt is clearly evident to them. Something significant had changed in their nature so that God's presence now brought dread.

And no one had to tell them that. It was death's immediate reign over them and it deluded them into thinking that they could run and hide.

And what foolishness it is for us to think that we can actually hide from God. It says Jeremiah 23, 24, the words of the Lord.

Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him, declares the Lord. Do I not feel heaven and earth, declares the Lord?

You cannot hide from him. Hebrews 4, 13, no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

[16:22] Adam and Eve are experiencing that for the first time. And yet, in the pervasive power of sin, they've already deceived themselves, deluded themselves into thinking that they can just hide in the garden and maybe God won't find them.

But you know, the astonishing thing about these verses is not Adam's hiding. That's foolish. But it's not the most astonishing thing here.

The most astonishing thing here is God's seeking. Do you see that in verse 9? The Lord God calls to the man.

Where are you? He doesn't come into the garden, guns a-blazin', so to speak. Isn't that interesting?

He didn't approach Adam primarily as a judge and an executioner ready to hand down the sentence and condemn him.

[17 : 32] No, he approaches the garden. He approaches Adam first as a loving father seeking out his beloved son. And he does not drive Adam out of hiding.

He draws Adam out of hiding. He's inviting the man to approach him in spite of his fallen condition. And he does it with a simple question. Where are you, Adam? Of course, we understand God is not looking for information.

The question is rhetorical. He knew exactly where Adam was. He was calling Adam out into the open so that he might confront Adam and lead Adam to mercy.

And so he does with each and every one of us. God calls us out of our hiding through the power of his word. Not seeking to destroy us.

[18 : 40] Seeking rather to save us. To fix what is broken. To offer to us divine mercy. Mercy. Is God calling you out of your hiding this morning?

Just like Adam and Eve, you have deceived yourself into thinking that I can get away from this sense of guilt and shame that I feel before God.

And maybe you're running in the sense that you're just trying to ignore it. Maybe you're running in the sense that you're just trying to deny that it even matters. Or that there's a God who would take so much interest in your life as to want to confront your sin and to control you in any kind of way. Maybe it's self-justifying. You're just trying to ignore the fact that you really are guilty. Blame it on something else. We see all of that happening here. But at the end of the day, you still have this real sense of personal guilt and shame.

And you're doing everything that you can to hide. The last thing you want is for God to confront your sin because you think that the only possible outcome of that experience will be your ruin.

[20 : 02] And yet God is drawing you out of your hiding. Not to humiliate you. But so that you might receive his mercy.

Adam is hiding. God is finding. He's seeking. He's drawing. He's calling. Do you know he's doing that for you?

And he's doing that in you. I want you to also notice that Adam is not only hiding from God. He's also concealing the truth. He's concealing the truth.

Look at verse 10. And he said, this is Adam speaking back to God. He said, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid. Because I was naked.

And I hid myself. Adam's initial response here reveals the essence of God's first question. It helps us to understand better what God was actually asking when he says, where are you?

[21 : 13] Adam understood that God wasn't attempting to locate him, but to draw him out in order that he might answer for himself. That he would give an explanation of why he was hiding.

And we can just envision this shameful picture of Adam wandering out from among the trees.

His wife just behind him. Both of them clad in the pitiful dressing of fig leaves hastily sewn together in panic after they had eaten the forbidden fruit.

It's a grievous scene, isn't it? A pitiful scene. And yet God's intent is not to humiliate them.

That's not what he's trying to do. He knows that apart from confronting the ugliness of what they've done, there can be no chance of reconciliation.

[22 : 17] There can be no chance of restoration unless Adam comes out of the hiding. Unless Adam confesses and seeks mercy.

This is Adam's opportunity to come clean. He doesn't take it. Notice he makes no mention at all of his sin.

He only addresses the shame that he feels. Isn't that like us? To in a moment of being caught in wrongdoing, to only respond in relationship to the feeling that we have of being caught rather than addressing the reality of sin that is at work in us.

The power of sin then is so pervasive that already the man is resorting to dishonesty and half-truths in hopes that he might somehow get out of this predicament.

Isn't that amazing how fast they fall? What began as just eating a piece of fruit has now become running from God and now lying to God.

[23 : 36] But while Adam is concealing, what is God doing? God's exposing the truth. It's at this point that those of us who are parents understand what we typically do, right?

We understand our kids have done something stupid, something that they're not supposed to do, that you've told them not to do. And you go and, Ashlyn, what's going on? Giving them a chance. They give some kind of pitiful excuse. Failing to recognize the reality of what they've done that you've already figured out.

And what is it that we do in that moment? That's typically when the line has been crossed and we drop the hammer, right?

What do you mean you're just feeling a little bad? No, let me tell you what you did. This is exactly what you did and it's a problem. God does not do that. Isn't it amazing?

[24:42] Look at verse 11. God says, who told you you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree that I commanded you not to eat?

Do you see what God's doing? He's teaching. This is didactic. He asked two penetrating questions, allowing Adam once again this opportunity to come clean as a loving father.

God drew the man toward the path of true confession and repentance here. And again, the questions are rhetorical. God's not looking for information. The first question, who told you you are naked, shows that no one had to convince Adam of his guilt.

No one had to manipulate Adam into feeling shame. No one did that here. That's a real sense of natural guilt and shame that Adam now experiences because death is reigning in him.

Says Kenneth Matthews, this was not the consequence of a false guilt imposed by parent or social convention. It was true guilt arising from a violated conscience.

[26:06] And it's being exposed by God in the question, who told you you were naked? Adam, think about it. Why do you feel shame? And then he asked a second question.

The point of the second question is the answer the first. What is it that he asked? Did you eat of the tree that I commanded you not to eat of?

Do you notice God doesn't refer to the tree in its proper name here. Remember the name he had given it? It was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He doesn't call it the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

What does he call it? The tree that I commanded you not to eat of. Do you see what he's doing? He's linking deliberate disobedience to his command to the feeling of guilt and shame that Adam now experiences in this nakedness.

He's exposing for Adam the real issue in order that he might draw the truth out of Adam, in order that he might lead Adam to true confession and repentance.

[27:15] Death's reign is expressed here in Adam's attempt to conceal the truth rather than to confess his sin.

It says Proverbs 28, 13, Part of the mercy of God is that he's trying to lead Adam down that road of proper confession in order that he might receive mercy.

So we see Adam is hiding from God. We see Adam is concealing the truth. And then we get to the third section. Adam is shifting the blame.

Shifting the blame. Look at verses 12 and 13. The man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate.

She is emphatic here in the text. It's emphatic. He's emphasizing the pronoun. She gave it to me, and I ate. Then the Lord God said to the woman, What is this that you have done?

[28:41] How could you have done this? And the woman said, The serpent deceived me, and I ate.

In the hardness of their hearts, they sought to self-justify rather than to repent. And just follow the progression of the narrative here.

Adam senses his guilt and shame. Of course, Eve does as well. But Adam is the only one who's emphasized until verse 13. God's questions up to this point have been given with a singular pronoun, you.

He is addressing Adam specifically. Adam runs and hides, thinking that he might be able to get away from God's judgment.

But God finds him. He seeks him, and he draws him out. That doesn't work. So what does Adam then resort to? Well, he attempts to conceal the truth. Well, it's really just about this feeling of shame that I have.

[29:44] He just kind of ignores and stays silent on the reality of his sin that brought about the shame and guilt. And what does God do in response? Well, he exposes it. He makes Adam look

foolish as he should have.

Adam thinks he has one resort left. And that resort, the only way he might possibly get out of this predicament now is if he can somehow shift the responsibility of what he's done to someone else. If he can make himself look like a victim rather than a perpetrator, maybe he can get out of it. And of course, he puts the blame on Eve, his wife.

What a change from the joyful embrace that he demonstrated when God brought her to him in chapter 2. Death is raining in their marriage now.

Just moments after sin, death is raining in their marriage. It's destroying their marriage. The one whom he rejoiced in and delighted in, just a few verses before saying, this is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.

[31:04] And he embraces her and he clings to her. And they become one flesh together. It's an amazingly beautiful picture. It's all destroyed now. He says bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.

Now he says she's a problem. This is her fault. She's responsible. But he does something even more egregious than that here.

Follow the structure of the phrase. The woman that you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit and I ate.

Do you see what Adam's doing? He's not only putting the responsibility on his wife, ultimately he's putting the responsibility and culpability of his sin on God.

She gave me the fruit, but you gave her to me. This is your fault, God. If you just hadn't given me this woman, this would have never happened. This is on you.

[32:16] In his hardened heart, Adam says that God is ultimately responsible for his sin. And is this not what we so often do, even when we reflect on this passage?

How many times have you come to Genesis 2 and 3, and the primary question in your mind is not, how could Adam do this? The primary question in your mind is something like this.

Why on earth would God put that tree in the garden? Do you know what we're doing? We're saying, you know what? This is really God's fault. This whole ordeal, this whole fall, this whole thing that corrupted us and caused the whole human race to descend into corruption and guilt, this is on God. He should have never put the tree there to begin with. We do the same thing. God draws us out from hiding. He exposes our sin. And we feel like we have no other resort but to accuse him.

You know, Lord, this wouldn't have happened if you'd just given me better parents. This wouldn't have happened, Lord, if you would have just helped me get that job and I would have had more money or I would have had more success.

[33:29] This would have been all so different, Lord, if you would have just been different to me. And we shift the blame. We shift the responsibility. And we try to put it not simply on others, but ultimately we put it on God.

And then for the first time in this entire narrative, God addresses the woman. How could you have done this?

He asked her. It's the right question. He had given her to be man's helper in blessing.

And she has now taken that authority, that authorization to help the man in blessing and she has used it to help him in his crime.

And of course, she follows suit with Adam. She shifts the blame. Well, really, this is the serpent's fault. He deceived me. Now, she stopped short of doing what Adam did.

[34:33] She doesn't put it on God. But she does present herself as something of a victim here, ignoring the reality of her own responsibility in the sin. And is this not exactly what we tend to do?

God's purpose is to lead us to repentance. But in the hardness of our hearts, we look for someone or something else to blame. How very rare is it for us to truly acknowledge our guilt and confess our sin and take responsibility for our disobedience?

Disobedience. And it takes all kinds of shapes and forms in our lives, doesn't it? Many times it's subtle. We don't recognize we're even doing it. Father loses his temper with his kids.

He sins against them with his words. He's angry. He exasperates them. And then he feels the guilt and the shame of what he's done because God is calling him out of that hiding.

God is exposing what he's done. And then he goes to his kids and he attempts to smooth things over. But he says something like this. You know, if you had just listened to what I had told you to do in the beginning, I wouldn't have reacted that way.

[35 : 52] I think the kids call that gaslighting. Shifting the blame. Okay, yeah, I spoke in anger, but this is really on you because you're the one that drove me to it.

You realize how subtly this happens. A wife in anger at her husband punishes him by going silent for days at a time.

And he tries to reconcile with his wife rather than acknowledge that she has responded in a way that's sinful and destructive. She says, you just don't understand how you made me feel.

Well, this is really your fault. We see this playing out around us in the news so often these days, don't we?

People refusing to take responsibility for their actions on account of their emotional distresses. Well, I was just really down that day. You can't hold this against me.

[36 : 56] We see it in popular media. The trend right now in movies is to highlight the backstory of a villain and to try to explain their future villainy as being the result of some type of victimhood that they experienced earlier in their lives.

Now, I'm not suggesting that those kind of experiences don't actually play a role in the things that we do. Of course they do, but we are responsible for the things that we do and the ways that we act and the way that we sin.

This is part of death's reign in us. The pervasive power of sin is such that whenever we're in the corner and God has pulled us out of hiding and we feel the guilt and we sense the shame and we've been exposed, our resort is to say, it's really not my fault.

We blame something else. It says death reigned through the power of sin, but hope is not lost here. While we sinfully seek to shift our blame to others, there is one who never did it. In fact, he did the opposite.

[38 : 22] We sinfully seek to shift the blame and to put it on others. Jesus joyfully, willingly sought to receive the blame for our sake.

He, the guiltless one, the sinless one, became sin for us so that we might then in turn be counted as righteous on account of him receiving our blame.

2 Corinthians 5, 21, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Again, in Colossians, this great statement by Paul, you were dead in your trespasses. You had that living death.

You're dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh. God made you alive together with him. How did he do it? Well, he's forgiven your trespasses.

[39 : 28] Well, why has he forgiven my trespasses? Paul says he's canceled the record of debt that stood against you with all of its legal demands, nailing it to his cross. The sinless one, the blameless one, takes our blame so that by faith we might receive his righteousness.

The guilty ones declared not guilty. The good news in all of this is that Jesus has taken all of our guilt and shame, every piece of it.

He didn't simply wear our sins as a symbol, like putting on a shirt that just had all of our sins listed on it. That's not how he bore our sins.

No, he became sin for us such that he felt the real misery that Adam felt. He felt the real guilt as if it was his own.

He felt the terror as if it was his own. And in return, all who trust him by faith receive his righteousness.

[40 : 42] Again, not as a mere symbol, like wearing a shirt that just says, Christ is righteous for my sake. No, in union with him, we are righteous in him.

Truly. Adam and Eve think blame shifting is their last and only resort. But in reality, that just wasn't true.

In reality, there was another option. They were just too blind and hardened in their sin to see it. God's patience in this confrontation was meant to lead them to repentance.

The better option would have been to fall before the Lord. God, we did what you said not to do. God, we did what you said. Is there mercy for us?

Will you forgive us? That option was always on the table. They just didn't see it. How many of us, we understand what this is like before we come to Christ.

[41 : 51] That option's always on the table. We're just too hardened to see it. We think the option is to shift or to hide or to conceal. No, the only real option, the only fruitful option is to confess.

