
LIFE BIBLE STUDY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: GENESIS 3:1-24

To understand the fall of man and woman and the future effects of sin.

That Escalated Quickly

Things in the beginning of Genesis begin with so much beauty. There is great promise for creation. Things are, “very good” (Gen. 1:31). However, it takes a mere couple chapters for things to get bad, and quickly. That’s all we have before sin becomes a reality; two chapters. We are not told how much time has passed between the



creation of man and the fall. It seems as if chapter 3 doesn’t immediately follow chapter 2 on a time scale, because there has been enough time for God’s commands to become slightly altered in the minds of the first man and woman. Nowhere are they ever told that if they touch the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* they will die, and yet the woman recounts this embellished command to the serpent (Gen. 3:3). There is no way of knowing for sure how many days have passed since the beginning of creation, but the suddenness of the fall in just the next chapter is enough to communicate that things go bad for humanity pretty quickly. All it takes is one misstep, and the consequences are beyond horrible.

The Serpent

It isn’t until the first verse of chapter 3 that we are introduced to the antagonist of the Garden of Eden: the serpent. What we know of him is scarce. We are told that he does in fact fall into the category of, “beasts of

the field,” and thus would have been created on day 6. This is a seemingly minor detail, but in fact, is actually very important. We understand because of verse 1 that the serpent was *created by God*. We are not told the origin of evil, but we are told the origin of the serpent himself.

He is unique as well. Verse 1 says, “the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.” The word *crafty* could also be translated as, “cunning or clever.” The serpent, in other words, is able to outsmart others into doing things that he wills them to do. Verse 1 is also interesting in that it utilizes the terminology of Genesis chapter 1 (beasts of the field) but attributes them to Yahweh, a title not found in chapter 1. In some sense, Genesis 3 harmonizes Genesis 1 and 2.

There is much debate regarding the identity of the serpent. Is he Satan? Is he an agent of Satan? Genesis never actually explicitly tells us. The reformer Martin Luther said, “The devil was permitted to enter beasts, as he here entered the serpent. For there is no doubt that it was a real serpent in which Satan was and in which he conversed with Eve” (LW 1.151). Early Jewish sources see serpents as dangerous creatures, creatures to be revered, and agents of chaos. Serpents posed a real threat to Jewish life. Infants were at constant risk of being snake-bitten because they were on the ground when not being held. For this reason, Isaiah foretells a time when the Messiah comes to bring peace on the earth and includes the details, “The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den” (Is. 11:8). Such a reality would have been virtually unheard of, and thus illustrates the profound results of the reigning Messiah and His kingdom. The serpent was not just the first enemy of man, but a continuous one.

Whatever the serpent of Genesis was, he was clearly an opponent of God and desired to thwart God’s creation, but clear details regarding his identity are missing. The Old Testament never explicitly connects Satan to the serpent, but the New Testament does. Below are the New Testament references that do make the connection, and a brief explanation of each of them.

ROMANS 16:20

The first connection that we find between Satan and the serpent is in Romans 16:20. Paul, at the end of his letter to the church in Rome, warns believers, “to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught” (Rom. 16:18). He says of these opponents, “by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive” (Rom. 16:19). At first glance, these is a simple verse about false teachers, and no doubt Paul has this in mind. However, there are echoes of the serpent here as well. The serpent is crafty and a smooth-talker, and there is a level of naivety in the first woman. The full allusion to the serpent is made, however, in verse 20: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” This immediately rings of Genesis 3:15, where God promises that the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent. While it never explicitly says that Satan is the serpent, there is ample evidence of at least an allusion to such a connection.

REVELATION 12:9; 20:2

The most convincing Satan/serpent connection is in Revelation 12. The Apostle John describes a supernatural, heavenly battle between the archangel Michael and his angels against a figure called, “the dragon” (Rev. 12:7). Michael prevails against the dragon who is thrown down from heaven once and for all. Then verse 9 makes the explicit connection: “And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.” The dragon is referred to as, “the ancient serpent,” who is, “the deceiver of the whole world.” There is no doubt that the deceptive serpent in the Garden is in mind here.

As we continue our study in Genesis, we must keep asking the question: “How did the ancient Hebrews understand this passage?” It’s easy for us to read Genesis 3 and understand the serpent to be Satan. All of what we know about God’s enemy from the New Testament lines up with the serpent’s behavior. But, did the Hebrews understand it this way? Probably not, at least not in the fullest sense that we do. The serpent, then, speaks to the tumultuous relationship between snakes and the people of God, while simultaneously showing how Satan has from the very beginning been about destroying all of what God has created.

The Fall

The serpent begins to question the woman regarding the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*. She embellishes the command that God gave regarding the fruit of this tree, stating that they were instructed neither to eat it nor even touch it. The embellishment here is not necessarily an example of self-imposed legalism as some have suggested. It could be one of wisdom. When something poses a threat, we instinctively place boundaries around it in order to protect ourselves. This could also be an example of that. Either way, it opens the door for the serpent to question her further. The serpent denies the plausibility of what the woman says: “You surely won’t die!” He then appeals to God Himself, stating that God knows that the man and woman will be like Him if they eat the forbidden fruit. This is how temptation and covetousness work. A promise to gain something that one does not possess that will bring them fulfillment or happiness. And thus, she looks upon the fruit once more, this time with a different attitude.

THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

There are some characteristics of this fruit that make it notable. For one, it is physically appropriate to eat. Verse 6 says that, “the tree was good for food.” In other words, there wasn’t anything physically wrong with eating the fruit. Secondly, it was a particularly enticing food. Verse 6 continues, “it was a delight to the eyes.” Finally, and perhaps most importantly, verse 6 concludes that it promised a result that no other food could promise: “the tree was to be desired to make one wise.” There were layers of temptation, then, in this fruit. Not only had the woman been coerced by the serpent, but the fruit itself was a temptation. The woman reaches out and eats, and then gives some to the man who, without hesitation, also eats.

NAKED

The results of this action are not the ones bargained for. Verse 7 says, “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.” There is an interesting word shift here. In Genesis 2:25, one of the things that marked the man and woman’s carefree nature was the fact that they, “were both naked and were not ashamed.” The word *naked* here is the Hebrew word, “rûmîm.” However, after the fall in Genesis 3:7 the word *naked* is written, “êrummim.” The evidence from the language is that both mean exactly the same thing, so why the change? Perhaps to show that while they both semantically mean *naked*, there is something different about nakedness now after the fall. Nakedness, by design, was not shameful but sin changes that. The shame they feel causes them to make clothes from leaves to cover themselves.

The Fallout

Verse 8 demonstrates a major departure in the relationship between man and God. In the garden, man and woman had everything they needed to not only survive, but thrive. They had direct fellowship with God. However, after the fall, verse 8 reveals that because of their shame from their sin, they hid from God when they heard Him coming. God immediately begins to question them. This is one of those instances where we, the reader, must be reminded that our theology of God is far more developed than the original audience. God is seen here questioning the man and woman, as if He doesn’t already know all things. Bear in mind, God had

not revealed Himself as fully to the Hebrews at this point as He has to us in the New Testament era. After man's confession and subsequent blaming of the woman and God (who gave him the woman), God delivers the consequences of sin for all three perpetrators. The consequences of sin work in two different ways. Some of the consequences alter functionality, while some of them affect the way each of the three relate to one another. Below is a more precise description.

THE SERPENT

The serpent is the first to receive his punishment. The fact that the serpent is even included is revealing. The serpent did not actually eat the fruit, nor was he ever commanded to not eat it (at least that we know of). However, he is still found guilty in participating in the sin of man and woman. Why? This speaks to how God feels about deception. The serpent deceived the woman, and is found guilty for it. Sometimes we like to try and argue technicalities to defend our behavior. Don't be mistaken; deceptively or craftily leading someone to do something that is wrong, is wrong in and of itself.

The serpent is punished first with regards to his physical functionality. God says, "on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life." The serpent apparently wasn't always a slithering creature. His physical stature is one now that is belittled and shameful. The notion of eating dust is not literal, but figurative; his face is always on the floor. The second aspect of his curse is with regard to his relationship with the woman. While he will wound her seed, he will one day be crushed by the woman's seed in return. Verse 15 is often called the *protevangelium*. It is a combination of the word *proto*, meaning, "first," and the transliterated Greek word *evangelium*, meaning, "Gospel." In other words, this is the first time the Gospel is promised. The seed of the woman, Jesus, will crush the head of the serpent, Satan. The fact that it is the woman's seed and not the man's seed would have been confusing to the ancient Hebrew. This is not how human anatomy works. However, in light of the virgin conception and birth of Jesus, this passage makes perfect sense (Matt. 1:23; Is. 7:14). Jesus' future victory of God's enemy is a promise from the very beginning.

THE WOMAN

The woman receives multiplied pain in childbirth as one of her consequences, another altering of original functionality. Apparently childbirth was not meant to be as painful as it is post-fall. One of the most controversial debates comes from this passage, not with regard to childbirth, but with regard to the woman and the man and the way they relate to one another now in the fallen world. God says, "Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." Some have speculated that this is sexual desire in nature. That, even though the woman will experience multiplied pain in childbirth, her desire will still be for the thing that leads to childbirth. However, the key to understanding this is found in the next chapter.

In Genesis 4:7, Cain is furious that God has accepted his brother's sacrifice but not his own. God says to Cain, "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." The Hebrew is almost identical. Here, sin is like a lion waiting to strike, but Cain must master it. The idea being drawn out here strikes at the heart of the way God intended man and woman to relate prior to the fall. God created man, and then woman as a helpmate (see last week's study for more on the concept of helpmate). They are both created as equals, with defined roles that mutually benefit each other. Man cannot accomplish what he is supposed to accomplish without woman, and woman cannot be of help to man unless man is there. They are *complimentary* to one another. Now, because of sin, things have changed. If the woman lets sin take control, then her desire will be to break free from her God-given role as his helpmate. Likewise, if man lets sin take control, he will not see her as a helpmate to cherish and love as he is supposed to, but he will instead domineer her as was common in the ancient world. Both break away from the God-given roles that they were intended to walk in.

THE MAN

The man's relational consequences are tied into verse 16 and were just discussed. His functional consequences are listed next, and are quite interesting. Take note that it is not the man who is cursed here, but the ground. The ground will become difficult, it will produce thorns and thistles, and man will have to work exceedingly hard to make it produce the fruit it is meant to produce, and once man dies he will go back to it. The takeaway from this is simple: sin has devastated the functional and relational aspects of all of creation. Nothing will work like it was meant to work, and no one will relate to one another in the way they were meant to relate. Sin changes the fabric of creation, which is why even creation itself is longing for Jesus (Rom. 8:22). Even after the punishment of sin is given, God demonstrates His kindness towards the man and the woman by clothing them (Gen. 3:21). Here, the woman is given her name. Verse 20 says, "Now, the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living."

Hide It!

The final part of Genesis 3 shows God removing the man and the woman from the garden, and then subsequently hiding and protecting the garden. God's reasoning for hiding the garden is perhaps the first act of grace. God reasons, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Gen. 3:22). The results of such a reality would be horrific. If man ate from the Tree of Life, he would live forever in a fallen state. Death is the wage of sin (Rom. 6:23), and in some way provides the possibility of redemption. Verse 24 says, "He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life." Not much is known about cherubim. They often represent the presence of God (Ps. 18:10; Ez. 10). The covering of the ark had their images on it (Ex. 25:18-22; 37:7-9) as did the curtains of the holy of holies (Ex. 26:1). The flaming sword almost definitely represents God's judgment (Ps. 104:4). The end of Genesis 3 is tragic. The garden that man and woman were once entrusted with have now been banished and guarded from returning. Sin has waged war, and has been effective in doing so.

Study Questions**Day One**

1. Read Genesis 3:1-7. In your own words, summarize this passage and make note of any unique details.

2. Read Genesis 3:8-13. In your own words, summarize this passage. What did God ask the man? What was man's response? Who did the blame for what had happened?

Day Two

1. Read Genesis 3:14-15. What are the curses that the serpent receives? What is the significance of the woman's seed? What is the significance of the woman's seed crushing the serpent?

2. Read Genesis 3:16. What are the curses that the woman receives? How does it affect her and the man?

Day Three

1. Read Genesis 3:17-19. Who or what is cursed because of man? What will the result be for him?
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2. Read Genesis 3:20. What name is woman given and why? What does God do for man and woman to show His kindness to them?
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Day Four

1. Read Genesis 3:22-23. What was the reasoning for removing Adam and Eve from the garden?
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2. Read Genesis 3:24. How is the garden guarded now? What is the significance of the flaming sword (Hint: See above).
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Week 3 Discussion: Sin

Genesis 3 shows us that the reaches of sin invade not only our relational capacity in marriage and other close relationships, but also our physical functionality. Discuss as a group the ways you have seen sin, when not mastered, affect your relationships. Also discuss the way sin has affected you functionally, not only in the ways described in Genesis 3, but also in other ways (disease, physical ailments, aging, etc.).

1. Icebreaker: What is the most devastating thing sin has caused in your life?
2. How has sin provoked you to harm the relationships you have with other people, and what have you done to counteract it? How has grace helped you in your relationships?
3. How has sin affected you physically? Whether by childbirth or working the ground, or disease, physical maladies, or simply getting older and not being able to do as much, how has sin made the functionality of life more difficult? How has God worked those things together for good, as Romans 8:28 says?
4. Have you ever considered that natural disasters are not so much an act of God's judgment, but merely a result of the fallen world we live in? Discuss.
5. How has this study helped you make sense of not only the difficulty you have experienced in your own life, but the evil in the world in general?

Takeaways:

1. The serpent deceived the woman, and the man followed, resulting in devastating consequences.
2. Sin affects everything from relationships, physical functionality, to even creation itself.

PRAYER REQUESTS: