

International Sunday School Lesson Study Notes

Lesson Text: Genesis 3:8-17, 22-23

Lesson Title: Knowledge of Good and Evil

Introduction

Commenting on Genesis 3, Doctor Jerry Vines said, "You can't understand the world if you don't understand Genesis 3." His statement is absolutely correct. Genesis 3 is one of the most important chapters in the entire Bible and crucial in the study of first things. It is the foundation of everything that comes after it. It tells us about the origin of sin and explains why humanity has so many problems. Disease, decay, dysfunction and death are all rooted in the events of this chapter.

Genesis 3 is actual history. There are no myths in this chapter. When God completed His perfect creation, there was no disorder, no death, no conflict, no struggle, no pain, and no discord. Then the tempter came and the temptation followed. While there was no reason for Adam and Eve to sin, the fact is they did. Eve did not have to listen to the serpent's subtle and deceptive words. But she did. Adam did not have to listen to Eve. But he did. When Eve and Adam sinned, they plunged the entire human race into sin (1 Corinthians 15:21-22). And the rest is history.

The theory of evolution offers no *explanation* for the human dilemma, much less any *solution*. Genesis 3 offers both an explanation and a solution. Man has certainly attained to great heights in many areas. But the fact is he fell into what he is today in one act, on one day, in one brief moment of time. Man did not ascend but he descended from the wonder and glory of his creation in the image of God to his current condition of sin. His only hope is a new birth, a new start, a brand new life. And that can only be found in Jesus Christ (John 3:3-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Questions God Asked (Genesis 3:8-13)

God created man and placed him in a beautiful paradise known as the Garden of Eden. Everything his heart could desire was there. And in that Garden of Eden God gave man a maximum of liberty with a minimum of prohibition. God said, "*Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*" (Genesis 2:16-17).

Verse 8

"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden."

Prior to Eve's deception and sin, she and Adam enjoyed an intimate fellowship and daily communion with God. But now that Eve has eaten of the forbidden fruit and gave to her husband who also ate a dramatic change in the attitude of Adam and Eve toward God has taken place. Sin instantly corrupted Adam and Eve to the point that everything changed. When they "heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" they immediately sensed the guilt of their disobedience and sin and wanted nothing to do with God. The indication is that Adam and Eve communed with God on a daily basis and enjoyed that time together. Things have now drastically changed.

Before the fall Adam and Eve "*were both naked...and were not ashamed*" (Genesis 2:25). Now they sensed the shame of their nakedness and had attempted to cover themselves with "*fig leaves*"(Genesis 3:7). This attempted covering was with materials and a pattern of their own making. Whatever the covering was they had made was not sufficient because "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden."

Sin produces shame, guilt, and fear. Before sin when Adam and Eve heard God's voice they went running to Him. Now they attempt to hide "amongst the trees." How foolish to think you can hide from God (Psalm 139). Yet, sinners today are still attempting to hide behind their religion and their good works. Atheists attempt to hide from God by saying there is no god. Self-righteous people attempt to hide by thinking they are good enough to please God on their own. Religious people attempt to hide by re-defining God into the kind of god they want.

The "trees of the garden" which Adam and Eve had tended and used for fruit now became their camouflage to prevent God from seeing them. It is no mistake that God will use a one "tree" on which His Son will die to provide salvation for Adam and Eve and all mankind who will trust His saving grace (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24).

Verse 9

"And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?"

In the midst of the awful scene of failure and disobedience, "the LORD God called unto Adam, and said, Where art thou?" It is "God" who is seeking Adam and not Adam who is seeking God. That is the way all sinners are saved. God takes the initiative.

The words of this verse are saturated with gentleness and graciousness. God wasn't looking for *information* as to the location of Adam. God knew exactly where Adam was. God was looking for *confession* from Adam.

Illus. Hymn, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" includes the words, "Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God. He to rescue me from danger, interposed His precious blood."

Question: Where are you today? Are you hiding?

Verse 10

"And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

Adam responds to God with half-truths, evasion, blame shifting and deception. There is no admission of wrong doing on his part at all. The only thing Adam confesses to at this point is his feeling of fear and shame. Adam ought to be thankful that he can still "hear God's voice" even after he has sinned. It's amazing that God would come for Adam, call for Adam, and that God gave Adam the grace to hear Him call! Hallelujah, "*where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*" (Romans 5:20)!

Adam is "afraid" to be in God's presence. Although he has partially clothed himself with the fig leaves he still senses his nakedness in God's presence. Where is all of the good stuff the serpent had promised Adam and Eve? Once they ate of the forbidden fruit they were promised that their "*eyes would be opened, and they would be as gods, knowing good and evil*" (Genesis 3:5). Adam must realize by now that Satan lied!

Verse 11

"And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?"

God's first question to Adam is "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" God is giving Adam the opportunity to come out in the open and answer truthfully. Adam had told God, "I was naked" (v.10). God wanted to know "Who told" him that he was "naked." Someone had told Adam he was "naked" and God wanted to know who. Was it Eve? Was it the serpent? Had he seen his reflection in the water? Again, God's questions are not designed to get information. God's second question was, "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" This question is designed to help Adam realize he has disobeyed the commandment of God.

Verse 12

"And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."

It doesn't take sinful man long to pass the buck! Like all of us Adam seems to be having difficulty in taking responsibility for his sin. Adam blamed God for the whole mess when he said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me..." Adam is implying that if God had been a better God He would not have given him this woman to lead him into sin. He blames the same woman who just a while earlier he had said, "*This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh*" (Genesis 2:23). At one time Eve was Adam's life, his lover, his companion, his help meet, his joy and his everything. Now she is his scapegoat. Adam is so cold and calculated in this answer to God's question.

Satan originated the first lie but it sure didn't take Adam long to learn how to lie himself. And lying is still a part of our fallen nature. Every time we try to shift the blame or make excuses for ourselves when we have disobeyed God we share a part in this garden scene.

Note: We sometimes blame God for placing us in circumstances that are too much for us. Some students cheat on tests and their excuse is that the professor expects too much or they had to work to support themselves and didn't have the time to study. Sometimes a man or woman who commits adultery will blame God for creating them with the sexual desires and passions they have. In other words, "God made me this way, so what can I do?"

Verse 13

"And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."

After questioning Adam God now turns to Eve and asks, "What is this that thou hast done?" Eve had the same amount of knowledge concerning God's command not to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree as Adam (Genesis 3:2-3). While Eve follows Adam's example and blames someone else, in this case "the serpent," she reveals a little more with her answer. She uses the word "beguiled" in defining the serpent's actions. It means Eve knows a deception has taken place. In spite of what she knows there is not a hint of remorse and she, like Adam, did not accept blame.

Both Adam and Eve defend themselves to God as victims. Adam is the victim of God and the woman and Eve is the victim of the serpent and his deception.

"Victimhood has become the fantasyland refuge of everyone from criminals to presidents to theologians who imagine that the blame for their conduct can be placed on some other person or thing or group. Buck-passing is the therapeutic trademark of the new millennium. Of course, as we saw in Genesis 3:8–13, the culture of victimhood has primeval roots in original sin. It is nothing new. Adam's sin brought instant death and instant sinfulness. In the bat of an eye, every part of the couple's beings was diffused with the tincture of sin—and in a nanosecond they were utterly dead in their transgressions and sins. Then came instant guilt and instant victimhood as Adam pointed a treasonous finger at the woman and at God himself and as the woman pointed to the snake." *Hughes, R. K. (2004). Genesis: Beginning and blessing. Preaching the Word (83). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.*

Note: It is frightening to think how often we make excuses for our sinful behavior. It is easy to read about Adam and Eve's excuses and finger pointing and forget about our own. Even in the sacredness of prayer we often point the finger and others and situations instead of admitting our guilt before God. If you are having a particular struggle with that Psalm 51 is a good place to start praying honestly before God.

The Punishment God Gave (Genesis 3:14-17)

Verse 14

"And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:"

"And the LORD God said unto the serpent" is an important statement. In dealing with Adam and Eve God questioned them for a confession and response. But when it came to Satan, God asked no questions of him. He cursed him and judged him.

Since the "serpent" has been the instrument in Eve's deception and Adam's transgression, God speaks to him first. Satan had embodied himself in the form of a "serpent" when he came and deceived Eve. Keep in mind that Satan, a fallen angel himself, had just been cast out of heaven for desiring to be equal with God (Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28). He has been judged already in heaven and now God is going to punish him upon the earth. God's punishment upon Satan, the "serpent" was that he was "cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field." All animals including serpents die because of the fall. But this "curse" of crawling "upon thy belly" and eating "dust all the days of thy life" simply means that when humans see a "serpent" they will serve as constant reminders of Satan's deception of Eve and sins entrance into the world. Every snake that slithers across the ground is a sign of judgment on Satan for tempting Adam and Eve.

Some suggest that before this "curse" that snakes walked upright on two legs. That cannot be proven from scripture but it is possible. By "cursing" the snake to crawl "upon thy belly" and "eat dust," it symbolized defeat for Satan. This curse will never be removed as stated in the words "all the days of thy life." Even in the Millennial Kingdom the serpent will never get out of the dust. Isaiah said, *"The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat"* (Isaiah 65:25). While the "wolf" and the "lamb" who are natural enemies will be eat together and the "lion" and the "bullock" will do the same, the "serpent" will still be crawling in the dust.

Verse 15

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

In this verse God continues to speak to Satan himself. "This is what is known as the first gospel message in the Bible, and at this point God establishes the conflict between man and Satan all through the ages. In this verse of scripture God establishes that there will be a seed of the Devil and there will be a seed of the woman and they will be in hostility to one another. God makes the promise that there will come a time that the woman will bring a seed and, by the way, all through the years, all through the centuries, the Jewish rabbis puzzled at this statement, because you do not refer to offspring as the seed of the woman, it's the seed of the man. But in this statement the prediction is made that someone will be born who will be the seed of the woman. He is anticipating the Virgin Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ." (*Doctor Jerry Vines, Sermon: Beginning of Sin, Genesis 3*).

When God said "I will" it must have been another blow to Satan. If he thought for a moment that he had defeated God in any area he now must think again. No matter what Satan had done or would do in the future, God is still sovereign. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman" means God will reverse what Satan has caused. "Enmity" refers to "a deep hostility." God is telling Satan that because of the coming "seed" which is Jesus Christ, man will have "a deep hostility" toward Satan.

Adam and Eve had disobeyed God and chose to believe Satan. But because of the coming "seed" God will make a way for sinful man to turn away from Satan and sin and be reconciled to God. This is the first suggestion of salvation in the Bible. What Satan ruined God is going to redeem and restore.

The first record of the gospel message does not come from the lips of a preacher or an evangelist. It does not come under a gospel tent or in a beautiful sanctuary. It comes in the context of God's curse on the devil. For hundreds of years Genesis 3:15 is all man had as a promise of salvation. But one word from God is enough!

At the cross Satan "bruised the heel" of the Son of God but that was a minor thing. At the cross Jesus Christ "bruised the head" of Satan giving him a fatal and crushing blow.

Verse 16

"Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

Woman would pay a price for sin in the two areas of life which define a woman, her "children" and her "husband." Speaking now to Eve God said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception." Because of Eve's sin there was to be "sorrow" centering in the area of a woman's greatest fulfillment which is in the birth of children. Child bearing was to be a part of life before the fall (Genesis 1:28), but now there would be "sorrow" with it. There can be many aspects of this "sorrow." Some suggest it is just the pain of childbirth. That certainly is a part of it but there are also other aspects such as every time a child is born another sinner has come into the world. Every time a child is born a mother senses the loss of intimacy and realizes that child is now more vulnerable than ever. All of this and more is involved in the "multiplied sorrows."

Sin would also bring submission to the headship of the man. The words "thy desire shall be to thy husband" is often interpreted as a woman's desire to continue to be with her husband even though the fall has occurred. However, the word "desire" means "to seek control." God is saying to Eve, "Because of your sin you will have a power struggle with your husband and have tension in a relationship that was perfect before the fall." That relationship of harmony and unity that Adam and Eve shared so easily before the fall will now be difficult to maintain.

"Rule" means "to dominate." The idea is that because of the fall woman will seek to rearrange God's divine order. This part of the punishment for sin shows up in marriages, in society, and in churches. Anywhere God's divine order in regard to the role of men and women is challenged it can be traced back to Genesis 3:16. It's part of the fall.

Verse 17

"And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;"

Speaking now to Adam God makes it clear that Adam has sinned by listening "unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree." Because of Adam's disobedience, God places a "curse" on the "ground." The "ground" is the area where man's life is defined. The "ground" symbolizes man's work, his activity, and his ability to provide for his wife and family. Because of sin the earth becomes man's enemy. God had originally placed man in the Garden of Eden *"to dress it and to keep it"* (Genesis 2:15). That sounds comforting and fulfilling. Now, *"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground"* (Genesis 3:19).

The Safeguard God Provided (Genesis 3:22-23)

Verse 22-23

"And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken."

In our lesson text God has spoken to the serpent, to Adam, and to Eve. In these verses God is speaking with Himself as He did in Genesis 1:26. Commenting on these verses, Doctor Jerry Vines says, "Man did know good now, man did know evil, but it was like a man in an airplane and he jumps out of the plane without a parachute. And the pilot looks at the co-pilot and he says, 'This man has become one of us: he knows gravity and he knows altitude.' But, you see,

the man knows gravity and he cannot avoid it, he knows altitude but he cannot maintain it. And man in his sinful condition knows good and evil: he knows good but he cannot live up to it, he knows evil but he cannot avoid it."

If God had allowed Adam and Eve to remain in the Garden of Eden and "take also of the tree of life, and eat," then man would have "lived for ever" on earth as sinners. God protected Adam from this possibility when He "sent him forth from the garden of Eden" In fact, Genesis 3:24 says, "*he drove out the man.*" God placed "*a flaming sword*" and "*Cherubims*" at the entrance of the garden to prevent Adam from returning (Genesis 3:24). The way to the "Tree of Life" would not be found in Eden but would be found at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Until Adam physically died he would continue to "till the ground from whence he was taken." He would continue to work the land but now it was much harder and the curse brought forth "*thorns and thistles*" (Genesis 3:18). And while the days were difficult and death was in his future, there was a promise covering Adam, Eve, their family and this earth. God would send someone through the "seed" of a woman to crush the head of Satan. That Someone is Jesus!

Conclusion

It seems to be a mark of intelligence today for man to proudly boast that he can do as he pleases. God's Word and His commands are scoffed at and dismissed with ease. Any suggestion of a return to biblical truth and obedience to God is viewed as useless and a backset to the progress of humanity.

The first sin shattered the harmony that existed between God and man and between man and woman. It also had a devastating effect upon the earth and eternally damning effect upon Satan. There were consequences to the first sin and there are still consequences to sin today. Yet, in the midst of it all God made a promise to send a Redeemer. Through the seed of a woman God promised that Jesus Christ would come to deal with sin and one day lift the curse.

If you have been saved by God's grace be thankful Christ has taken the curse of sin upon Himself and you are set free. If you have never trusted Christ for salvation call upon His name today and you too can be redeemed (Romans 8:2).

Amen.