

Prayerfully read Genesis 3:1–3:24 at least two times and then read the following notes.

Context: Setting the Table

After the magnificent introduction of 1:1–2:3, the first section of Genesis (2:4–4:26) relates the “history of the heavens and the earth.” We saw last week (2:4–2:25) how abundantly God provided for his image bearers. This week (3:1–24) tells the sad story of how our first parents nevertheless chose to trust the serpent more than the Creator, transforming God’s very good creation into the sin-cursed world of rebels we now inhabit.

Content: Reading the Text

(3:1–8) Temptation and Shame

(3:1a) While later revelation makes it clear that Satan was the one who spoke through the snake, it is notable that this passage uses the ordinary Hebrew word for snake throughout. Rather than discussing the “origin of evil,” Scripture focuses on what we so often would rather ignore—the origin and continued reality of human rebellion.

(3:1b) The Hebrew word translated as “naked” in 2:25 (*arumim*) sounds very much like the word translated as “subtil” (*arum*)—a deliberate play on words seems very likely.

(3:1c) From the heading in 2:4 until the beginning of the serpent’s speech, every reference to God has included his covenant (personal) name—“LORD”, a pattern that will continue in 3:8–3:24. In their dialogue the serpent (and the woman!) use only the more generic “God.” From the very beginning the serpent is seeking to place distance between the LORD God and his image bearers.

(3:1d) The serpent’s question is ambiguous—and could mean either (a.) “has God *really* forbidden *every* tree in the entire garden?” or (b.) “has God *really* denied you *free access* to the garden by prohibiting a *tree*?” The ambiguity of the question made a one word answer impossible.

(3:2a) The man and the woman should have expelled the snake from the garden without further discussion. Whatever else “keeping the garden” (2:15) may have involved, it certainly demanded the expulsion of skeptical snakes. Yet the woman (and the man, see below) decided to exchange dominion for dialogue with devastating consequences.

(3:2–3) Even as the woman corrects the serpent (taking his words in sense a), she herself modifies what God had actually said. “Whereas the LORD had said, ‘You may freely eat of every garden tree,’ she omits ‘every,’ saying simply, ‘We may eat of the fruit ...’ She also adopts the snake’s description of the LORD God, describing him simply as ‘God,’ and most significantly, she adds to the ban on eating of the tree of knowledge a prohibition on even touching it ‘lest you die.’”

(3:4–5) It is striking that the serpent never actually tells them to eat the fruit. Once they no longer trusted in the goodness of the LORD God, the serpent’s work was as good as done.

(3:5a—*God...gods*) Like a number of other words in Hebrew (e.g. heaven in 1:1,) the word translated as “God” is always plural in grammatical form. Only context can determine whether the word refers to the true God or to (false) gods. It seems likely that the serpent is offering them equality with their Creator.

(3:5b—*good and evil*) “What the serpent is saying is that the woman and the man will have the capacity to make judgments as to their own welfare independently of God.”² (see also the notes on 2:17)

(3:6a) There is a striking parallel between the three aspects of the fruit mentioned here and the three aspects of the world described in 1 John 2:16.

(3:6b—*with her*) Adam was with his wife when she ate the fruit. As the serpent used a plural form of address throughout verses 1–5, it seems likely that the man was there the entire time.

(3:7) The eyes of our first parents were opened, just as the serpent had promised. Yet “[i]nstead of knowing good and evil the couple now know that they are naked.... What was formerly understood to be a sign of a healthy relationship between the man and the woman (2:25) has now become something unpleasant and full of shame.”³

(3:8) While our parents were busy sewing their scratchy loincloths, the LORD God (note the renewed use of the covenant name) shows up.

(3:9–21) Judgment and Grace

(3:9) The LORD God’s questions are intended to expose guilt and give opportunity for confession—he already knew the answers perfectly well!

(3:12) Instead of openly confessing his sin, Adam chooses to deepen his rebellion by blaming his wife—and, only somewhat indirectly, the LORD God himself for giving her to him.

(3:14) This is the first use of “curse” in Scripture. It is striking that there are five

curses in 1:1–11:26 (8:21 uses an entirely different Hebrew word) and the call of Abraham (12:1–3) opens with a five-fold blessing (more on this at that point!).

(3:75) Though the details were still cryptic, God’s rescue plan was already in motion. God promised that there would come a day when one of Eve’s children would crush the head of the serpent. Rebellion would not have the final word on God’s very good creation. While this verse is never directly quoted in the New Testament, it seems alluded to in Revelation 12:17 and Romans 16:20.

(3:76a) The word translated as “sorrow” is not the normal word that would be expected in this context and sounds strikingly like the word translated as “tree.”

(3:76b) While the precise meaning of the rare Hebrew word translated as “desire” has been hotly debated in recent days, the context makes the following points clear: (a.) God created mankind in two distinct genders, male and female. While they were equally served as the image of God and were therefore fully equal in value, they nonetheless had distinct roles from the beginning. Adam’s authoritative role was part of God’s creational design, not a result of the curse (1 Timothy 2:12–13). (b.) When mankind rebelled against God’s creational design for humanity, their sin made the carrying out of God’s original intentions more difficult *without changing those intentions in the slightest*. Mankind was still to “be fruitful,” (though that would now involve pain and suffering for the woman in particular), and they were still to “subdue the earth,” (though that would now involve pain and suffering for the man in particular). (c.) Mankind’s rebellion meant that the perfect balance of fully distinct equals that existed before the fall would be as difficult for sinners to achieve as children are to birth. God’s creational intent for marriage—sacrificial headship and willing submission (Ephesians 5:22–33)—can only be accomplished by the new-creational power of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

(3:77–3:79) As Paul makes clear in Romans (5:12–21), Adam was the representative head of all of his descendants and it is therefore fitting that he received the focus of the judgment here. We are all born “in Adam” and all who are in Adam will die (1 Corinthians 15:22). Only and all of those who, by the Spirit, have been placed “in Christ,” the second Adam, will be made alive. All mankind is either in Adam or in Christ—this, not race, gender, age, social status or any other such thing, is the fundamental division of mankind.

(3:79) While the necessity of work is neither the result of the fall nor is it a punishment for sin (2:15), the pain and suffering that work brings is both.

(3:27) God provided our first parents with much more sufficient garments than they provided for themselves. While Scripture does not provide us with a

“dress code,” it should be very clear that the public undressing that characterizes our society, sadly including many professing believers, is displeasing to God. An inability to be ashamed is a sign of appalling hardness of heart (Jeremiah 3:3).

(3:22–24) Expulsion from the Garden

(3:24a) The tabernacle and temple, like the garden, was guarded by cherubim (Exodus 26:31, 1 Kings 6:29) as well as a continuously burning fire (Leviticus 6:13).

(3:24b) Though Adam had been commissioned to keep the garden (2:15), now God had to keep him from it.

Credo: Believing the Truth

Though Adam and Eve had it really good in the beautiful garden the LORD God placed them in, an evil being disguised as a snake convinced them that they didn't have it good enough. According to the snake, God was holding out on them. If they would only eat from the one forbidden tree, they could become as powerful and wise as their Creator. Our first parents swallowed the lie and ate the fruit. While their disobedience devastated the creation the LORD God had made so good, it did not change his plans for his image bearers. Though the path to redemption would be long and difficult, rebellion could not and would not have the final word.

Conduct: Reshaping Our Walk

Discuss the meaning of the text and then walk through the following application questions as you discuss the difference this meaning ought to make in our lives today.

The serpent convinced Eve that God was “holding out on her,” that the one tree God had forbidden was really more desirable than all the other trees he had so freely given. How might we be tempted to devalue all that God has already given us by focusing on what he hasn't?

When confronted with their rebellion, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. What are some areas of rebellion in our own lives that we are tempted to blame others for?

Examples: Blaming sinful anger on those who provoke us; Young people blaming their rebellion on the strictness of their parents etc.

Endnotes