

DID ADAM AND EVE'S TUNICS INVOLVE SACRIFICE? (GENESIS 3)

As a Jew newly acquainted with Christ, I initially knew little about Christian denominations. Considering the frequent talk about God being love, I was puzzled by the disdain most in my Messianic⁶⁸ faith community held for traditional churches. Once, inquiring about the differences between "us" and the Catholic Church, I learned that we, in contrast to the Catholic Church, adhere to "*Sola Scriptura*"—Scripture alone! No traditions! However, as time passed, I realized that every denomination harbors its own set of traditions.

For instance, I noticed how evangelicals commonly pray before meals: "Lord, please bless this food we are about to eat to our bodies." This practice always baffled me, not because the Torah instructs us to pray after meals (Deuteronomy 8:10) but for another reason—the blessing itself seemed odd. "*Bless this food to our bodies*"? Does this mean God will miraculously transform our junk food into a nutritious feast just because we prayed? If so, that's great news—I can indulge in all the Big Macs and doughnuts I want, and they'll be blessed—converted to healthy food!

I also noticed that Evangelical traditions are not just practiced but deeply embedded in theology—specifically in Calvin's teachings. This realization dawned on me slowly: traditions permeate all facets of faith,

though we might not always recognize them. Traditions aren't inherently evil—who doesn't enjoy receiving gifts every year on their birthday?—but traditions can profoundly influence our theology. This becomes problematic when such influences distort our understanding of core concepts like sacrifices and atonement or God's character.

In our discussion's context, Divine Abuse subtly uses the Book of Genesis to force its theological traditions into the book's interpretation. Let's start with Genesis 3:21.

Genesis 3:21

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

Genesis 3:21

Calvinists believe that this verse encodes the doctrine of Penal Substitutionary sacrifice. Thus, it's enough to refute the view of Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA), or at least severely undermine it, simply by studying Genesis 3 because that's where proponents of Divine Abuse claim it all started.

Allegedly, verse 21 is a cryptic portrayal of God pouring His wrath on one of the garden's animals, killing it so He could forgive Adam and Eve. For instance, in his sermon titled “The First Sacrifice,” John MacArthur explains:

The sacrificial system was to picture the necessity of a substitute to take the place of sinners, to be killed, and to bear the wrath of God. And, of course, none of the

sacrifices ever given in the past could do that, they just pictured the One that was to come, who was Christ. So here, for the first time in Genesis 3:21, we have a picture of the substitutionary atonement...⁶⁹

John MacArthur

When John MacArthur reads Genesis 3:21, he imagines the text to include 'kill,' 'blood,' 'wrath,' 'death,' 'sacrifice,' and 'atonement.' This is a clear example of eisegesis, where MacArthur forcefully inserts the concept of "penal substitutionary atonement" into the passage. Although none of these terms are present in the text, for MacArthur, the verse portrays God's wrath, bloodshed, and killing, culminating in the idea of God making a sacrifice—to Himself.

This is a prime example of the "theological tradition" I previously referred to. In this instance, the Calvinist interpretation has become a widespread tradition within evangelical circles and beyond.

Frankly, this is an awful lot to read into a single verse that says nothing other than *the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them*. The killing of an animal is never mentioned. There's nothing about blood, sacrifice, atonement, or wrath, either. Penal Substitutionary Atonement is not inferred.

The Skin of What?

Just as John MacArthur speculated a dead animal was involved, others speculated that God made the tunics from the molting skin of an animal. For example, an ancient Jewish commentary, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, explains that in Genesis 3:21, God made garments for Adam and Eve from the molting skin of the serpent:

And the Lord God made to Adam and to his wife vestures of honour from the skin of the serpent, which he had cast from him, upon the skin of their flesh, instead of that adornment which had been cast away; and He clothed them.

Targum Jonathan on Gen. 3:21

Perhaps this was God's method of ridiculing the Serpent, as though declaring, "I will employ your skin to provide cover for them."

Similarly, other hypotheses can be speculated. In fact, it's easy to speculate once we detach from the text and let our imagination soar. Nevertheless, the text does not detail the substance's source because it was not pertinent to the author of Genesis. Had it been significant, it would have been included. Therefore, constructing a doctrine on the absence of information is an "argument from silence," a logical fallacy.

Okay, if not the killing and death of an animal as a penal substitution, what, then, does Genesis 3:21 truly signify? Fortunately, the Hebrew text speaks for itself.

God Made

Brent A. Strawn, an Old Testament professor at Duke Divinity School, points to the creation story as context. Strawn argues that just as God *made* everything else out of thin air, so he made the tunics, and that it has nothing to do with atonement and sacrifices but with God being the creator and a provider. Just as God provided food for mankind by creating plants, so he provided Adam and Eve clothes to dress their nakedness:

Yhwh-God's provision of clothing for the first humans in Gen 3:21 is often understood as a gracious act that nevertheless involves animal slaughter so as to produce the "garments of skin." The present essay uncouples these two elements—the beneficence of the divine provision of clothing and the possible death of animals that may be implied—reexamining the latter in light of a neglected parallel found in *Enūma Eliš*, which demonstrates (perhaps with a cognate to the Hebrew verb used in Genesis) that the gods can summon things into existence, especially by speech. The power of divine creation, especially through utterance, is well attested in other ancient Near Eastern texts, and so Yhwh-God's making (*ASAH*) clothes need not indicate the destruction of animals. In the end, therefore, if Gen 3:21 is used in wider theological-ethical discussions, its significance lies with a theology of creation, not one of sacrifice or atonement.⁷⁰

Brent A. Strawn

Regardless of parallel pagan stories, Strawn is correct in pointing out that Genesis 3:21 uses the same Hebrew word, *ASAH* (made), that the text previously used to describe God's acts of creation. When we read the Hebrew text carefully, we can see how it repeatedly emphasizes that God *ASAH* (made).

For example, in Genesis 1:7, "*God ASAH the vault.*" In verse 16, "*God ASAH two great lights.*" In verse 25, "*God ASAH the wild animals.*" In the following chapter, we read again in verse 4, "*the Lord God ASAH the earth and the heavens.*" Verse 9, "*The Lord God ASAH all kinds of trees.*"

In verse 22, “*the Lord God ASAH a woman.*” And in Genesis 3:21, “*The Lord God ASAH garments of skin.*”

Thus, the Hebrew word *ASAH* is used throughout the creation story—Genesis 3:21 included—to describe how the Creator of the universe creates things. This is excellent textual support for Strawn’s argument. In light of this, the point of Genesis 3:21 is that God *ASAH*-made tunics to provide clothing for the couple.

Why Did God Clothe Them?

Consider the interesting parallelism between God dressing Adam and Eve and their attempt to dress themselves. Only a few verses earlier, Adam and Eve covered themselves with something basic, delicate, and temporary—fig leaves. Often, people associate Adam and Eve’s feelings of shame with their sin, feeling embarrassed due to their transgression. However, the text says something else. They were ashamed because “*they were naked.*” They had realized their nakedness due to their eyes being opened. Animals don’t mind being naked, but humans do. Nakedness causes us to feel vulnerable and exposed. Their nakedness was not a sin, and definitely not nakedness between the Garden’s majestic couple. Eyes being open symbolizes understanding and maturity (e.g., Psalm 119:18; Jeremiah 5:21; Luke 24:31; Ephesians 1:18). It’s like saying, “They woke up to reality.”

Strawn said Genesis 3:21 is about “*Yhwh-God’s provision of clothing for the first humans.*” But God did not only provide them with covering. Adam and Eve’s simple fig leaves could also hide their nakedness. Yet God did more—He made long-lasting, top-quality tunics! Upon reading this story, the people of Israel knew that kings and priests wore extravagant garments (e.g., Exodus 28:4-5; 1 Kings 22:10). Historically, as it is today,

leather clothing has been regarded as extravagant, sophisticated, and luxurious.

The Biblical Significance of Tunics (Garments) of Skin

During Seinfeld's second season, Jerry Seinfeld buys an outrageously expensive leather jacket before his dinner meeting with Elaine's father, a war veteran and a famous writer. Before leaving the house, Jerry explains to his friend George:

When I leave the house in this jacket, it's with a whole different confidence. Like tonight, I might have been a little nervous. But inside this jacket, I am composed, grounded, secure that I can meet any social challenge!

Jerry Seinfeld, S02E03.

The way we dress communicates aspects of our identity and emotions to others. Take, for example, two brothers: one is a teenager clad entirely in black, and the other, in his twenties, dons an army uniform. Their attire conveys distinct perceptions about their maturity, identity, and the roles they embody.

“Clothes are a kind of uniform.” Says Victor LaValle, *“A nun’s habit, a surgeon’s scrubs, a cop’s uniform. People often say that when they put on a certain uniform, they actually think of themselves differently.”*⁷¹

Clothes are important as they reflect who we are, what we do, our titles, and what we believe ourselves to be. This is why the authority of doctors, soldiers, judges, conductors, kings, and priests is recognizable by

their dress. Animals don't dress up, but people do, with much creativity to reflect various situations and roles. Humans were also given the role of subduing animals (Genesis 1:28), as we are superior to them. This is why we are the ones who visit them at the zoo, and we do it dressed.

Would you be able to respect a judge if they removed their robe and put on denim shorts instead? Or would you respect a police officer wearing a fuchsia pink t-shirt and flip-flops? How about trusting a doctor wearing snug, shiny latex pants, and a red clown nose? For the same principle, God replaced the perishable fig leaves with permanent and majestic tunics—Fig leaves failed to represent who they were as priests over God's creation.

Just like judges and kings wore gowns, the priests of Israel wore tunics. In fact, the phrase *“to clothe with tunics”* in Genesis 3:21 is only used elsewhere in the Pentateuch to describe garments for the priests (Exod 29:5, 8; 40:14; 8:13; Lev. 8:7, 13; 16:4).

An Israelite reading Genesis would have known that tunics were the uniforms of the priests. Thus, when they heard or read Genesis chapter three, they knew God symbolically ordained Adam and Eve as priests over creation by dressing them in tunics. This role goes hand in hand with God's commandment for Adam and Eve to *“rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground”* (Genesis 1:28). By clothing them, God ordained Adam and Eve as the priestly rulers over creation.

Conclusion

Genesis 3 is a message of grace—even though Adam and Eve had just rebelled against God, He still declared them CEOs over His creation.

Their sin did not change His mind. Genesis 3:21 does not describe God's "Plan B" but verifies His original plan and purpose for humanity.

Genesis 3:21 serves as a beautiful reminder, not of God's wrath, but of God's grace. Garments are a biblical motif stressing God's grace. In the Prodigal Son, for instance, the father dresses his son with his own garment. Later, the same tunics/garments motif reappears in the book of Revelation, where believers in Christ wear garments:

The one who overcomes will be clothed the same way, in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Revelation 3:5

In summary, Genesis 3:21 does not mention death, bloodshed, wrath, sacrifice, or atonement. Thus, the Calvinistic assertion that it represents the first sacrifice in scripture is an example of taking a verse out of context and engaging in eisegesis. Furthermore, the New Testament, which often refers to Adam and speaks volumes about sacrifice and atonement by quoting the Old Testament, does not once refer to Genesis 3:21 in the context of sacrifices and atonement.