

Chapter 3: The Fall

Genesis 3:1–7

Sometimes, it takes us a long time to recognize that we are in the wrong about something. As the prophet Jeremiah writes, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). Even when we feel that we are doing the right thing with the best of intentions, our judgment can be self-deceived to the point that we struggle to recognize that we fail to recognize even the most egregious sin in us. The Apostle John underscores this idea, writing, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

But other times, we immediately know that we have done something wrong after committing a sin. In those moments, the question is not *whether* we have sinned, but, rather, How could we possibly have come to that point? Where did we get off course? How could we ever have been so deceived? What would justify acting with such arrogance and disregard?

Satan’s strategy for luring us into sin is fairly consistent. In one way or another, Satan attempts to drive a wedge between us and God, and he does this by driving a wedge between us and God’s *word*. Satan first leads us to doubt whether God’s word is *good*, and then whether God’s word is *true*, and then finally whether God’s word is even *relevant*. This is the strategy Satan used to lure Adam and Eve into sin, and it is the strategy he still employs to this day. Our success in standing firm against Satan’s schemes depends on our ability, by the grace of God, to recognize and oppose these schemes by pleading and trusting in the power of God’s word. As we study the first temptation in Genesis 3, let us pray that God will give us grace to become more aware of the Enemy’s tactics in our own lives so that we can live lives characterized by increasing obedience to God.

Is God’s Word Good? (Gen. 3:1–3)

At the end of Genesis 2, it is difficult to see how anything could possibly lure Adam and Eve away from the bliss that they experienced in the garden of Eden. The newlywed couple was the special object of Yahweh God’s affections, and they were given dominion and authority over all the rest of creation. They received all the food they could eat from the entire garden (with only a single tree held back), a noble mission to achieve, and a perfect marriage where the two were naked and unashamed. How, then, could Yahweh God’s image-bearers possibly commit treason against their God? Genesis 3 unfolds the tragic details.

The Crafty Serpent

The first verse of Genesis 3 provides us with background information to help us understand the story that we are about to read.¹ Namely, we read something about the serpent who will interact with Eve: “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God made” (Gen. 3:1). This background information sets up the story in several important ways.

First, the narrative identifies this creature as a serpent. The ancient Israelites (the original audience Genesis) already knew that Yahweh had classified the serpent as an unclean, “detestable” animal on the basis that it swarms on the ground, going on its belly (Lev. 11:42; cf. Gen. 3:14). Genesis 3 perhaps explains the reason for the serpent’s unclean classification: this is the animal that seduces Adam and Eve to rebel against their holy God.²

Second, despite the fact that this is a detestable, unclean animal, we read that this serpent is among every other “beast of the field that the LORD God made.” This means that God created this animal, so that the serpent is *not* some kind of dualistic god of evil who rivals Yahweh God.³ In the beginning, *God* created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, including this snake. This snake is rebelling against his Creator; he is not an alternative deity whom Adam and Eve might legitimately worship.⁴

Third, because the serpent is an animal, God has given Adam and Eve dominion and authority over the serpent (Gen. 1:26, 28). The serpent is not the equal to Adam and Eve, and much less is he their superior to obey. Rather, Adam and Eve have charge over him as a servile creature who is *not* created in the image of God, like the man and his wife were. Furthermore, Yahweh God charged Adam with the task of “keeping” (Gen. 2:15) the garden of Eden clear of all uncleanness and rebellion against the Creator. So, the failure of Adam and Eve is twofold: (1) they subject themselves to an animal, rather than exercising authority over it, and (2) they fail to keep the garden free from a rebellious creature. Instead, in the words of John Calvin, “not only did they neglect to punish it, but, in violation of all lawful order, they subjected and devoted themselves to it, as participators in the same apostasy.”⁵

Fourth, we are told that the serpent is “crafty” (עָרוּם; *‘ārûm*) a play on words with the term “naked” (עָרוּמִים; *‘ārûmîm*) from the previous verse, Genesis 2:25.⁶ This wordplay ought to put us on the alert, instructing us that the serpent is speaking carefully, craftily, and shrewdly, while the man and the woman are interacting with him in naked innocence. And indeed, the serpent will deceive Eve and prompt Adam to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil without ever directly instructing them to do so.⁷

Misquoting God’s Word

The serpent demonstrates his craftiness right away, asking the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Gen. 3:1b). The serpent begins, then, not with an assertion—and certainly not with an outright instruction—but with merely a suggestion. Derek Kidner describes this as “disturbing and flattering: it smuggles in the assumption that God’s word is subject to our judgment.”⁸ The serpent craftily implies (without directly saying as much) that Yahweh God’s limitations are indeed too restrictive. This is a preposterous suggestion, since God has encouraged the man and the woman to eat of every tree in the entire garden of Eden except for only one; however, the framing of the question raises a doubt in the woman’s mind that the serpent will eventually exploit.

Still, if the question of the serpent is bad, the response of the woman is far worse. First, the woman understates Yahweh God’s generosity, saying only “We may eat of the fruit...” rather than quoting Yahweh God’s statement from Genesis 2:16: “You may *surely* eat of *every* tree of the garden....” This is the first act of *ingratitude*. While the woman does admit that Yahweh God has given the first couple fruit to eat, she fails to acknowledge the abundant generosity of God in

commanding them that they may *surely* eat from *every* tree of the garden. In contrast, the woman's words make Yahweh God's provision seem meager.

Second, the woman exaggerates the strictness of Yahweh God's law, adding an extra provision, "...neither shall you touch it..." even though Yahweh God had said nothing to that effect. Here we see the first example of *legalism* in the Bible. Rather than quoting the commandment verbatim, the woman adds an additional layer to the law beyond what Yahweh God has spoken. It is unclear whether she has misremembered the law, or whether Adam told her the law incorrectly, or whether she is trying to set a higher bar for herself than Yahweh God had asked of her.¹⁰ Regardless, Allen Ross correctly analyzes the effect of attempting to obey a degree of the law beyond what Yahweh God has required: "this addition continues to build up the idea in their minds that God's laws are restrictive."¹¹ Sadly, it is the woman who builds this idea up, not the serpent.

Third, the woman relaxes the punishment for eating from the tree, stating "lest you die" (Gen. 3:3) rather than what Yahweh God had said: "for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17).¹² This statement reflects the first *failure to fear* Yahweh God. In these words, the woman reduces the death sentence that Yahweh God has pronounced as the punishment for such an action into merely a hypothetical, conditional possibility. The woman's words would be on the level of saying, "Be sure to buckle up your seatbelt on the way home, lest you die." Failure to buckle your seatbelt does not carry an instantaneous sentence of death; rather, death is a hypothetical possibility that could only happen in the unlikely event that you were in an accident. Eve seems aware of some vague, distant threat of something called "death," but the fear of Yahweh God's glorious, righteous justice does not hold power over her imagination.

Fourth, and most insidiously, the woman follows the lead of the serpent in referring to Yahweh God (as he is called throughout Genesis 2:4–25) simply "God."¹³ By using only the more impersonal title "God" and leaving off the personal name "Yahweh," she unwittingly distances herself from her covenant Lord. This is the first time that human beings *depersonalize* Yahweh God. Here, the woman creates a caricature of Yahweh God, rather than dealing with the blazing reality of the God whose name is "I Am What I Am" (Ex. 3:14). Eventually, this depersonalization will grow into more obscene forms, such as creating graven images to worship as though they accurately depicted Yahweh (Ex. 32:5, 8), or questioning whether other gods like Baal or Asherah might be more powerful than Yahweh (1 Kgs. 18:21). Today, this depersonalization of Yahweh God looks like the deism that professes belief in some kind of "God," but that wants to define that "God" entirely on our own terms. Typically, this depersonalization includes the rejection of the Triune nature of our one, true God, and the rejection of his laws that do not fit our own standards of morality.¹⁴ Even in Genesis 3, it is far easier to rebel against an impersonal, generic deity than to rebel against Yahweh God who is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Rightly Handling the Word of Truth

The serpent leverages all of his craftiness toward one goal: undermining the word of God. This observation should demonstrate the importance of both knowing and believing God's word. Notice the damage inflicted because the woman lacked a perfect knowledge of God's word. The serpent exploits this imperfect knowledge not only through the framing of his initial question, but, even more effectively, in the woman's response to the serpent. Rather than responding to the serpent with the pure word of Yahweh God, she understates, exaggerates, and relaxes God's word all in one statement.

We find a counter-example of the woman's poor handling of God's word when we come to the temptation of Jesus. There, Jesus meets the temptations of Satan head on by a perfect knowledge of the word of God, quoting three times from Deuteronomy to foil the plans of the tempter (Matt. 4:1–11).¹⁵ Even when Satan quotes the Scriptures out of context to get Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple (Matt. 4:6), Jesus recognizes what the serpent is doing, and puts Satan's quotation from the Psalms into the larger context of the law. So, Jesus responds to Satan's misuse of Scripture by quoting a clearer passage of Scripture: "Again, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Matt. 4:7). Jesus' temptation story illustrates that we must not only memorize the *text* of Scripture, even though understanding Scripture necessarily *begins* with knowing the text itself. Beyond that, we must also move on toward understanding the overarching *theology* of Scripture, lest we be "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (Eph. 4:14). Satan did not know Scripture better than the Word who became flesh, but Satan knows Scripture better than you or I do. Let us therefore be on our guard against his deceitful schemes.

This story also illustrates the crucial importance of *faith* in the moment of temptation. Remember, one of Satan's craftiest strategies in this temptation scene is to lead the woman to speak of Yahweh God as merely "God" in order to undercut her trust in him. His desire was to get her to believe that "God" might not really care for her, a suggestion that he drives at from the very first question of surprise, "Did God *actually* say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"

Once again, we find the counter-example in the temptation of Jesus. In the last temptation, after Satan had appealed to Jesus' physical needs and to (misquoted) Scripture, Satan attempted to give Jesus the good gift that the Father had planned to give his Son all along: all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. If only Jesus would bow down to Satan, Satan would give those kingdoms to Jesus without any need to go through the suffering of the cross (Matt. 4:8–9). Here was a crisis of faith very similar to the allure that the serpent held out to the woman—was the Father *really* good if Jesus would have to suffer to gain those kingdoms? Why not simply follow Satan to gain them by a shortcut? As John Walton observes, "There was nothing wrong with Christ's ruling all the kingdoms of the world—it was his destiny. The temptation involved bypassing appropriate process and timing, seizing them through devious means."¹⁶

Jesus, of course, isn't fooled for a moment. He banishes Satan, quoting Scripture once again, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve" (Matt. 4:10). No matter how good of a gift Satan might be holding out to him, and no matter how attractive Satan's path to that good gift might be, Jesus proclaimed that only the Lord God was worthy of our worship and our faith. From our Lord's example, we recognize that the Scriptures must not only be *known* and *understood*, but the Scriptures must also become the fuel of our *faith*. John Calvin writes wisely on this subject:

But observe, that men then revolted from God, when, having forsaken his word, they lent their ears to the falsehoods of Satan. Hence we infer, that God will be seen and adored in his word; and, therefore, that all reverence for him is shaken off when his word is despised. A doctrine most useful to be known, for the word of God obtains its due honor only with few so that they who rush onward with impunity in contempt of this word, yet arrogate to themselves a chief rank among the worshippers of God. But as God does not manifest himself

to men otherwise than through the word, so neither is his majesty maintained, nor does his worship remain secure among us any longer than while we obey his word. Therefore, unbelief was the root of defection; just as faith alone unites us to God.¹⁷

Seeing and adoring God in his word happens only through prolonged attention to the word of God in careful study and prayer. Prayer is essential for this, since only the Spirit can open the eyes of our hearts to behold the beauty of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in God's word (2 Cor. 3:12–4:6). What disciplines do we have for remaining in the word and prayer regularly? And more, do we engage in these disciplines out of drudgery or out of delight as we seek to cultivate our love for and faith in the God who speaks to us in his word?

Is God's Word True? (Gen. 3:4–5)

After the serpent leads the woman to misquote and misunderstand God's word, the serpent seeks next to lead the woman to doubt the truthfulness of God's word altogether. Satan still uses this tactic to this day, so we will do well to analyze his crafty methods as he originally used them in the garden of Eden.

"You Will Not Surely Die"

The serpent responds to the woman, saying, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). The serpent's words are interesting, since he does not completely contradict God's word.¹⁸ In Hebrew, God literally said, "You shall die die" (Gen. 2:17). In Hebrew, authors sometimes repeat words to demonstrate emphasis, which is what is happening here. So, in Genesis 2:17, Yahweh God repeated the word "die" twice for the sake of emphasizing the *certainty* of the death that would come if the man and woman ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For this reason, we usually translate the first word "die" as "surely": "You shall *surely* die."

So, the serpent does not contradict Yahweh God's statement altogether. Instead, he only negates the first occurrence of the word *die* to lessen the *certainty* of the death. Certainly, the woman *could* die from eating this fruit, but her death is by no means *certain*. In this way, the serpent's words follow the way the woman relaxed the certainty of God's punishment by saying, "lest we die." The serpent is echoing and reinforcing the woman's idea that their death might not be so inevitable after all. John Walton outlines these grammatical issues in his commentary, writing:

The link to the next statement creates the sense that, according to the serpent, it was never really God's intention to put them to death. "He only said that to discourage you from acquiring the marvelous properties of the tree." In effect, then, the serpent does not actually contradict God, he only suggests that there is nothing to worry about.¹⁹

The overall effect of the serpent's words up to this point, then, is to suggest (1) that "God" is not good, since he has withheld something good, and (2) that God's penalty is not certain, since the man and the woman will not *surely* die. This is a powerful blend of lies, since it provides the man and the woman with both motive and opportunity to rebel against their Creator. Still, the man and the woman do not necessarily have a compelling reason to eat the fruit. Why disturb with their good situation?

“You Will Be Like God”

Therefore, the serpent’s next move is to give them a compelling reason to disobey. He explains not only why they *may* sin, but why they *should* sin, saying, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). In a single sentence, the serpent holds out the possibility not only of opened eyes that know both good and evil, but, more alluringly, the possibility of becoming “like God.” How could the man and the woman resist an opportunity to become gloriously wise like their Creator? Furthermore, why would God be so sinister as to keep them from the fruit that would enable them to become like him? Suddenly, the temptation of the serpent advances from becoming a mere possibility to a moral obligation.

Derek Kidner shrewdly recognizes the tragic, long-term trajectory of such thinking: “God will henceforth be regarded, consciously or not, as rival and enemy.”²⁰ The human race will approach God with pervasive suspicion in the realm of wisdom. In every generation, human beings created in the image of God will succumb to the lie that we are wiser than God in evaluating good and evil for ourselves. Even more, we will reject God’s word as his attempt to keep us in ignorance and in poverty. Instead, we will believe that we see the world with open eyes that give us the ability to judge good and evil for ourselves, as though we were God. This is monstrous, foolish pride, and yet it seems so natural, reasonable, and wise.

Cursed Blessings

Fundamentally, there are two problems with this outlook. First, while we can often get what we want at some level, we end up gaining far more than we bargain for. Gordon Wenham explores in his commentary on this passage the way in which the lies of the serpent “are apparently vindicated”:

The man and his wife do not die, at least not until Adam reached the ripe age of 930 years (5:5)! While v 7 notes that their eyes were opened and in v 22 God says, “Man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” On first reading at least, God seems to have tried to deceive his creatures by issuing threats he subsequently did not fulfill. The snake told the truth, not the LORD God.²¹

But, once we move beyond these surface-level observations of our first reading, it becomes apparent that the serpent is only speaking in half-truths. While Adam and Eve do not drop dead on the day of their rebellion, they are immediately separated from the direct presence of God in the garden. Separation from God is the essence of death, since we can only find true life in the presence of God.²² On this point, the Apostle John would later write, “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12). Furthermore, while the eyes of the man and woman are indeed opened (Gen. 3:7), they only see misery, losing their innocence and gaining shame over their nakedness.²³ They receive the blessings they sought, but they discover that those “blessings” are cursed.

Second, when we insist upon rebelling against God in order to gain some good thing that we believe he is holding back from us, we often miss out on gaining exactly that good thing. Although we are not told specifically in this passage, in all likelihood Yahweh God intended to introduce the man and the woman to the knowledge of good and evil at the proper time. John Walton explains

this principle:

If (1) the tree is not prohibited because what it grants is bad, and if (2) it is not prohibited because of divine repression, then one can logically conclude that the prohibition concerned timing. So, for instance, there is nothing wrong with driving, but there is something wrong with a five-year-old driving. Or we might observe that sex is a wonderful creation of God, but there is an appropriate time for such activity.²⁴

The problem with Adam and Eve's impatience to gain the knowledge of good and evil is not that they desire a good gift that God does not intend to give them. Rather, they lose the possibility of gaining that gift in its highest, purest form by waiting on God's timing.

C. S. Lewis provides one of the greatest illustrations of both of these principles in his book, *The Magician's Nephew*. In this story about the original creation of Narnia, Aslan sends the boy Digory to a secret garden in the Western Wild, instructing him to bring back an apple growing on a tree there. When Digory arrives, he discovers that the White Witch has come there before him, and that she has already stolen and eaten a piece of the fruit. The Witch tries to tempt Digory to steal and eat fruit for himself in order to live forever, but, Digory quickly refuses this temptation. Immediately, the Witch takes another approach by encouraging him not to steal the fruit for himself, but for his dying mother back home. Digory considers this temptation more seriously, but he ultimately escapes the Witch. When he returns with the fruit, Aslan instructs him to plant that fruit in Narnia so that it will grow up into a new tree in Narnia's fresh, fertile soil.

When Digory tells Aslan how severely the Witch tempted him, Aslan explains that the Witch was telling the truth, but only *partially*, about the effects that the apple would have had on Digory's mother: "Understand, then, that it would have healed her; but not to your joy or hers. The day would have come when both you and she would have looked back and said it would have been better to die in that illness."²⁵ Then, to Digory's overjoyed surprise, Aslan continues speaking, saying, "That is what *would* have happened, child, with a stolen apple. It is not what will happen now. What I give you now will bring joy. It will not, in your world, give endless life, but it will heal. Go. Pluck her an apple from the Tree."²⁶ Although the apple was forbidden originally, Aslan's intentions were never to *keep* Digory or his mother from life and health and joy. Rather, Aslan's desire all along was to give those good gifts at the proper time. When Digory takes the apple to his mother, true to Aslan's word, she is healed of her sickness. The blessings of obedience are always better than the cursed "blessings" of sin.

Is God's Word Relevant? (Gen. 3:6–7)

At last, we come to the fatal moment when humanity plunges headlong into the curse of sin: "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" (Gen. 3:6). The description of this scene is brief, and the language is even more terse in Hebrew than in English, with the first sin recorded in only eight words. Hebrew scholars also have noted that the language of this verse involves six doubled consonants that are difficult to pronounce quickly, forcing "a merciless concentration on each word."²⁷

Independent Judgment

As mentioned earlier, the serpent at no point instructs Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Certainly, everything the serpent says is intended for that purpose, but the serpent is too crafty to reveal his goals so openly. In fact, getting Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit is only the serpent's secondary goal; the serpent's primary goal is simply to get the woman to exercise her own judgment about whether she should eat the fruit. If the woman stopped listening to and trusting in God's word in favor of her own judgment, then the original sin was sure to follow.

So, the woman begins to behave toward the tree in the way that God himself behaved toward his creation. Seven times in Genesis 1, we read some derivation of, "And God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), and the evaluation of the woman takes the same form: "So when the woman *saw* that the tree was *good*..." (Gen. 3:6). Additionally, as we noted in the precious chapter, the woman's judgment of the tree mirrors what we read about Yahweh's creation of all the other trees of the garden: "And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is *pleasant* [*nehmād*] to the sight and *good for food*." These words are repeated here in Genesis 3:6: "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* [*nehmād*] to make one wise...."

Finally, the two words translated by the ESV as "delight" and "desired" in Genesis 3:6 come from the same root words that are used to translate "covet" in the Ten Commandments.²⁸ This last correlation helps us to evaluate the entirety of what is happening here. The fatal moment of the woman's sin is through her covetous attempt to be like Yahweh God through her own judgment. This independent judgment imitates, but *opposes*, the judgment and law of her Lord.

Take and Eat

When the woman begins to exercise judgment independently from the word of Yahweh God, she necessarily takes the final step toward sin: "...she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6). This is where the language becomes especially terse and difficult to pronounce, so that one may not read the text out loud quickly or easily, even despite the short word count. The overall effect is to illustrate the fragility of the original human innocence, while also demonstrating the tragedy of the mistake. Derek Kidner summarizes this simple tragedy and its eventual solution best, writing, "*She took...and ate*: so simple the act, so hard its undoing. God will taste poverty and death before 'take and eat' become verbs of salvation."²⁹

Suddenly, we learn of the presence of Adam in the garden, for "she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate." Apparently, Adam has been there this entire time, and the text has, in fact, hinted at his presence, since all the instances of "you" in Genesis 3:1–5 are in plural forms.³⁰ This is egregious, since Yahweh instructed *Adam* to "keep" the garden of Eden pure and free from rebellion (Gen. 2:15), and Adam alone heard Yahweh God's law (Gen. 2:16–17). Eve was not created yet when Yahweh God spoke to Adam in Genesis 2:16–17. While it is the *woman*, not the man, who is deceived (Gen. 3:13), it is the *man*, not the woman, who is held responsible for plunging the human race under the curse of sin. Yahweh God gave Adam a unique role of leadership within the first couple, but he does nothing while one of the lowly beasts of the field leads his wife astray. Then, after she has eaten, he takes some of the fruit and eats with her.

Naked and Ashamed

Immediately, the man and the woman recognize that they have sinned: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths” (Gen. 3:7). What the serpent promised them about having their eyes opened (Gen. 3:5) has come true, but with disastrous consequences. With open eyes, they see that they are, in fact, naked. They have forfeited their innocence, so that they are keenly aware of their nakedness with grief-filled shame. Even the words for “naked” are spelled differently from Genesis 2:25 (עֲרֻמִּים; *‘ărûmîm*), when they were “naked and were not ashamed,” to here in Genesis 3:7 (עִרְוָה; *‘êrumim*).³¹ At both points, they were without clothes; now, they are exposed.

Instinctively, the two sew together some kind of covering—any kind of covering!—using fig leaves to create a makeshift loincloth. Thus we see humanity’s first attempt to cover over shame, which succeeds about as well as our own attempts to hide shame have worked ever since. The fig leaves they use cannot really cover them, so that Yahweh God will later create for them new clothing of animal skins to fully cover their shame (Gen. 3:21). More importantly, this attempt will do nothing to stop Yahweh God from recognizing instantly that his beloved people had rebelled against him. They will take yet another step to cover their shame by hiding among the trees of the garden (Gen. 3:8), but Yahweh God will find them out nevertheless (Gen. 3:9).

The Fall

In a moment, all the goodness of Yahweh God’s creation is shattered. What was noble, glorious, and authoritative dominion for the man and his wife is reduced to shameful, exposed nakedness. This is the first, major turning point of the story of human history in the Bible. Through the rest of the Bible, everything we read will address the fallout from *this* sin. Graciously, Yahweh God does not abandon his creation, but he begins the work of redemption. That story of redemption which comes to a climax during the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ will begin immediately, before the close of Genesis 3.

But, while we will read the beginning of the rest of the story in the second half of Genesis 3, let us imagine the weight of the shameful, anxious uncertainty that Adam and Eve must have experienced *before* hearing the promise of the first gospel in Genesis 3:15, or before seeing the first sacrifice when Yahweh God covers their shame by putting to death a substitute in their place to provide animal skins for their clothing in Genesis 3:21. Adam and Eve know nothing about Noah, Abraham, David, or Jesus Christ. In fact, they do not even know whether Yahweh God will still permit them to be fruitful and multiply at all. This is a dark day, and before rushing too quickly onto the glorious light of redemption, let us sit—if only for a moment—in the horror and terror of the Fall. Humanity will not feel such a weight of despair again until a naked, bleeding man gasps his final words during his execution on a Roman cross: “It is finished!” (John 19:30).

Discussion Questions

1. What does this first story of sin and temptation teach us about the importance of God’s word? To what degree are you seeking to study, memorize, and understand God’s word? How might you find yourself misquoting God’s word with ingratitude? With legalism? By failing to fear God? By

depersonalizing Yahweh God?

2. In what ways does Satan tempt you to believe that God is not *good*? In what areas do you feel that God’s word is too narrow, constrictive, and burdensome? Do the serpent’s words, “Did God *really* say...?” resonate with you? What might you do to cultivate gratitude in the face of God’s generosity rather than grumbling against God’s restrictions?

3. In what ways does Satan tempt you to believe that God’s word is not *true*? Do you struggle to believe the story of creation? The accounts of miracles? The stories of judgment? The account of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus? Rather than outright, skeptical disbelief, does your doubt merely downplay the seriousness of God’s holiness?

4. In what ways does Satan tempt you to believe that God word is not *relevant*? Do you believe that God’s thoughts and ways are higher than yours (Isa. 55:8–9)? If so, how does that belief affect the way in which you seek wisdom for various challenges in your life? When life is complicated, to what degree do you cling to God’s word with simple, trusting faith?

Notes

1. Grammatically, the narrator uses a *wāw* disjunctive to create a parenthetic clause, with a *wāw* connected to a noun (“and the serpent”; שֶׁרֶפֶן) at the beginning of the sentence. This kind of *wāw* disjunctive introduces “information that is parenthetic to the main narrative, information that the reader needs to know but that does not fit within the narrative sequence.” (Allen P. Ross, *Introducing Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 156.)

2. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 73.

3. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 188.

4. Kidner, *Genesis*, 72.

5. Calvin, *Genesis*, 141–42. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.ix.i.html>>

6. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 72.

7. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 88.

8. Kidner, *Genesis*, 72.

9. See Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 134–35, and Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 73.

10. “Von Rad says that it is as though she wanted to set a law for herself by means of this exaggeration (*Genesis*, p. 86)...Concentration on such a forbidden object very easily led her to these modifications—unless Adam had told her incorrectly.” (Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 135.)

11. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 135.

12. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 135.

13. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 73.

14. Christian Smith has famously coined the phrase, “moralistic, therapeutic, deism” as a fuller description of the depersonalization of Yahweh God in our current cultural context. See Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

15. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 138.

16. Walton, *Genesis*, 206.

17. Calvin, *Genesis*, 153. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.ix.i.html>>

18. On this grammatical point as discussed over the next two paragraphs, see: Walton, *Genesis*, 204–05.

19. Walton, *Genesis*, 205.

20. Kidner, *Genesis*, 73.

21. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 73–74.

22. “Finally, it may be that just as the other two serpentine remarks about opening eyes and becoming like God can be understood in two ways, there are two meanings of ‘you shall die.’ We have seen that the garden of Eden narrative is full of symbols suggesting the presence of God and his life-giving power—trees, gold, rivers, and jewels used to adorn the holy of holies. In Israelite worship, true life was experienced when one went to the sanctuary. There God was present. There he gave life. But to be expelled from the camp, as lepers were, was to enter the realm of death. Those unfortunates had to behave like mourners, with their clothes torn and their hair disheveled (Lev 13:45). If to be expelled from the camp of Israel was to ‘die,’ expulsion from the garden was an even more drastic kind of death. In this sense they did die on the day they ate of the tree: they were no longer able to have daily conversation with God, enjoy his bounteous provision, and eat of the tree of life; instead they had to toil for food, suffer, and eventually return to the dust from which they were taken. A parallel to this idea of death before death is to be found in the story of Saul. As far as Samuel was concerned, Saul ‘died’ when he rejected the word of the LORD at Gilgal. So Samuel mourned for him (1 Sam 15:35–16:1). And evidently the narrator shared Samuel’s perspective, for he states, ‘and Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death,’ although he relates another encounter between Samuel and Saul in 1 Sam 19:24. Evidently this did not count, for Saul was as good as dead, though his physical death was to be delayed some years.” (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 74–75.)

23. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 74.

24. Walton, *Genesis*, 205.

25. C. S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 175.

26. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 175.

27. See J. T. Walsh, “Genesis 2:4b–3:24: A Synchronic Approach,” *JBL* 96 (1977) 166. Quoted in Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 190.

28. “The words used in Eve’s reflection are significant. First, the words *ta’āwā* (‘pleasant’) and *nehmād* (‘desirable’) are cognate to the Hebrew verbs translated ‘covet’ in the Ten Commandments; both verbs are used in Deuteronomy 5:21, but only the second occurs in Exodus 20:17.” (Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 136.)

29. Kidner, *Genesis*, 73.

30. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 238.

31. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 191.