

The Fall (Genesis 3)

October 11, 2015

Brian Watson

Genesis 3

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” ² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.¹

What is wrong with the world? Every week, we hear news of more murders, more bombings, natural disasters, and people treating each other in inhumane ways. Just yesterday, two bombs went off near a train station in Ankara, Turkey, killing 97 people and wounding many more.² Why does this happen? Where does evil come from?

The problem of evil is a problem for everyone. It’s a problem because we all experience evil on some level. We may not all die in such a bombing, or lose loved ones to an act of terrorism, but we will all die and we will all lose loved ones. We all experience people acting in awful ways; sometimes, we’re the ones who treat others poorly. We’ve all seen destruction and decay. Evil is an existential problem. We must learn how to live through it.

Evil is not only a problem we experience; it is also a problem that we try to explain. We try to account for why the world isn’t the way we think it should be. And, to be honest, none of us has all the answers. I don’t think any worldview explains everything about evil. And that’s what makes evil so evil: we can’t make sense of it. But many different religions and different philosophies have tried to come up with those answers. Some ancient philosophies say that good and evil have always existed. Some have said that all matter—the stuff of the physical world—is evil and must be escaped. Confucianism taught human nature is essentially good, and that evil

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/10/middleeast/turkey-ankara-bomb-blast/index.html>

comes from turning away from the right path, and from ignorance.³ In classical Hinduism and Buddhism, evil is an illusion and suffering comes from our desires.⁴

The current story that many believe explains everything with respect to evolution. Darwinism, or neo-Darwinism, states that all life has evolved from a common ancestor through natural selection. If this story were true, there would certainly be evil. A big part of evolutionary thought is that animals are in competition with each other for precious resources, and that they must avoid dangerous predators. According to this story, nature is “red in tooth and claw.”⁵ Frankly, if the grand story of evolution is true, then we should expect evil. It shouldn’t shock us or appall us. The real shocking thing is why anyone would be good.

I don’t think these worldviews best explain evil. But the Bible’s story does explain it. The Bible doesn’t answer every question we might ask about evil, but it presents a story in which a good world turns bad because God’s creatures turn away from him. We’ll see that today in Genesis 3. This passage is usually known as “The Fall.” These words don’t appear anywhere in the Bible, but they definitely explain what happens.

In the passage that was just read, we meet a mysterious serpent. We’re not told a lot about him, but he is a beast of the field, a creature God has made. He approaches the first woman, Eve, and he begins to question what God had said. He asks, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (v. 1). He’s trying to get Eve to doubt God’s goodness. He’s presenting God as mean, restrictive, and stingy. Now, Eve could have said, “God didn’t say that. He said we can eat fruit from any tree except one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” But she doesn’t. She repeats the command given to the first man, Adam, in the previous chapter, but with some changes. Those subtle changes are important. So let’s look at the command in Genesis 2:16-17:

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Now look at what Eve says:

³ Iain Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 128-29.

⁴ “Although Hinduism and Buddhism are different from each other in many ways, in both worldviews evil and suffering are simply aspects of the illusory world that I am seeking to leave behind in favor of reality. My critical need is, once again, enlightenment: if only I could grasp the truth about existence, I would not be suffering.” *Ibid.*, 131.

⁵ This phrase comes from Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem, *In Memoriam A. H. H.*

“We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die’” (Gen. 3:2-3).

She changes the wording of the first clause, leaving out “surely” and “every.” That’s important. God had allowed Adam and Eve to eat abundantly. He had barred them from only one tree. But Eve apparently didn’t understand that. Maybe Adam didn’t relay the message to her rightly. At any rate, she takes away from God’s word. And she adds to it. She adds that they are not supposed to touch the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Even before Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, something has gone wrong.

The serpent, having first introduced doubt into Eve’s mind, now directly contradicts God by saying that Eve will not die if she eats the fruit. He says, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (v. 5). The serpent is trying to poison the mind of Eve. He is saying, “The real reason God doesn’t want you to eat this fruit is because he wants to keep you under his thumb. He knows that if you eat the fruit, you’ll be like him, and he doesn’t want that.”

At this point, the woman can’t (or won’t) resist. She has doubts about God’s goodness, and as she looks at the forbidden fruit, she sees it is “a delight to the eyes.” She believed it could make her wise. So she ate it and she gave it to her husband, Adam, and he also ate. And the two of them suddenly realized what they had done. They knew they had disobeyed God. They knew they had done wrong. And they tried to hide from God.

Now, before I go further, I want to say something about the elements of the story. It seems that the elements, such as the serpent, and the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, are concrete symbols. That is, they were real things. This is a real story. And yet, these elements are symbolic in the sense that they have greater meaning than just a tree and some fruit. It’s like the Lord’s Supper. If someone saw us taking the Lord’s Supper, they might not understand what we were doing. They would see the concrete elements—the little bits of bread and the little cups of grape juice—but they might not understand that those elements have a greater meaning.

Last week, I said that the tree of knowledge of good and evil represented wisdom. More specifically, it represents the ability to know good and evil apart from God, through one’s own experiences. Adam and Eve could have known what was good and evil simply by trusting God’s word. They could have embraced being dependent upon God. But they were not content with

that. They wanted to know good and evil for themselves. The serpent said that if they ate from the forbidden tree, their eyes would be opened. And that was true. But when their eyes were opened, they realized they weren't like God. They realized that they were wrong. They saw that they were naked—they were vulnerable, they were exposed. God could see everything about them, all that they had done. They felt guilty.

Before we move on, I want to make some observations. First, this serpent shouldn't have been in the garden of Eden. Last week, I said that Adam and Eve were supposed to “work and keep” the garden (Gen. 2:15). I said that these verbs were used of the Levites in Numbers 3. The Levites were the priestly tribe. They ministered at the tabernacle, the sacred space where God dwelled in the midst of the Israelites. This is one clue that Adam and Eve were supposed to serve as priests. They should have removed from the garden anything that was unclean. In other words, when the serpent started talking trash about God, they should have destroyed the serpent, or at least removed him from the garden. But they didn't do that.

Second, notice also that Adam was with Eve the whole time (v. 6). There are several clues in Genesis 2 and 3 that Adam was supposed to be the leader. He was the first human being God made. He was the one to whom God gave the command not to eat from the forbidden tree. He is the one that God speaks to in the verses we're soon going to read. Adam should have protected his wife from the serpent. He was responsible for leading his wife in obedience to God. But he was passive. He failed. Many men today don't take responsibility for their families. And men are responsible for the vast majority of all murders and violent crimes.

Third, notice also the inversion of the created order. God made man and woman in his image, to have dominion over animals (Gen. 1:26-28). But now one of the animals gets the woman to doubt God's goodness. And the woman gets her husband to disobey God. This is not the way things should have gone. When God's creatures disobey God, the good order that God gave to the world becomes chaos. Things become backward.

Now, we know from the New Testament the identity of the serpent. He is an embodiment of Satan. Revelation 12:9 refers to him as “that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.” Jesus says that Satan is “a murderer” and “a liar and the father of lies.” Satan is a shadowy figure in the Bible. We don't know a great deal about him. But he is the source of evil. He represents rebellion against God. He lies. He twists God's words. And he destroys.

Some people think the idea of Satan, or the devil, is a bit of antiquated nonsense. When Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia was being interviewed for *New York* magazine, he said he believed in the devil. His interviewer was a bit surprised. And Scalia responded in part by saying,

You're looking at me as though I'm weird. My God! Are you so out of touch with most of America, most of which believes in the Devil? I mean, Jesus Christ believed in the Devil! It's in the Gospels! You travel in circles that are so, *so* removed from mainstream America that you are appalled that anybody would believe in the Devil! Most of mankind has believed in the Devil, for all of history. Many more intelligent people than you or me have believed in the Devil.⁶

Let me say why I believe in the devil, aside from the fact that the Bible says he exists. I don't know how else to explain some evil. How else can someone explain Adolf Hitler? How else can someone explain people who rape children? There are some evils in the world that can only be explained with reference to a supernatural evil. The devil tries to get people to doubt God and his goodness. The devil even tries to get us to doubt that *he himself* exists! He's more effective that way.

Fourth, we need to be wary of people who say, "Did God really say . . .?" The New Testament warns us of false teachers. They will be with us until Jesus returns. There will always be people who distort the meaning of the Bible, or who get us to question whether it is true. Now, to be clear, I'm not referring to differences of interpretation regarding secondary theological issues. Christians of good faith and good will have some differences. No, false teachers often get people to doubt the things that are clear and important in Scripture. Usually, these involve the character of God, the nature of salvation, and ethics.

The only way that we can protect ourselves from false teachers is by knowing the Bible. How many of us actually know all of the Bible? How many of us have read it all the way through, and enough times to know when someone is contradicting Scripture?

Fifth, notice also that Adam and Eve doubted God's goodness. The serpent got Eve to believe that God was withholding something from them. He got Eve, and I suppose Adam, to believe that God wasn't good, that he didn't have their best interests in mind. So they disobeyed God. Many people often depict God as the cosmic spoilsport. According to that view, he says

⁶ Jennifer Senior, "In Conversation: Antonin Scalia," *New York*, October 6, 2013, <http://nymag.com/news/features/antonin-scalia-2013-10/index3.html> (accessed October 11, 2015).

“no” to us all the time. But God gave Adam and Eve freedom to eat from any tree except one. They couldn’t see how good God was to them. What’s interesting is that the serpent didn’t even need to tell Eve to eat from the tree. All he had to do was get her to doubt that God’s way is best, and that God’s commandment was good. Do you trust that God is good? Do you trust that his ways are best? Or do you want to go your own way, and live life on your own terms?

Adam and Eve had a very high status: they were made in the image of God. They had the privilege of representing God. They were given the task of ruling over God’s world. But they had to do that while recognizing that God is the true King. And they weren’t content with that. They didn’t accept what God had given them. They didn’t want to represent God. They wanted to be like God. What about us? Do we accept what God has given to us? Do we accept our place in life? Are we content? Or do we want to be God? Do we want to control everything? Do we want to be our own kings and queens?

Here’s a final observation about the opening verses of Genesis 3: after they sinned, Adam and Eve realized they were naked. Genesis 2:25 says, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” But now they realize they are naked and they hide. What does this mean? Think about this: we don’t let just anyone see us naked. We don’t want people to see exactly what we look like. Now think of that in a metaphorical sense: we don’t let people see everything in our lives. We don’t let anyone know all of our secrets: all the things we’ve ever thought, said, and done. We try to control our image. We hide our true selves. But God knows everything about us. He sees us naked. We can’t hide from him. And that’s terrifying, because we have sinned. To be acceptable to God, we need to be clothed. We can’t be exposed for who we really are, for God is too holy, too pure to look upon our sin and not punish us.

Now let’s move on. Let’s look at how God responds to what happened. This is verses 8-11:

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” ¹¹ He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

We know from the rest of the Bible that God knows everything. So God didn’t have to come to Adam and Eve and ask them questions. But God pursues sinful people, and he gives them an

opportunity to confess. Specifically, God addresses Adam, because he is the leader. He is responsible. God asks Adam, “Where are you?” And Adam admits that he was afraid, and that he was hiding. God then asks Adam how he knew he was naked. He asks Adam if he ate the forbidden fruit. Again, God doesn’t need to ask Adam about this. God already knows. But God asks in order to give Adam the opportunity to confess what he had done. And does Adam do that? Let’s see how he responds. Verse 12:

¹²The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”

Adam doesn’t confess his sin. In fact, it sounds like he’s blaming God: “This happened because of the woman *you* gave me!” He’s shifting the blame. Eve does the same thing. We see that in verse 13:

¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Adam and Eve don’t confess their sin. They try to cover their nakedness. There are three ways that Adam and Eve try to cover themselves. They make garments of fig leaves, which means they hide their nakedness from God, but also from themselves. Then they hide among the trees of the garden. And then they try to hide their sin by blaming others.

Are we hiding from God? Are we hiding our true selves from each other? Do we blame others for the things we’ve done wrong? Or do we own our sin, and confess it? Do we let God see into the deepest recesses of our souls so that he can bring our sin into the light and correct it?

After God finds the man and the woman, he curses the serpent, and he addresses the woman and the man. Let’s first look at what he says to the serpent. Verses 14-15:

¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

God tells the serpent that he is cursed. He now will crawl on his belly. He will be humiliated. And he will eat dust. That means he will be defeated. We might say, “He’ll bite the dust.”⁷ God also says that there will be a battle between the serpent and the woman. More specifically, there will be a battle between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. This theme runs through the Bible. We see good versus evil. We see Moses versus Pharaoh. David versus Saul. Jesus versus the religious leaders in Jerusalem. And, ultimately, Jesus versus Satan.

God also addresses the woman. Because she has sinned, there will be consequences:

¹⁶To the woman he said,

“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.”

God had told the man and woman to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). Now, as the woman multiplies, she will experience a multiplication of pain. The Hebrew word translated as “childbearing” here refers not just to childbirth, but the whole process of pregnancy. On a related note, throughout the Bible, there are stories of women who are barren, who have trouble getting pregnant. Surely this is a result of the curse. Yet God, in his grace, gives these women children. These children are often very special people like Isaac, Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. Only God’s grace can overcome the effects of sin in the world.

This is also the beginning of the battle of the sexes. We could miss this if we read this verse quickly. The second half of verse 16 says, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” That might not sound bad at first, but it is. What does it mean for the woman’s desire to be for her husband? We have to look at the next chapter in Genesis. In that chapter, Cain kills his brother, Abel. Before he does that, God warns him. God says to Cain, “sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it” (Gen. 4:7). Sin’s desire was for Cain. That means sin desired to master Cain. And Cain had to rule over it—he had to dominate it. That’s what God is saying to the woman here. She was supposed to be the man’s helper. Now, she wants to master him. She wants to dominate him. And the man, in return, is going to dominate her. He’s not going to be a humble leader. He’s going to be harsh with her. This is not the way things were supposed to be.

⁷ See Isa. 65:25.

This shows us that since sin entered the world, our desires are disordered. We cannot trust our desires. Just because we want something, or just because we feel something, doesn't mean it's right. Just because something feels natural doesn't mean it's what God wants for us.

In a moment, we'll see that Adam and Eve had to leave the garden of Eden. They had to leave God's presence. And outside of God's presence, our desires are disordered. Life is difficult. We battle. We fight. We're at odds with God. We're at odds with each other. We're at odds with creation. And we're even at odds with ourselves. Our desires conflict with each other. We're not our true selves.

God also addresses the man. We see this beginning in verse 17:

¹⁷ And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

God reminds the man that he was responsible. Because he disobeyed God's commandment and listened to his wife instead of God, there will be consequences. The land is now cursed. Getting food to eat will now be hard. Instead of a bounty of fruit trees, there will be thorns and thistles. Before sin entered the world, man was expected to work. But now that sin has entered the world, that work will be hard. It will be frustrating.

But beyond being frustrating, life has an end. There is death. Man was made from dust, and he'll return to dust. Ecclesiastes 3:20 says, “All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.”

Though death is tragic news, there is also some hope here. We find some hope in the next two verses:

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. ²¹ And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Adam names his wife "Eve." The name probably means "life." He realizes that life will come from her, and she is called the mother of all living. Eventually, one will come from her who will destroy the serpent. There will be a special offspring who emerges from her lineage who will bring life. And God clothes Adam and Eve. Some people think this is the first sacrifice mentioned in the Bible. We don't really know that. God didn't need to sacrifice animals to make garments of skin. After all, he has just made man from dust and woman from a rib. But clothing is important. Throughout the Bible, a change of clothes represents a change of status. Being clothed can also represent salvation. Isaiah 61:10 says

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.

At the very least, God provided for Adam and Eve. But his clothing of them hints at future salvation.

Even though there is a glimmer of hope here, there is also more bad news. Adam and Eve must leave the garden. They are exiled from God's direct presence.

²² Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Adam and Eve had declared their independence from God by eating the forbidden fruit. But God wasn't going to let Adam and Eve live forever in that state. He had to bar them from the tree of life. So he sent them east of Eden, back to the barren land where Adam was made. And God blocked the way back into the garden. He put cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way back.

It seems that all the consequences of sin that God describes to Adam and Eve are the result of leaving God's special place. They are the result of having a broken relationship with God. And that's the state we're born in. Theologians refer to the first sin as original sin. When

Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they committed that first sin. And original sin has an effect on us. I think the best way to understand this is to see that we are born outside the garden. We start life “east of Eden.” We don’t start out with a relationship with God. Because of that, we have desires that are bent towards sin. And our disordered desires lead us to commit sinful acts.

This passage explains so much. It explains why we are alienated from God. It explains why we have wrong desires. It explains our pride. It explains our greed. It explains why we have sinful sexual impulses that seem like second nature.

This passage explains why life is hard and frustrating.

This passage explains why we sometimes don’t feel at home in the world. Philosophers have observed that we feel a certain longing for home, no matter where we are. We long to be in a place where everything is right, where everything is as it should be. But we’re not there yet. The whole story of the Bible is a story of exile and homecoming. We see that in individual stories like the parable of the prodigal son. We see it in the exiles and exoduses of Israel. And we see that in the story of Jesus, who left his home in heaven and became an exile to rescue his people.

This passage also hints at how to get back home. If you read this passage for the first time, without knowing the rest of the story, you’d ask, “How do we get back to the garden?” That would be the question that you’d scream out as Adam and Eve were evicted from Eden. How do we get back?

If someone tried to get back, they would be killed by the flaming sword. We need someone to take the sword for us so we don’t get destroyed.

Also, if things are going to be restored to their original state, we need something to crush the serpent for us. We are waiting for the offspring of the woman to put an end to that ancient serpent, Satan.

Jesus is the one who takes the sword for us. He is the one who takes the punishment for our sins. When he died on the cross, he opened up a way back to God’s presence. That’s why the curtain of the temple was torn when Jesus died. He is the way back.

Jesus is the serpent-crusher. One day, Satan will be destroyed. When Jesus returns, Satan will be cast out of God’s creation.

Jesus is the second Adam, the one who never sinned. He was tried in a garden—the garden of Gethsemane—and he didn’t fail. He was tempted by Satan, who twisted God’s Word,

but Jesus didn't give in. He is the only human who is truly righteous, and if we are united to him, we can be clothed with his righteousness. That means we can be considered perfect, never having sinned. In reality, we aren't righteous. But if you've put your trust in Jesus, your sin has been charged to him, and he paid for it on the cross. And if you're a Christian, Jesus' perfect moral standing has been credited to you. When he died on the cross, he was naked and ashamed so that you don't have to be.

If we drop our fig leaves, if we confess our sins, God will clothe us with the righteousness of Jesus. If stop running from God, if we stop hiding from him, we can have a relationship with him. If you have a relationship with Jesus, one day you will return to paradise, to a world that is restored, a place where there is no separation from God, no battles, no guilt, no shame, no alienation, and no death. We'll finally be home.