

## **Genesis 3:1-7**

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So far in our study of Genesis, we have seen that at the center of God's purposeful, creative work are two people who are privileged to live in God's beautiful and abundant world. They are generously commissioned to live in relationship with God and as his images — filling the creation with others who bear God's likeness, and then managing God's creation on his behalf and for his glory. Further, we have seen marriage, in particular, as part of God's generous provision for his creation, and as a permanent paradigm of the relationship between God and his people, between Christ and his Church.

In Genesis 3 this beautiful story, this idyllic world, this perfect creation turns suddenly and decidedly sour. Verses 1-7 describe how sin came in to the world, and how God's perfect creation was spoiled as a result. In theological language, we are looking at the "fall of mankind." But in less technical language, we are looking at why our doors have locks on them, why we have insurance policies, why we have hospitals, why we have police officers, why we have nightmares, why we cry, why we get angry, why we hate, why we are sad, why we go to funerals, why we are afraid, why we are ashamed, why we lie, and why we hide.

In much the same way that Genesis 1 operates, Genesis 3 introduces a new creature/person into the developing storyline without any warning, preparation or explanation of origins. In Genesis 1, we read "In the beginning God," and suddenly God is in the picture, and he's everywhere. In Genesis 3, suddenly, out of nowhere, this serpent appears. No attempt is made to explain the serpent's history, or why it is that he can talk, or how he came to be the way he was in God's universe. He was simply there. God doesn't tell us the serpent's origin, and it is better not to speculate.

Now, the fact that this serpent is an ordinary beast/creature seems clear from Genesis 3:1: "the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. So, this is an ordinary creature. And yet, as the story unfolds we see that this clearly is not a completely ordinary serpent, for several reasons:

1. Because it is talking. Serpents do not naturally talk.
2. Because of what it is says. These are clearly not the thoughts and perspectives of one of God's benign creatures.

3. We know there is more going on here because of what we find in other parts of Scripture, for example:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world - he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him (Rev. 12:7-9).

In summary then, what we have here is one of God's creatures, one who has a natural craftiness about him. He is exploited by Satan, who enters into and makes use of him for his own evil purposes. We see a similar reality much later in the Bible, where the description reveals the same kind of activity by Satan — only this time he is not making use of a creature but a person:

Then Satan entered Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him [Jesus] to them (Luke 22:3).

Moving on from thinking about the serpent's identity, we need to consider the more important matters of what he did, how the woman responded, and the results that followed. Let's consider, then, in a more or less chronological order, the events that took place that day in the Garden of Eden.

Firstly, as we've seen, Satan comes to the woman in and through the serpent, which is to say he comes in disguise. Concerning this, Alec Motyer writes,

Were Satan to manifest himself in his own person — if it is possible for him to do so — he has given the game away before it has started; he must hide himself behind some innocuous reality, and a voice out of the beauty and goodness of creation perhaps offers the best hope of success.

And so, Satan comes in the guise of an ordinary creature, a serpent, which the woman likely would have seen already in the garden. This particular serpent, however, does a very un-serpentine thing: he speaks. Now, admittedly, for you and I this seems quite extraordinary. And we look at this and wonder how it is that the woman seems simply to take all this in stride.

But I think that we forget all too easily that this woman — this still sinless, unfallen woman, I might add — is living in a world that for us would be the stuff of dreams and fairy tales. It is truly a paradise in which she lives. Even more, in this world she has had God himself — the Creator — apparently walking about the place. And so in a world like that, with circumstances like that, it might not be nearly as startling for

one of God's creatures to start speaking to you. It was that kind of place — a place full of beauty, full of possibilities, where anything might happen.

And so it does, and the serpent speaks. More precisely, he asks a seemingly innocent question. You know the sort of question I'm talking about, right? It's the kind of question you've no doubt been asked yourself, many times. It's the kind of question you have also probably asked others. It's a question that, on the surface, is "just a question," but which really is an accusation disguised as a question.

That's the sort of thing going on here with the serpent. "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" Do you see what is going on here? The serpent knows perfectly well what God has said, and has just twisted God's words. Why? Because he wants to accuse God of being stingy, of being petty, of being a miserly sort of Creator who holds out on his creatures. And so he plants the seed of that doubt by means of this "innocent" question.

Now, as we know, what God really said was the exact opposite of what the serpent was suggesting. God said they could eat of every tree except one. The Serpent's question implies that God has withheld every tree from them, and so casts doubt on the goodness and generosity of God. Why? Because appreciating the goodness of God is essential to keeping the law of God. Let me put it another way: If you don't think that God is good, if you don't think he cares for you, then you won't be motivated to listen to what he says, or to value and respect what he says.

So, the serpent asks his question, wanting to create some doubt in the woman's mind and, at the same time, to test the woman to see how much she knows about what God has said and how well she knows it. Now, at one level, when the woman responds to the serpent, she shows that she does know something, she does get something right. She, in fact, corrects the serpent, saying that she and the man could eat from the trees in the garden — all except one. So far, so good. The serpent can see that she does know something of what God has said in this regard.

But the woman doesn't stop there. She goes on to repeat God's rule about not eating of the tree in the midst of the garden, which is fine, but then she adds something to what God has said. She tells the serpent that God had also forbidden them from even touching the fruit of the tree, and that if they even touch this fruit they will die.

Now, while it may not seem like much, the fact that she adds to God's word here is crucial. It indicates that while she has some knowledge of God's word, it is an inexact knowledge, an approximate knowledge. Again, Alec Motyer is helpful. He points out that God never forbade them from touching the tree. God never said that. Indeed, they could have climbed the tree if they wanted to. They could have built a tree house in it. The only thing they were forbidden was eating its fruit.

The woman — and the man possibly as well — added to what God had said, and then treated that addition as if it were part of God's divine command. And the matter of

adding to or taking away from God's Word is a very important issue in the Bible. As one scholar points out, it is no accident that the sloppy handling of God's Word that we see here at the *beginning* of the Bible is countered at the other end of the Bible with these words from Revelation 22:18:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life, and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

And you hear the echo of this in other places in Scripture, as in Paul's admonition to Timothy to "handle accurately the Word of God." Or in Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 15 for the way that they were adding to what God had said, treating human traditions as if they were divine doctrines. Again, the Scriptures treat this matter of how we handle God's revelation very seriously. But why? One commentator sums it up like this,

There is nothing truer to the [description] of Satan than [saying that he is a being that is determined] to undermine the Word of God, to get people to live on any other basis than revelation.

This is precisely what happens, you see, when God's people handle God's word poorly — adding an idea here, subtracting a truth over there — creating this sort of "paraphrased version of the truth." We end up with a Bible in our heads that we live by, which replaces what God has actually said and which accomplishes Satan's goal for us quite well: getting us to live on the basis of something other than God's revealed truth, or at least by a corrupted version of that truth.

Well, the serpent has asked his question, he has discovered the woman's inexact knowledge. And seeing it for the opportunity that it is, he goes a step further with her. Now, rather than merely suggesting things about God by asking a question, the serpent boldly declares them, flatly and directly contradicting God. God says, "If you eat, you will die." The serpent says, "No, you won't." And then goes on to say, in effect, that the reason God doesn't want the man and the woman to eat the fruit from the one tree is not that God is protecting them. Rather, God is protecting himself and his turf. The serpent suggests God prohibited the fruit from the tree because he is holding out on his creation. God is selfishly holding back from them, keeping away from them a kind of knowledge they do not yet possess but which, if they did, would make them God's rivals.

So, the serpent has already planted the seed of doubt about God's generosity regarding the trees with his opening question. The woman has exhibited an inexact knowledge of God's will, and demonstrated by adding to God's word that she is capable of confusing her own thoughts with God's, that she is willing to go beyond what God has said, to be a little "adventurous" with truth. The serpent sees all this, and so he simply

presses that advantage here. Maybe, you see, she will go even further, maybe she will be willing to go even further beyond what God had said, again confusing her own ideas with God's, and placing them on an equal footing.

And so he tempts her with this notion that there is something else out there that she can have and should have. And he does this because he knows that it is a short step from "can and should have" to "must have." And this, says one commentator, is the essence of covetousness and idolatry: the belief that I still need something I do not now have in order to be happy. This is clearly reflected in verse 6: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food" (this is true, that's why God made them; Gen. 1:29; 2:9) "and that it was a delight to the eyes" (that much is true too, no danger there) "and to be desired to make one wise" — there it is. She was going along great, and then, once again, she adds to what is true. She has bought the lie, adopted it as her own, included it alongside what actually was true, and placed it on equal footing. And she eats.

Now, we want to look at the eating of the fruit and what it all meant, but before we do, I don't want you to miss the pattern of sin that we can discern thus far from the woman's actions, namely this:

- 1) She listens to another creature instead of the Creator.
- 2) She follows her impressions instead of God's instructions.
- 3) She makes self-fulfillment her goal, and places that above obedience to God.

Is any of this sounding familiar? Are these things not the theme of practically every movie coming out of Hollywood? I mean, if I hear "What does your heart tell you to do?" one more time, if I see that in one more movie, I may throw up. The point is: The patterns and practices engaged in by this woman are alive and well, and thriving as the background music of our culture. They are the unquestioned assumptions that lie behind the decisions of people all around us, and behind many of our own decisions, so deeply have we drunk of this poison.

Well, back in the garden the woman is deceived and eats, and then gives some of the fruit to her husband, whom the text simply says was "with her," and then he ate as well. Now the phrase "with her" could mean that he was right beside her or it could mean he was near her or sort of around her, but not necessarily right there with her. In other words, the Hebrew allows for a few possibilities. However, we do not hear a single word from Adam during this whole exchange, and in 1 Timothy 2:14 Paul tells us infallibly that Eve was deceived but Adam was not. The impact of these two realities seems to me to show quite clearly that Adam was not "right there with her."

In other words, he would have been "with her" in the same sense that I am often "with Lisa" or "with my kids" when we go to the shopping mall. I really don't like shopping. So, if we go some place to shop for things, I will sometimes sit on a bench outside of each store we stop at, or simply wander around in circles in the hallway. But, if while that was going on, someone were to run into Lisa inside a shop and ask, "Are

you here by yourself?” she could easily and rightly say, “No, Scott is with me.” I think that is something like what is happening here.

So, the woman is deceived and eats. She then gives the fruit to the man, who does not have the luxury of claiming that he was deceived but simply goes along with his wife, seeing what she has done, and imitating it, and so continuing the disintegration of the order of creation.

Well, now that both the man and the woman have sinned, now that they have been tried and found wanting, now that they have both been shown to be incapable of living under the conditions of the Garden, at this point both of their eyes were opened and we begin to see the consequences of their sin and rebellion, consequences whose painful seriousness will only become apparent over a period of time. Indeed the rest of the Book of Genesis, and the whole Bible and all history itself, are the outworking of this one sin. So, even though we will come back to this again, let's take a look right now at some of the consequences of this first sin, both for the man and the woman, and then beyond them for all humanity including you and me.

As far as the man and the woman are concerned, the two main consequences that they experienced as a result of their rebellion were: 1) They did gain new knowledge which they did not have before; and 2) they died. Firstly, let's look at the so-called “gains” in new knowledge that resulted from their actions.

One thing they “knew” after they sinned, which they did not “know” before, was that they were naked. They didn't suddenly become naked, of course, but they did suddenly become conscious of their nakedness. They felt exposed. They felt vulnerable. What was once natural became a point of embarrassment and shame for them.

The connection between eating a forbidden fruit and the feeling of shame is not absolutely clear. It most likely has something to do with the fact that they were suddenly aware that they had done something wrong and this made them fearful and scared and made them want to hide. And so “feeling naked” and wanting “physically to cover themselves” was most likely an external expression of their inward burden of sin, and a desire to “cover that up” and “hide.”

However, it also seems to me that the awareness of their nakedness, as real and painful as that may have been for them, was possibly an indicator that they did not at this point see their sin rightly. They were only seeing it in personal terms, how it was affecting them individually. They did not seem to see their sin — at least at this stage — as this great offence against God. They do not seem to have seen it as something that grieved God, nor do they seem to have been conscious of the damage they had caused. As one commentator puts it: “Their sin does not drive them back to God but to a self-atoning, self-protecting stance. Indeed, it seems to drive them from God and into themselves.”

So, one thing that they “knew” after they ate the fruit was that they were naked. Another kind of knowledge they “gained,” regrettably, was an experiential knowledge of sin. From the beginning, from the time that God first told them what they could eat and what they couldn’t eat, from that point the man and the woman knew something about good and evil. With regard to good, they knew this in an experiential way, through the way they lived in God’s Garden. With regard to evil, they only knew about it in a theoretical way. They knew that the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit would be death. And even though they had never seen death, they could infer that this was not a good thing. So, again, they were supposed to know good in an experiential way and evil in a theoretical way.

However, as a consequence of their sin, this was all turned around. They suddenly had an experiential knowledge of sin that they were never meant to have and, on the other side of the equation, doing good became merely theoretical. There was a complete reversal. And the experiential knowledge of evil is terrible, isn’t it? It is like the knowledge gained by a child whose mother says, “Don’t go near that fire, because if you do, you will get hurt. You will catch fire and be burned.” But the little child goes on in disobedience, falls into the fire, and spends the next three days dying in agony. Has the child learned something that she would not have known experientially if she had listened to the knowledge given her by her mother? Most definitely. But what knowledge! What horrible, senseless, useless knowledge it is!

A third sort of “knowledge” they gained was the knowledge of good and evil, not as rule keepers but as rule makers. The woman showed by her actions that she was not content to let God be the only one to define what is good and what is evil, she wanted the ability to do that for herself. And so she, and the man along with her, attempted to do that very thing when they took the fruit and ate it. They wanted the right, you see, to determine for themselves what was best. To be sure, that was a new kind of knowledge for them, but a kind that they were not meant to have.

So, one of the consequences for the man and the woman were that they did gain new knowledge: knowledge that they were naked, experiential knowledge of sin and evil, and knowing good and evil through a foolish attempt to challenge God’s exclusive right to determine what was good and what was evil. They gained all this knowledge — and it was all terrible and useless and tragic.

The other and even more significant consequence of their sin — assurances of the serpent notwithstanding — was that they did, in fact, die. This is the heinous irony of the serpent’s lie. The serpent said that “they would not die” if they ate from the tree, but then he went on in the very next breath to describe their death, although they did not see it yet. He said, “You will become like God, knowing good and evil.” As we have just seen, the only way they could have the sort of knowledge of good and evil that the serpent was describing was by sinning against God, by taking an action that would render them spiritually dead and unresponsive to God.

And so, they did die from the moment they sinned against God. They died spiritually; they were “dead in their trespasses and sins,” as Paul describes the human situation in Romans 5 and Ephesians 2. And this immediate spiritual death and separation from God set in motion the process of physical decay and degeneration that would result in their physical death, and eventually, unless otherwise dealt with, it would also result in eternal death under the judgment and wrath of a holy God.

Well, those are some of the consequences of the first sin for the man and the woman. But sadly, the consequences did not stop with them. As Romans 5:12-21 makes painfully clear, Adam acted as the representative for all humanity. His actions and choices affected us all. To use the language of the theologians, Adam was the federal representative for the human race (Romans 5:12,18).

Paul makes it quite clear in these verses that the “one trespass” led to condemnation for all men. When Adam fell, we fell with him. When he died spiritually, that death became our inheritance, our birthright. We are guilty in him. To be sure, to that guilt we add our own sinful thoughts and deeds. But these only confirm the reality that we born, from the womb, with a heart that is wicked and oriented away from God, that is spiritually unresponsive to him — as unresponsive as a corpse.

Now, thankfully, the same chapter of Romans is also the source of the greatest news of all. That same principle by which we were condemned with Adam, when he fell in the garden, is the principle by which we are saved in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is also the representative for us. As Paul says in Romans 5:18-19,

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

In Jesus, who is the last Adam, the questions raised by the Fall of mankind — as to whether we will ever be able to live in God's world, under the conditions which God has set for living there — those questions are answered in the affirmative by Jesus. He is the one who knows his Father's Word, who does not at all doubt God's wisdom or goodness, who resists evil.

In Luke 4, there is an account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. After 40 days of fasting and being tempted by the devil, there is a further, final attempt by Satan to trip him up. The first Adam failed the test — what would happen with Jesus? Well, you know the story. Jesus was tempted by the very same Satan that tripped up the man and the woman at the beginning. But things did not go so well for Satan this time. Jesus — the last Adam — showed his complete reliance on the Father and on the Father's Word. And as a result, the tempter failed.

To put it another way, Jesus passes the test that Adam fails. And thereby, he merits, by his active obedience and death on the cross, the righteousness that he then

credits to his people. This reverses the Fall and its effects, and opens the way for his people, securing for them a permanent home from which they will never be cast out.