

Genesis 3 — The Choice That Opened the World — the Serpent's Question, the Fruit and the Opened Eyes, the Promise of the Seed, and the Coats of Skins

Genesis 3: the serpent, more subtil than any beast of the field, questions the woman and denies the warning of death; the woman sees the fruit is good and takes and eats, and gives to her husband, and the eyes of them both are opened; they hide, and the LORD God calls 'Where art thou?'; the judgments fall on serpent, woman, and man, and in the midst of them the first promise of a Redeemer — the seed of the woman who will bruise the serpent's head; Adam names Eve the mother of all living, God clothes the pair in coats of skins, and they are sent from Eden past the cherubim and the flaming sword. The Fall of Adam and Eve at the beginning; read with its Restoration companion Moses 4, already live on this site.

Genesis 2 ended on a held breath — "they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25) — a picture of innocence so complete it could only be mourned once it was gone. Genesis 3 is where it goes. This is the hinge chapter of the whole Old Testament, the one every later page assumes: the wound the prophets diagnose, the ruin the Law fences against, the death the Psalms cry out of, the sickness the whole canon is a rescue from. Nothing that comes after makes sense without it. Read Isaiah, read Romans, read Alma, and you are reading commentary on the afternoon the fruit was taken.

Hebrew Word Studies

arum (H6175) / erom (H5903) (אָרומ / עָרוֹם) — **crafty, subtil, shrewd / naked, bare vv. 1, 7.** Two words that sound almost identical and mean almost opposite things, and Genesis sets them one verse apart on purpose. The pair are *arum* (H6175), "subtil," and the *arom/erom* family (H5903), "naked" — the closing note of chapter 2 was that the couple were naked (*arummim*) and unashamed, and the opening note of chapter 3 is that the serpent was subtil (*arum*). The Hebrew ear hears the innocence of the one turning into the cunning of the other. *Arum* is not always a bad word; Proverbs uses it for the prudent man who "foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself" (Prov. 22:3). Shrewdness is a tool, and like any tool it serves whatever hand holds it — here, a hand bent on ruin. And the terrible symmetry is what the craft produces: after the fruit, the couple's eyes are opened and "they knew that they were naked" (*erom*, v. 7). The subtilty (*arum*) manufactures the nakedness-as-shame (*erom*) — the very sound the chapter opened on, now soured. What began as unashamed openness ends as exposure that must be sewn over with fig leaves. Jesus keeps the good sense of the word alive when he sends his disciples out "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16): the shrewdness of the serpent, redeemed, aimed at survival instead of seduction.

nachash (H5175) (נָחָשׁ) — **serpent; and, by its verb root, to hiss, to whisper, to divine, to enchant vv. 1, 4, 13, 14.** The word for "serpent" is *nachash*, and it hums with more than zoology. As a noun it is the snake; but the root reaches into a verb (*nachash*) that means to whisper, to divine, to practice enchantment — the language of the hiss that becomes a spell, the low voice that reads omens and bends the mind. It is the perfect name for a tempter whose whole weapon is speech: this creature does nothing in the chapter but talk. Genesis, spare as always, never says the snake is more than a snake. But the Restoration lifts the veil the Hebrew keeps drawn. Moses 4 identifies the voice without flinching: "And now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which I, the Lord God, had made. And Satan put it into the heart of the serpent... for he sought to destroy the world" (Moses 4:5–6), the same being who in the premortal council "rebelled against me... and also that I should give unto him mine own power" and was cast down (Moses 4:3). The New Testament closes the identification for good: "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). So the *nachash* of Eden and the dragon of the Apocalypse are one enemy, and the hiss in the garden is the same voice that lost the war in heaven — still doing the only thing it has ever been able to do, which is to whisper a question against the goodness of God.

nasha (H5377) (נָשָׂא) — **to beguile, to deceive, to lead astray by luring v. 13.** "The serpent *beguiled* me." The verb is *nasha* — not the ordinary word for a plain lie, but a word for being lured, drawn off course, deceived by something that works on you subtly and from the side. It is the word the Rabshakeh's propaganda uses when Hezekiah warns, "let not Hezekiah *deceive* you" (2 Kgs. 18:29; Isa. 36:14), and the word for the false confidence that "the pride of thine heart hath *deceived* thee" (Obad. 3). What it names is not stupidity but susceptibility — the way a sincere heart can be turned by a voice patient and cunning enough. Eve's confession is exact: she does not say "I rebelled," she says "I was *beguiled*," and Scripture takes her at her word, for Paul echoes it precisely — "the woman being deceived" (1 Tim. 2:14). The Restoration will not let this word be used to crush her. Latter-day revelation puts Eve among the honored, glad in the redemption her choice opened (Moses 5:11),

and the temple tradition treats her as wise, not wicked. *Nasha* tells the truth about the mechanism — she was genuinely deceived — without turning the deception into a verdict on her worth. There is mercy in the very grammar: the being who did the beguiling is cursed in the next verse; the one who was beguiled is given, in the same breath, the promise of the Seed who will undo it.

eybah (H342) / zera (H2233) / shuph (H7779) (עַרְשׁוֹ / הַבִּיָּא) — **enmity, hostility, hatred / seed, offspring, posterity / to bruise, crush, strike at v. 15.** Three words carry the first gospel. *Eybah*, "enmity," is a word for settled, deadly hostility — the same word for the "old hatred" of a mortal enemy (Ezek. 25:15; 35:5). And the astonishment is who declares it: "I will put enmity" — God himself installs the war between the human heart and the serpent, so that the alliance of Eden cannot stand. The enmity is mercy; a soul at peace with the deceiver is lost, and God will not leave us at peace with him. *Zera*, "seed," is the chapter's forward-looking word, the same *zera* promised to Abraham (Gen. 22:18) and narrowed by prophets and apostles to a single descendant — "he saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one... which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). "Her seed," reckoned through the woman against all Hebrew custom, waits for a birth "made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4) with no mortal father. And *shuph*, "bruise," is a rare verb used only a handful of times, deliberately repeated so the same action falls on both combatants — the Seed's heel and the serpent's head — but the anatomy decides the outcome: a struck heel limps and heals; a struck head does not rise. The Seed absorbs the survivable wound and delivers the fatal one. In one verse, over the ruins of the garden, God has named the enmity that starts our rescue, the Seed who will accomplish it, and the crushing blow that ends the war — the entire arc of redemption, spoken as a sentence on the enemy.

teshuqah (H8669) (הַקְּוֹשׁ) — **desire, longing, a stretching-out toward v. 16.** "Thy *desire* shall be to thy husband." *Teshuqah* is a rare and strong word — it appears only three times in the whole Hebrew Bible — and it means an intense longing, a reaching-out toward another. It is the word the bride uses of her beloved in the Song: "I am my beloved's, and his *desire* is toward me" (Song 7:10), pure and mutual longing. But its very next appearance is the shadow side, one chapter on, when God warns Cain that sin "lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his *desire*, and thou shalt rule over him" (Gen. 4:7) — where the *teshuqah* is a desire to master, and the answering word is the same "rule" (*mashal*) as in 3:16. Set the three uses side by side and the tragedy of the verse comes clear: the longing that was meant to be the Song's mutual delight is bent, by the Fall, toward a struggle for mastery — desire and rule now pulling against each other where once they answered each other. This is the fracture in the partnership of Genesis 2, named exactly. And it is precisely this fracture the gospel sets out to heal, calling husband and wife back from mastery to the "equal partners" they were made to be — turning *teshuqah* back into the Song's kind of longing, and the rule back into the mutual service of two who are one flesh.

kethoneth (H3801) / or (H5785) (כֶּתֶנֶת / רֹעַ) — **a tunic, a long coat, a garment worn next to the skin / skin, hide, leather v. 21.** The "coats of skins" are *kethoneth* of *or*, and both words carry weight past their plain sense. *Kethoneth* is the ordinary word for a tunic — but watch where else it goes. It is the "coat of many colours" Jacob gives Joseph (Gen. 37:3), the garment of favor and covenant love. And it is, above all, the priestly vestment: "thou shalt make them linen breeches... and thou shalt make for them coats [*kethoneth*]" (Ex. 28:40; 29:8) — the holy tunic the priest must wear to stand before God. So when the Lord clothes Adam and Eve in a *kethoneth* of his own making, the word already whispers of favor, of priesthood, of being made fit to stand in the divine presence. And *or*, "skin," is the cost: hides come from a body, and a body must die. The first garment God ever sews requires the first death — an innocent creature given so the guilty can be covered. The pattern set here runs through the whole Law: "it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11), the covering that cost a life. Latter-day Saints, familiar with sacred clothing given as a token of covenant, find the verse doubly resonant: God does not leave his children in the flimsy fig leaves of their own making. He clothes them himself, at the price of a life, in a garment that marks them as his — the earliest shadow in scripture of the robe of righteousness Christ's own sacrifice provides, the covering "made... white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14).

From the Chapter's Architecture

The Restoration adds the frame that turns the whole architecture from tragedy to plan. Moses 4 tells this same fall and prefaces it with the war in heaven — Satan's rebellion, his bid to "destroy the agency of man," his casting-out (Moses 4:1–4) — so that the serpent's whisper in verse 1 is heard as the continuation of a battle already lost in the premortal council. And Lehi, reading Genesis 3 in 2 Nephi 2, supplies the doctrine that reorders every loss in the chapter: the deathless, childless innocence of Eden "would have remained... having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin" (2 Ne. 2:23), and so "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2:25). Read through Moses 4 and 2 Nephi 2, Genesis 3 is not the story of how paradise was lost. It is the story of how the plan went forward — a step down that was the only way up, taken by two people the Restoration honors rather than blames, with the promise of the Seed spoken over them before they ever left the garden.