

The Sentence of Death

There is no evidence that the Serpent either touched the tree, or ate of its fruit. Indeed, if he had he would have committed no offence; for the law was not given to him, but to Adam and Eve only; and 'where there is no law there is no transgression'. Besides, Paul says Eve was the first in the transgression. The Lord God, therefore, did not interrogate the Serpent as He had the others... All the evidence in the case being elicited, the Lord God proceeded to pass sentence upon the accused in the order of their conviction.—Page 108.

BRO. Thomas divided Part One of *Elpis Israel* into six chapters, taking the reader from the opening words of the exposition, through to page 187. Part One is headed: "*The Rudiments of the World*". Commencing with "*The Necessity of a Revelation*", the reader is taken through the Scriptural testimony concerning the Creation, the introduction of God's law and how sin entered into the world.

The author has now come to the point where he finds it expedient to show how God brought the convicted sinners to trial and pronounced the sentence of death upon them both. Effectively, this resulted in the "ruin of the old world" when the sons of God intermarried with apostates and brought upon themselves the catastrophe of the Noahic flood. But despite this almost total disaster for humanity, a "remnant" remained faithful to the Truth, and therefore of worth to God in the continuing unfolding of His purpose.

Sin, Bro. Thomas points out, had an "immediate" effect upon the "transgressors". This does not mean that they "immediately" died, for they did not. Adam lived 930 years. It is true, how-

ever, that death began to work in them from the time they sinned.

They endeavoured to cover their sin by sewing fig leaves together. In their own eyes, their nakedness was adequately covered. But Yahweh Elohim was not deluded. "All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" — or, "naked and bent backward", as the words may be rendered. Such words describe an animal which has been prepared for slaughter, its head held back so as to expose the throat (Heb. 4:13). All should learn that Yahweh will not be deceived by disguises, no matter what form they take. Pretences prove pointless. "Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7, NIV).

Adam's Conscience Defiled

Adam was "called" by God. He thought his covering would be accepted. He did not realise that Yahweh possessed a depth of vision that could discern Adam's true moral state.

The divine voice was heard in the garden. "Where art thou?" Adam answered: "I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Gen. 3:9-

10). Brother Thomas gives emphasis to these three words. Why did he do so? Because they represent the natural reaction of man, when he feels entrapped through sin: he knows the fear of impending discovery; the realisation of guilt; the need to seek a way of escape. This human weakness was apparent in David; a state which he could recognise once his mind had been cleared of the philosophy of subterfuge: "When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to Thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, I will confess my transgressions to Yahweh; then Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Selah (*Pause and consider*)" (Psa. 32:3-5, RSV).

Brother Thomas states that Yahweh probed Adam's guilt with the object of causing him to acknowledge the true nature of his changed condition. "The Lord God, however, knowing from the mental constitution He had bestowed upon him, that man could not be ashamed, unless his conscience was defiled by transgression of His law in fact or supposition, directed His next inquiry so as to at once elicit a confession of the whole truth" (p. 107).

Sin and Self-delusion

The most obvious question was asked of Adam: "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" Nothing more needed to be asked. There was only one answer to the question. Adam's own "defiled conscience" had told him. Unwittingly, Adam had admitted to his sin before being called upon to do so. But he did not confess that he had now become a convicted sinner. On the contrary, he had "covered" his "transgression" by "hiding" it in his "bosom" (Job 31:33).

This led to the inevitable question:

"Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" There was only one possible answer. And Adam knew it. So he tried to avoid answering. "The woman whom *thou* gavest to be with me", he postulated, doubtless pointing an accusing finger at Eve to divert attention from himself, "*she* gave me of the tree, and I did eat".

With an astonishing degree of self-delusion, he tried to shift the blame to his Creator and to the woman. Brother Thomas states that Adam's response was "as much as to say, If thou hadst not put her in my way, and I had been left to myself, I should not have done it. It is she who is chiefly to blame; for she not only ate herself, but tempted me" (p. 108).

From the dawn of history, mankind has endeavoured to avoid the guilt associated with sin; often by either denying its existence or by presenting some plausible argument whereby responsibility can be diverted elsewhere or avoided entirely.

Those who understand divine wisdom will humbly accept the weakness of their position in relation to sin. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

The Source of Sin

The question being turned upon Eve, Bro. Thomas observes: "her ingenuousness was no more conspicuous than Adam's". She was equally adept at trying to disclaim accountability. Confessing that she had indeed partaken of the fruit, she offered her rebuttal, claiming there were extenuating circumstances: "The serpent beguiled me," she said, "and I did eat".

The defensive arguments presented by Adam and Eve were futile. They, and they alone, were answerable for their moral conduct. Bro. Thomas observes: "There is no evidence that

the Serpent either touched the tree, or ate of its fruit. Indeed, if he had he would have committed no offence; for the law was not given to him, but to Adam and Eve only; and 'where there is no law there is no transgression'. This observation is in harmony with Paul's comment: "Adam was not deceived; but the woman *having been deceived* became a transgressor" (1 Tim. 2:14, *DIAG.*). Had the serpent been the *first* sinner, Paul's statement would be incorrect. It is important that this should be clearly understood. Bro. Thomas writes: "Cognizance of the morality of thoughts and actions was beyond the sphere of his (the Serpent's) mentality. With all his superior shrewdness, he was neither responsible, nor able to give an account" (page 108).

This reasoning appears to create something of a paradox. Since God perfectly balances justice and mercy, was it right and fitting that He should pass judgment against the serpent? Without doubt. The serpent, though not a sinner against divine law, had meddled in matters that were beyond his limited comprehension. Also, in his ignorance he had lied; for he had categorically claimed that God would not sentence the man and the woman to death if they were disobedient. But there was more than this involved. In passing judgment against Adam and

Eve, Yahweh fulfilled His decree, thereby demonstrating the moral accountability of them both, and that "the wages of sin is death". In the case of the serpent, this basis of judgment did not apply. But another factor was entirely relevant which demanded the upholding of Yahweh's righteousness. Sin having "entered into the world", it was necessary that God should condemn *the source of sin*. Paul speaks of "sin that dwelleth in me" which he describes as "a law in my members" (Rom. 7:17-21). The Lord Jesus Christ taught that it was necessary for him to put to death the nature which he bore, knowing that it was the *source* of sin, and therefore rightly related to death. Referring to "the serpent in the wilderness" — the brazen serpent which was held aloft upon a pole — he identified himself therewith: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14).

Though innocent of any transgression, it was necessary that the Lord should demonstrate in his death that all righteousness originates with God, and that the flesh, because it could produce "no good thing", was worthy only of death. By this means, mankind was offered a hope of redemption, whilst God's righteousness remained unimpaired.

— John Ullman.

Imitating the World.

The old-style Christadelphian lecture, based upon a direct appeal to the Scriptures is seldom heard in many parts today. It has been discarded in favour of a more philosophical approach — an imitation of what the world offers. We are perhaps becoming a little squeamish as to whether we might offend the world, and perhaps are unconsciously moderating our "contention for the faith" to conform to nebulous sermonizing on morals, that is so popular with the whole world today.

—H. P. Mansfield (1960).

Antipas, the Faithful.

"Antipas" was against all the Nicolaitanes, Balaams, and Jezebels; false teachers who had crept in unawares, corrupting and handling the Word of God deceitfully, that they might make it less offensive to the Jews and idolators, and so make the profession of christianity more popular and consequently less dangerous to life, liberty, and happiness in the world.

—J. Thomas.