

THE EARLY WORLD

The Fall of Man and the Promise

Genesis 3

INTRODUCTION

In Genesis, chapter 2, we find the first man and woman living in peace and perfect harmony with God's creation (the earth and animals), with themselves as husband and wife, and with God their Creator. There is no need to establish a covenant because their covenant relationship with God and with one another in marriage is a given! Created in the image and likeness of God, the man and woman are totally innocent "self-giving" persons, "living gifts" to God and to one another in marriage. They are naked and unashamed, because they are totally innocent, seeing everything with perfect purity of heart.

In Genesis 3, a new character is introduced into the story – a serpent. This creature is characterized as being "cunning." This term carries connotations of craftiness and cleverness, and contrasts with the naiveté of the man and the woman who are "naked," completely innocent, without shame or guile.

The serpent enters the story of Gen 3 as a symbol of evil and rebellion against God. He is the physical personification and manifestation of Satan, the fallen angel or "evil spirit." The first man and woman live in peace and harmony with all the animals of Paradise. As yet, the existence of wicked spirits, angels fallen from their high estate, has not yet been revealed to them. And so, to tempt them to rebel against God, Satan must approach them under the disguise of an animal and a supposed friend.

The temptation scene is universal. It has all the stages and characteristics of a typical temptation. The serpent, with an opening question, insinuates that God has some ulterior motive for His command, that God is keeping something from humanity. He hopes to attract the woman's attention and to draw her into a conversation. The woman responds by jumping to God's defence, but she is no match against the craftiness of the serpent. In the conversation that follows, the serpent proceeds to poison the mind with three half-truths: "you will not die," "your eyes will be opened," and "you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (vv. 4-5).

It is true that if the man and woman would eat, they would not die immediately. But they would die eventually as a consequence of sin. It is true that their eyes would be opened, but not in the way they had anticipated. They would become aware, as they were not before, of a whole new area of human experience – the experience of guilt and shame. And finally, it is true that they were to grow in "the likeness of God." But this was not something to be grasped out of pride or selfishness, with the desire to be equal with God. It was to happen over time by grace and in cooperation with God.

God had placed a limit on humanity, which is symbolized by the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Humanity can know many things, but who is to decide what is best for

humanity, what is good and what is evil – the God who created humanity or the creature who was created? Gen 3 tells us that God wanted to retain that knowledge of what was best for all human beings.

By disobeying God’s command, humanity overstepped the limit imposed by God, hoping to appropriate that knowledge and to determine what is best on its own, without the wisdom and vision of God - the Creator.

STUDY AND REFLECTION

The Temptation and Deception (Gen 3:1-5)

What was the serpent trying to accomplish? What strategy was he using to deceive the woman?

First, the serpent (Satan) is trying to attack God, by inciting Adam and Eve to join him in his rebellion against God. He will try to accomplish this by planting a **seed of doubt** into the mind of the first woman: doubt about God’s good intentions, doubt about the sincerity of God’s love for them. Can God be really trusted? Does He truly wish to provide Adam and Eve with what is best?

Why does he approach the woman first and not the man? A possible explanation may be that he knows Eve will be the mother of all the living. By deceiving Eve, he knows that he will be able to affect the whole human race.

The first question that the serpent (Satan) poses to Eve is deceptive. He twists the truth by asking: “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden’?” By posing his question in a deceptive way, he puts Eve on the defensive and draws her into conversation. That is his first objective.

Once Eve begins a dialogue with the serpent, she is no match for his cunning deceptiveness. To be protected from the influence of the Evil One, it is best for humans not to enter into conversation with him alone, for they will surely lose. Humans must maintain their conversation with God, allowing God to deal directly with the Evil One on their behalf.

Once the serpent has drawn the woman into conversation, he begins to undermine her trust in the sincerity and goodness of God. He sows seeds of doubt in her mind. What follows then is an outright lie: “*You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” Eve takes the bait.

In her response to the serpent (see Gen 3:2), the woman adds something that God did not say. What was it? Why would she do this?

Eve adds the words, “neither shall you touch it.” God only commanded that “you shall not eat of it.” She may have added this because of fear.

The Evil One incites fear and he works through fear. God is never the source of fear. He is always the source of peace.

In his first letter, St. John writes the following: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:18-19).

In Gen 3:4, the serpent calls God a liar. He says to the woman, “You will not die.” Then, he proceeds to tell the woman why it will be to her benefit to disobey God. What are the supposed benefits?

Satan proposes three benefits to be gained from eating of the fruit. First, their eyes will be opened, and they will gain great knowledge, wisdom and understanding. Secondly, they will become like God, equal to Him in power and freedom. Finally, they will come to know good and evil, according to their own terms, not God’s.

This is the first test: Will Adam and Eve trust in God’s love and goodness? Will they obey their Creator and remain faithful to Him, or will they abuse their freedom and follow their own desires instead? Will they go beyond the boundary of what it means to be a created human being?

Do these benefits offer Eve anything she doesn’t already have? What do they offer?

There is great irony in the choice the serpent proposes. His offer is a tragic, hollow imitation of what the man and woman already have in God’s friendship.

If you remember, man and woman were created “in the image and likeness of God”. As an “image of God” their eyes were already opened to God’s goodness and love, to the beauty of all He had given them. Satan wanted to rob them of their original purity of heart and innocence, so that their eyes would be opened to the experience of guilt and shame.

Created in the “likeness of God,” man and woman were called by God to forever grow in their “likeness of God,” to become more and more “like God.” This was to happen with the help of God, by cooperating with His grace. But Satan is now proposing that Adam and Eve become “like God” on their own terms, by their own efforts, without the help of God and His grace.

Finally, the first man and woman knew good and evil as God had revealed it to them. ‘Enjoy creation,’ He told them, “it is all very good”. ‘But do not eat of the fruit of one tree or you will die.’ This was the boundary of their knowledge of good and evil, as determined by God. Satan then comes to them and tempts to set their own boundary, to determine what is good and evil according to their own desires.

The Original Sin and the Immediate After-Effects (Gen 3:6-13)

What immediate effects did Adam and Eve’s disobedience have that can be seen in their behavior? What were the consequences of their sin?

The consequences of choosing self over God are immediately evident. Adam and Eve realize that they are naked. They are so ashamed that they hide from each other and no

longer live in perfect harmony with one another. Sin has blinded their spiritual vision. If you remember from last week's discussion, it was with "purity of the heart" that they looked upon each other. They saw each other fully, intimately and spiritually, not just with the physical eyes of the body, but with the peace of their interior gaze. Once their spiritual gaze became blinded by sin, their inner peace was lost. They now look upon each other only with the physical eyes of their bodies, realizing their nakedness and loss of innocence.

Next, they realize that they have sinned against God. Afraid, they hide from God. Since their spiritual eye (the heart) has been blinded, their image of Him has become distorted. They no longer see Him as a loving Father to whom they can run, but as a punishing Judge from whom they must hide. Their perfect harmony with God has been lost. Unable or unwilling to take responsibility for their actions (i.e. we see no repentance in them), they blame one another, excusing themselves. Sin now has taken dominion over them.

Eating of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve have been "poisoned" with selfish desire, or *concupiscence*: the inordinate desire of the flesh (to use or to abuse), the desire of the eyes (to have, to possess) and the pride of life (to control and to dominate).

The fractured relationship between man and woman will continue in tension, lust, and the desire to dominate.

What was to be the greatest joy for woman, childbearing, is now fraught with pain and suffering. What was to be the great joy for the man, the work of his own hands as God's steward, is also now also fraught with pain and suffering. Their perfect harmony with nature is also lost, as the earth becomes alien and hostile to them. They will leave the perfection and harmony of Paradise and enter into a world of both good and evil.

Eventually, death will come upon them and their bodies will return to the dust of the earth.

If God is all-knowing, why would He call out to them saying, "Where are you?" What could this mean?

Obviously, God knows their exact physical location. They cannot physically hide from God. The question, "Where are you?" is a spiritual one. It can be interpreted like this: "You were so close to me in friendship, and now I feel the distance between us, alienation from one another. Where are you, spiritually? -For you have drifted away from me."

What is a sure sign of repentance? What is a sure sign of lack of any repentance? Does the man and/or the woman show signs of repentance?

A sure sign of repentance is confession. A person, sincerely repentant, will take responsibility for his/her actions. They will openly confess their sin and ask for forgiveness.

A sure sign of lack of repentance is the desire to rationalize sin before God and others, to explain why it is "not my fault;" and to blame others.

The man and woman show no signs of repentance. Instead of taking responsibility for their actions, they blame someone else: the man blames the woman, and the woman blames the serpent.

The Punishments and the Promise of a Saviour (Gen 3:14-19)

What does God mean, when He says to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Is God talking about “woman” in general, or about one particular woman? What is the “seed of the serpent” and what is the “seed of the woman”? What is God really saying in this verse (Gen 3:15)?

God has one specific woman in mind: The Virgin Mary. A battle will take place between the Serpent and the Virgin Mary; between the offspring of the Serpent, i.e. those who join him in his rebellion against God, and the offspring of the Woman, Her Son, Jesus Christ, and all those who shall follow Him. A time will come when the child of this Woman, will crush the Serpent’s head. This prophecy is fulfilled with the victory of Christ’s death upon the cross.

“You shall bruise his heel.” By inciting the betrayal, arrest, passion and crucifixion of Christ, Satan is deceived into believing that he will conquer. But it is Christ Who will conquer in the end, vanquishing death by His own death and resurrection. This victory over Satan by Jesus Christ is perpetuated in time through His Mystical Body, the Church. The very humans through whom Satan sought to attack God, who were deceived by his first onslaught, will in the end crush the Serpent’s head.

Genesis 3:15 is a prophecy of hope. God does not abandon his children. He promises to send a Savior, who will free mankind from the bondage of sin and death. The pronouncement of ultimate victory in Genesis 3:15 is known as the *protoevangelium* – “the first gospel” or “the first good news.

What was special about being a woman before the Fall? What changes after the Fall?

Both man and woman were to share in the gift of procreation, bringing new life into world. However, to bear children was the unique gift bestowed upon the woman and it was to be her greatest joy. After the fall, what was to be a source of great joy, childbearing, is now fraught with pain and suffering.

What was special about being man before the Fall? What changes after the Fall?

Stewardship of God’s earth is a vocation that was given to both man and woman. However, the man experienced the gift of human work in a unique and special way. To serve God by tending and caring for the earth entrusted to him was to be a source of great joy and fulfillment for him. However, after the fall, the gift of human work also becomes fraught with pain and suffering.

In verses 16-19, how do you envisage God speaking to Adam and Eve? Is he speaking with righteous anger, judgment, justice, love, or concern? What is your opinion?

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Life in the World of Good and Evil (Gen 3:20-24)

In Gen 3:21, it says that God clothed Adam and Eve with 'garments of skin.' Where did they come from? Why did God need to clothe them? (Wouldn't fig leaves be good enough?) How should we understand this verse: literally, or symbolically?

Garments of skin can only come from dead animals. Commenting on these 'garments of skin,' St. Gregory of Nyssa says that these garments symbolize the **mystery of death**. God had to clothe Adam and Eve in the garment of death, as a consequence of their sin. For the soul, this meant separation from God; and for the body, it meant eventual separation from the soul.

The question is then this: What animal did God use to provide the garments? The text does not give us any indication. Some have suggested that the animal was a lamb, thus a foreshadowing of God's chosen Lamb, the Redeemer, and the sacrifice that is still to come. His Sacrifice will bring about the removal of the garment of skin the re-clothing of mankind in a garment of light.

In the mystery of Baptism, the old garment of skin (the garment of death) is removed by God. As a person is stripped of the old clothing (the old self) and is immersed into the waters of baptism, he/she emerges as a new person, spiritual born again (from above) as a child of God. In baptism, the person is immersed into the death of Christ in order to rise together with Him, in His resurrection to new and eternal life. Baptism, the first resurrection, is the resurrection of the soul.

As the person emerges from the baptismal waters, he/she is clothed in a white garment, as a sign the soul has now been clothed in a garment of light and righteousness. God has removed the garment of death and clothed the person with the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Second Coming will be moment of our second resurrection, the resurrection of the body. At that time, our souls will be reunited to a glorified body and the fullness of Christ's Resurrection will be completed in us.

Why did Adam and Eve have to leave the Garden of Eden? Couldn't they just stay there and eventually die? Why is God being so adamant about them leaving? What impression do you get of God at this point?

According to St. Irenaeus (one of the Fathers of the Church), God in His mercy, would not allow Adam and Eve to remain in the garden of Eden, because He did not want them to partake of the tree of life in their fallen condition, and thus remain in that state forever.

To return to Paradise and to have access to the Tree of Life, they would first need to be “redeemed” and “restored” to their original “image and likeness” of God. This would become possible through the promised Saviour, Jesus Christ. A more permanent and glorious solution was in the works!

New Testament Connection: *The apostle and evangelist John borrowed language and imagery from the Creation story to begin his gospel. Read John 1:1-14. What new creation is he describing?*

The arrival of a new creation, the dawn of the kingdom of God on earth, is described in terms reminiscent of the Genesis creation story. John begins his gospel with the exact same words that Moses begins the book of Genesis: “In the beginning...”

It was through the spoken Word that God created all things. St. John explains that this Divine Word of God is a Person, the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. He is the only-begotten Son of the un-begotten Father, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made. “All things were made through Him, and without Him was nothing made.

The Word of God is also the true Light and Life of all mankind. He came into the world and dwelt among us, and the darkness of sin cannot overcome it.

To the children of Adam who have fallen from their original relationship with God, Christ offers power to become children of God. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” – God once again walks among His people in harmony.

The cherubim, are they still guarding the way to the Tree of Life today? What is the Tree of Life for us anyway? What is the fruit of this Tree?

The cherubim are no longer guarding the entrance to Paradise, preventing access to the Tree of Life. At the vigil of the feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, we sing the following:

“Come let us rejoice in the Lord as we tell of this present mystery. The middle wall of partition has been destroyed; the flaming sword turns back, the cherubim withdraws from the **tree of life**, and I partake of the delight of Paradise from which I was cast out through disobedience.”

The cross has become for us the Tree of Life and the fruit of this Tree is Christ Jesus Himself. As we celebrate the Most Holy Eucharist, the Mystery of the Cross as the “TREE OF LIFE” becomes truly present to us. In Holy Communion we partake of the divine fruit of this Tree, which is the most precious Body and Blood of Christ, received unto life everlasting under the appearance of bread and wine.