

11. GENESIS SERIES: The Fall

'Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons (Genesis 3:1-7).'

Just how much time has passed between what was recorded in the first two chapters of Genesis and chapter three is a matter of speculation. In short we don't know and really have no means of knowing. What we do know is that all was 'very good' in the first two chapters and in chapter 3 all the good is turned upside down as sin enters the world. Now nothing is 'very good.'

Just when evil originated is a subject that is outside of our realm of knowledge - we have no means of knowing the answer to that question. All we can say is that it was after creation and prior to the fall of man, for Satan and 1/3 of the angels rebelled against God, becoming the source of all evil in the universe. From this initial rebellion evil spread to earth, and this is then taken up in Genesis 3.

Verse 1: In this first verse of Genesis 3 we are confronted with a speaking serpent, something which we are totally bewildered by. How can a serpent speak? One thing is certain and that is that the serpent that confronted Eve in the garden is totally different to those serpents that we see today, for as a result of this encounter the serpent was cursed by God and was changed forever (3:14). A speaking serpent - something was not right in paradise!

Yet the description we have of the serpent in this verse is that it 'was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.' Clearly the serpent was one of the organisms created by God in chapter 1 (1:24-28) and was therefore 'very good' at the time of it's creation. Here it is described as being more cunning or wise (word usage - Pr 12:23) than all the other creatures 'of the field' at this point in history. This may refer to what actually occurred in Genesis 3 in the temptation of Eve.

Even though this was the case, the serpent is not to be seen as the real villain of the story,

for it was Satan who was making use of this creature to attain his end (3:15; Rom 16:20; 2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:13,14; Rev 12:9; 20:1,2). As to the serpent being able to speak, John Calvin has this to say:

‘... the serpent was not eloquent by nature, but when Satan, by divine permission, procured it as a fit instrument for his use, he uttered words also by its tongue, which God himself permitted.’

What we see then in this verse is Satan (Jn 8:44; Rev 12:9; 20:2) moving to tempt man through the means most likely to achieve his goal (2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:13,14; 1 Pet 3:7). This he does through a talking serpent and through the woman, casting doubt on what God had actually said, ‘Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’ By this question Satan is questioning the goodness of God, yet sounds as though he was asking an honest question - very subtle! ‘So you can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’ Surely Eve will respond to such a question - which is exactly Satan’s plan!

Verses 2 and 3: Satan’s plan has worked, for Eve responds to the question and engages Satan in conversation. Eve answered Satan’s question by defending God’s command of not eating of the tree in the middle of the garden, for it was from just one tree that they couldn’t eat. God had indeed given so many others from which they could eat. Only one was banned, not all of them.

Yet in verse 3 there is a subtle shift in Eve’s thinking, for she adds, ‘neither shall ye touch it,’ which does not appear in God’s prohibition in Genesis 2:16 and 17. This may indeed be almost an agreement with the serpent’s argument that God was not being good toward humanity, for he had put restrictions on them. The text appears to imply that Eve’s understanding of the prohibition may have included an element of excessiveness on the part of God in outlawing this particular tree for food.

There is also an element of doubt in her understanding of God’s judgment regarding the breaking of his probationary law, for Eve says ‘lest ye die,’ while God said ‘thou shalt surely die.’

QUESTION: Discuss Eve’s reply to Satan. What do you think Eve’s answer reveals about her relationship with God at this point?

Verses 4 and 5: In these verses Satan has sensed that he has gained the upper hand in the discussion, for the woman is already wavering in her understanding of God and His Word. In his reply to the woman, the serpent (Satan) claims to know more about the nature of the prohibited tree, God and the consequences of eating from the prohibited tree than God has revealed to Adam and Eve. He attempts to expose God as an ungracious God, concerned for His own place at the expense of His creatures. Yet it’s interesting to note that Satan knows only too well what the consequences were for this very sort of rebellion against God, for it was this that led to His own alienation from God.

In effect Satan calls God a liar, denying that the man and the woman would die if they ate of the tree. Instead he claims that God is being selfish, putting restrictions upon them so that they would not be like God and He would therefore stay in a position above them. Satan is saying that God will lose His position of authority over man if they eat of the fruit, for they in effect will become as God. By eating they will become very wise - according to Satan's lie.

Verse 6: As you read verse 6 the question is when did the fall take place? Did the fall occur when the fruit of the prohibited tree was eaten or did it occur prior to the eating? The description given in verse 6 of the entire rebellion process in man suggests that the sin actually occurred prior to the actual eating of the fruit, having been committed in the mind before it became an external act.

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: What sins were committed in the Garden of Eden by our first parents?

Verse six gives a summary of man's descent into sin and his fall from the state of his original righteousness. There is a clear progression from his original state to that of the external act of disobedience and rebellion against God. There is the doubting of God's Word and distrust of God, leading on to covetousness and a lusting after the forbidden fruit for a whole variety of reasons including what it looked like, a food that was being unfairly kept from them and a self-centred desire of ambition. From all this came the actual external act of disobedience (See Jam 1:14,15).

Whereas the woman had been deceived by Satan into her sin, Adam was not - he simply sinned (1 Tim 2:14). We are not told of the circumstances that moved Adam to sin. He suddenly turns up in the narrative when Eve gives him some of the prohibited fruit and he ate. Whatever the reason, he joined in this act of rebellion against God and fell from his original state of righteousness - and it is in Adam that the whole human race is condemned (Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:22).

Verse 7: Having sinned, any deception that may have been there through the devices of Satan was now removed and they saw themselves as they truly were before God - guilty. They knew they were wicked and made a feeble attempt to hide themselves by making fig leaf coverings and then attempted to hide in the garden from God (3:8). Their conscience was condemning them and their guilt was over-powering.

QUESTION: What was the purpose of making fig leaf aprons for themselves?

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

How was Adam and Eve's response to the presence of God in the garden similar to the response that we now have when we sin? Explain the comparison.

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