

## The Fall



### “It Was Very Good”

After his creation of the man and woman, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (*Genesis 1:31*). The first humans enjoyed moral innocence and harmony with God. “The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (*2:25*). However, their moral innocence would be lost, and their relationship with God would be broken. As the parents of the human race, all mankind would be affected. Theologians call this “*the Fall of Man.*” What went wrong?

📖 “And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,<sup>1</sup> for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” (*Genesis 2:16-17, NIV*)

### The Temptation (*Genesis 3:1-6*)

The first humans were confronted by temptation. Read *Genesis 3:1-6*. The woman is tempted by “the serpent” to disobey God’s instructions. What are the serpent’s character and methods?

- The serpent is “crafty” or “cunning” – skillful at deceiving others.
- With his question (*3:1*), he exaggerates God’s prohibition to make God sound harsh and unreasonable.
- He negates God’s warning by saying (literally), “Not – you will certainly die” (*3:4*). He speaks misleading half-truths (*3:4-5, 22*).
- The serpent influences the woman to doubt God’s word and to question her trust in Him. He influences the woman to think she is better off if she disobeys God.



“Serpents” were part of God’s good creation. We would not expect a mere serpent to talk and act like this. In the New Testament, “that ancient serpent” is identified as “the devil, or Satan” (*Revelation 12:9*), a created angel who had rebelled against God (*2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6*). Thus it may be concluded that Satan himself is behind “the serpent.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ is not found elsewhere in the Bible though the idea of ‘knowing good and evil’ is found in Deuteronomy 1:39, 2 Samuel 14:17, 1 Kings 3:9 and Isaiah 7:15-16. These verses generally refer to the ability to discern or make judgments about good and evil. Of course, we should seek to understand the phrase in its immediate context (*Genesis 3:5-6, 22*). Interpretations of ‘the knowledge of good and evil’ include (1) consequential experiential knowledge of good *and* evil; (2) God-like wisdom, but knowledge must be sought in the right way and some knowledge is God’s sole preserve; (3) moral autonomy (moral independence from God). Eating from the tree is an expression of moral independence but only God has the authority to decide what is right and wrong. In line with Keil and Delitzsch, Collins says that ‘God intended through this tree [that] humans would come to know good and evil: either from above, as masters over temptation [by *not* eating from it], or from below, as slaves to sin’ [by eating from it] (C. John Collins, *Science & Faith* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003], 137-138).

<sup>2</sup> This raises the question: If God’s original creation was ‘very good,’ where did Satan come from? The Bible does not reveal much about the origin of Satan. However, we can conclude that Satan was created a good angel (*Genesis 1:7, 31; Colossians 1:16; Job 1:6*) but rebelled against God (*2 Peter 2:4*). The name ‘Satan’ is derived from the Hebrew word meaning ‘adversary’ or ‘opponent.’ Satan’s rebellion must have occurred between God’s declaration that everything was very good (*Genesis 1:31*) and the temptation in the garden. Satan is the leader among other fallen angels, called ‘demons’ (*Matthew 12:24; 25:41*). Whether or not Ezekiel 28:12-19 and Isaiah 14:12-15 refer to the fall of Satan is disputed. These passages clearly refer to human kings but many scholars say they also refer to Satan (especially the Ezekiel passage). How a ‘good’ angel could choose to rebel against God is a philosophical difficulty that the Bible does not directly explain. In any case, pride was involved (*1 Timothy 3:6*).

📖 "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it" (*Genesis 3:6a, 11V*).

1. What motivates the woman to eat? What is evident about her beliefs and values?<sup>3</sup> Do you think anything is wrong with the woman and man's attitudes and actions?<sup>4</sup> Explain.
2. The serpent influenced the woman, the woman influenced the man, and the woman and man responded wrongly. In what ways are *our* attitudes and actions similar to those of the first man and woman? What influences *us* to have wrong attitudes and actions?<sup>5</sup>

### The Result (Genesis 3:7-24)

3. Read Genesis 3:7-24. What are the consequences of the first humans' disobedience? How does it affect the humans' attitude toward themselves, each other, and God (3:7-13)?<sup>6</sup>



As a consequence of their sin, the woman will experience much pain in childbirth and a troubled relationship with her husband (3:16).<sup>7</sup> The man will struggle to sustain himself until his eventual physical death (3:17-19).<sup>8</sup> But the worst consequence is seen in verses 22-24. What is it?

<sup>3</sup> 'good for food' – appealing to the body (physical senses); 'pleasing to the eye' – appealing to the eye (emotional senses); 'desirable for gaining wisdom' – appealing to the pride (intellectual, spiritual senses). The woman values these things, and these things seem good. Thus she believes it is good to eat the fruit even though God prohibited it. By eating the forbidden fruit, she reveals her value of autonomy (self-rule or moral independence from God).

<sup>4</sup> Some people do not see anything wrong with the woman's attitudes and actions. However, morality must be evaluated by God's standard. The woman is wrong because she doubts God's word and allows her self-interest to control her actions even though it is against God's clear command. She trusts more in herself than she trusts in God, and rebels against God's authority. However, 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom' (*Proverbs 9:10*).

<sup>5</sup> The apostle Paul lists the world, the devil, and the flesh (*Ephesians 2:2-3*). We may be *directly* influenced by evil spirits. More often, we are influenced by 'the world' (the ideas of popular culture, the media, academia, or others with values, ideas and directions that are opposed to God). In general, we are influenced by the 'flesh' (our human nature, now corrupted, with its desires), including our own selfishness and pride (*James 4:1-2*).

<sup>6</sup> They experience shame, a loss of innocence (3:7). They become defensive (3:12-13). The man blames the woman, and to some extent he blames God ('the woman whom *you* gave to be with me'). The woman blames the serpent. They feel they must hide from God (3:8) because they are afraid (3:10). In general, the harmony of relationships is destroyed, resulting in guilt, shame, and fear. In differing degrees, these three conditions have deeply affected the various cultures and worldviews of our world throughout human history.

<sup>7</sup> Interpretation of the phrase 'Your desire shall be for your husband' (3:16) is informed by Genesis 4:7, which says, '...sin is crouching at the door. *Its desire is for you*, but you must rule over it.' Assuming a similar meaning, the woman's desire will be to rule over her husband, but the husband will rule over the wife in a domineering manner, contrary to God's intention that the husband lead in a loving, self-sacrificial manner (*Ephesians 5:23-33*).

- Expulsion from the garden. Fellowship and enjoyment with God becomes alienation from God. Sin separates man from God and the tree of life (symbolizing everlasting life). This separation is called "death" (it is separation from the Source of life). Though physical life continued for a while, spiritual death was immediate.
- The cherubim (angels) guard the way to the tree of life on the east side of the garden. Likewise, the only way into the tabernacle and temple would be through the east side. There is only *one way* to the tree of life and harmony with God. That has never changed.



#### 4. How do the consequences of "the Fall" apply to us today?<sup>9</sup>

📖 "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (*Romans 5:12, NIV*).

The actions of the first humans turned God's intended order upside down. Humans were to submit to God's rule; Adam was to lead his family; and humans were to rule over every living creature that moves on the earth. However, the serpent influences the woman to rebel against God's authority, and following his wife, Adam also rebels. "In doing so they elevate the serpent's authority over God's. Consequently, they become subject to it."<sup>10</sup> In this sense, Satan becomes "the ruler of this world" (*John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cp. 1 John 5:18-19; Ephesians 2:2*).

### God's Promise for the Nations

The "fall of man" is not the end of the story! God has a plan to restore the harmony of the original creation. God's statement to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 points to this plan.<sup>11</sup> God's purpose and plan become increasingly clear as we continue through the Bible. " Stay tuned!

<sup>8</sup> Verse 21 says that God made 'garments of skin' to cover Adam and Eve (3:21). Many Christians believe this is significant based on the idea that their sin resulted in the sacrifice (death) of another creature to cover their shame and guilt. The significance of animal sacrifice will be revealed as our study continues.

<sup>9</sup> The separation from God experienced by the first man and woman is experienced by all their descendants, including us. In a sense, everyone since has been born 'outside the garden.' In general, sin results in spiritual separation from God. This is the condition of everyone who has not been restored to relationship with God through faith in Christ. Of course, God's children are not sinless (*1 John 1:8*). 'The Fall' resulted in a corrupted human nature, which affects both the nonbeliever and believer. However, the Christian's relationship with God is based on *Christ's* righteousness. In a broader sense, all humans live in a 'fallen world.' All creation is affected (*Romans 8:20-22*). Thus we all face trouble, suffering, sickness, death, etc. These conditions will continue until Christ returns and establishes his kingdom.

<sup>10</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 102.

<sup>11</sup> Many interpreters call Genesis 3:15 the 'protoevangelium' (first gospel), understanding it to represent the great struggle between God and the evil one, played out in the hearts and history of humankind. 'The offspring of the woman would eventually crush the serpent's head, a promise fulfilled in Christ's victory over Satan – a victory in which all believers will share.' From the *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 10.

## Reflection & Application

- This week, think about the example of the first humans. Reflect on these questions: In what ways are *my* attitudes and actions similar to theirs? In what ways am *I* tempted to do the wrong things? How do my wrong attitudes and actions affect the relationships in my life?
- Because of man's sin against God, the relationship was broken, resulting in a lack of true peace, joy, purpose, and hope (the blessings of abundant, everlasting life). How would you characterize your relationship with God? The Bible reveals God's plan to reconcile people to himself. How are you responding to God's plan and purpose revealed in the Bible?
- We live in a world of much pain, suffering, confusion, disappointment, and despair. In general, people understand that something is wrong, but most lack a biblical understanding of the problem. Brothers and sisters, when family members, friends, coworkers, or neighbors share their troubles with you, how do you respond? When they acknowledge that *something* is wrong, how do you respond? Reflect on this lesson and think through how you can respond in a loving, biblical way.

## Prologue to the Promise

The first 11 chapters of Genesis might be considered the "prologue" to the main story of the Bible – that is, God's program to restore harmony to his creation. God's plan emerges in his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12. The first 11 chapters discuss two major topics: 1) God and creation; and 2) God's creation ruined (caused by sin and its spread throughout the world).

- Chapter 4 records the account of Cain & Abel (Adam and Eve's first sons). This is a continuation of Adam and Eve's story, and involves the first murder. The result was God's judgment – separation from God.
- Chapter 5 records a genealogy (Adam to Noah).
- Chapter 6-9 records the account of the great flood. Humans had become so wicked – so evil, all of the earth was corrupted. So God sent a flood to destroy the earth. Among humans, only Noah and his family were saved.
- Chapter 10 records a genealogy (Noah to the clans of Noah's sons)
- Chapter 11:1-9 records the account of Babel, where prideful mankind aspired to "make a name for themselves." But God scattered them.
- Chapter 11:10-32 records a genealogy (Shem to Abram)



These chapters record a cycle of human sin and God's judgment. The human situation was not getting better! But God had a plan. That plan emerges in Genesis 12.

## Questions You May Have

This lesson may have raised some questions. For example: 1) If eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was prohibited and "deadly," why did God put it in the garden?; 2) Why did God allow man to sin?; 3) Why can't God just overlook sin? These are good questions but I ran out of room on this handout. If you would like to see my answers, let me know.