

THE FALL OF MAN

“It Was Very Good”

The Bible begins with God’s creation of the heavens and the earth (*Genesis 1:1*). The *crown of creation* was the human being, who was created in the “image of God” (*1:27*).¹ After the creation of man, God “saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (*1:31*). The first humans enjoyed moral innocence and harmony with God. “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (*2:25*). However, their moral innocence would be lost, and their relationship with God would be broken. Theologians call this “*the Fall of Man*.” What went wrong?

📖 “And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree of the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,² for when you eat of it you will surely die.’” (*Genesis 2:16-17, NIV*)



The Cause (Genesis 3:1-7)

Read *Genesis 3:1-7*. Temptation was the occasion for the cause.

? What are the tempter’s character and methods?

- “The serpent” tempts the woman. The serpent is “crafty” – skillful at deceiving others.
- With his question (*3:1*), he exaggerates God’s prohibition to make God sound harsh and unreasonable.
- He negates God’s warning by saying (literally), “*Not* – you will surely die” (*3:4*). He speaks misleading half-truths (*3:4-5, 22*).
- The serpent influences the woman to doubt God’s word and to question her trust in Him. He influences the woman to think she is better off if she disobeys God.



“Serpents” were part of God’s good creation. While apparently “shrewd” (*Matthew 10:16*), we would not expect a mere serpent to display the “craftiness” revealed in this passage. In the New Testament, “that ancient serpent” is identified as “the devil, or Satan” (*Revelation 12:9*), a created angel who had rebelled against God (*2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6*). Thus it may be concluded that Satan himself is behind “the serpent” in this passage.³

¹The “image of God” is commonly described as the reflection of God’s communicable attributes (those qualities of God for which at least a partial counterpart can be found in his human creations). The image of God in us includes spiritual life; moral consciousness; ability to think abstractly, appreciate beauty; capacity to relate to God and other humans, and to represent God (to exercise dominion over the earth). Human beings are special, and given a status and role superior to all other visible creation.

²“the knowledge of good and evil” – Interpretations vary, including (1) experiential knowledge of good *and* evil as a consequence of eating from the tree; (2a) comprehensive knowledge or God-like wisdom, but some knowledge is God’s sole preserve, and knowledge must be sought in the right way; (3) moral autonomy. Only God has the authority to decide what is right, and seeking “the “knowledge of good and evil” is an expression of autonomy (moral independence from God), which is contrary to submission to God.

³ This raises the question: If God’s original creation was “very good,” where did Satan come from? The Bible does not reveal much about the origin of Satan. However, we can conclude that Satan was created a good angel (*Genesis 1:1, 31; Colossians 1:16; Job 1:6*) but rebelled against God (*2 Peter 2:4*). The name “Satan” is derived from the Hebrew word meaning “adversary” or “opponent.” Satan’s rebellion must have occurred between God’s declaration that everything was very good (*Genesis 1:31*) and the temptation in the garden. Satan is the leader among other fallen angels, called “demons” (*Matthew 12:24; 25:41*). Whether or not *Ezekiel 28:12-19* and *Isaiah 14:12-15* refer to the fall of Satan is disputed. These passages clearly refer to human kings but many scholars say that they also refer to Satan (especially the *Ezekiel* passage). How a “good” angel could choose to rebel against God is a philosophical difficulty that the Bible does not directly explain. In any case, pride was involved (*1 Timothy 3:6*).

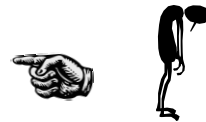
1. The woman saw that the fruit was “good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom” (3:6), so she took some and ate it. What do you think about the woman’s values and motivations? What is evident about her beliefs?⁴
2. Do you think the man and woman’s attitudes and actions were wrong?⁵ Explain.

Reflection Question

- In what ways are our attitudes and actions similar to those of the first man and woman?
- ?
- The serpent influenced the woman, and the woman influenced the man. What influences *us* to have wrong attitudes or actions?
- In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul lists the world, the devil, and the flesh (*Eph. 2:2-3*).
 - We may be *directly* influenced by evil spirits.
 - More often, we are influenced by “the world” (the ideas of popular culture, the media, academia, or others with values, ideas, and directions that are opposed to God).
 - In general, we are influenced by the “flesh” (our human nature, now corrupted, with its desires), including our own selfishness and pride (*James 4:1-2*).

The Result (Genesis 3:7-24)

3. Read Genesis 3:7-24. What were the consequences of the first humans’ disobedience? How did it affect the humans’ attitude toward themselves, each other, and God (3:7-13)?⁶



⁴ “good for food” – appealing to the body (physical senses); “pleasing to the eye” – appealing to the eye (emotional senses); “desirable for gaining wisdom” – appealing to the pride (intellectual, spiritual senses). The woman values these things, and these things seem good. Thus she believes it is good to eat the fruit even though God prohibited it. By eating the forbidden fruit, she reveals her value of autonomy (self-rule or moral independence from God).

⁵ I ask this question because some people do not see anything wrong with their attitudes and actions. However, morality must be evaluated by God’s standard, not man’s standard. The woman is wrong because she doubts God’s word, and allows her self-interest to control her actions, even though it is against God’s clear command. She trusts more in herself than she trusts in God. However, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10) and “knowledge” (1:7).

⁶ They experience shame, a loss of innocence (3:7). They become defensive (3:12-13). The man blames the woman, and to some extent he blames God (“the woman *you* put here”). The woman blames the serpent. They feel they must hide from God (3:8), because they are afraid (3:10). In general, the harmony of relationships is destroyed, resulting in guilt, shame, and fear. In differing degrees, these three conditions have deeply affected the various cultures and worldviews of our world throughout human history.

As a consequence of their sin,⁷ the woman will experience much pain in childbirth and a troubled relationship with her husband (3:16), and the man must toil (struggle) to sustain himself until his eventual physical death (3:17-19).⁸

? However, the worst consequence is symbolized in Genesis 3:22-24. What is it?

- Expulsion from the garden. Intimacy and enjoyment with God becomes alienation from God. Sin separates man from God and the tree of life (symbolizing everlasting life). This separation is called “death” (it is separation from the Source of life). Though physical life continued for a while, spiritual death was immediate.
- The cherubim (angels) guard the way to the tree of life on the east side of the garden. Likewise, the only way into the tabernacle and temple would be through the east side. There is only *one* way to the tree of life. That has never changed.



4. How do the consequences apply to us today?⁹

📖 “Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned”(Romans 5:12, NIV).

Questions You Might Have

➤ Why Did God Allow Man to Sin?

- God purposed to make human beings morally responsible (consistent with being created “in his image”). God gave humans the freedom to make choices.¹⁰ They could make good choices or bad choices. They could choose right or wrong. The first humans chose to do wrong.¹¹ Human beings have been making wrong choices ever since.

⁷ “Sin” may be defined as “any attitude or action that is opposed to the will of God” or “that condition and activity of human beings that is offensive to God, their Creator” (*The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 946).

⁸ Verse 21 says that God made “garments of skin” to cover Adam and Eve (3:21). Many Christians believe this is significant based on the idea that their sin resulted in the sacrifice (death) of another creature to cover their shame and guilt. The significance of animal sacrifice will be revealed as our study continues.

⁹ The separation from God experienced by the first man and woman is experienced by all their descendants, including us. In as sense, everyone since has been born “outside the garden.” In general, sin results in spiritual separation from God. This is the condition of everyone who has not been restored to relationship with God through faith in Christ. Of course, God’s children are not sinless (1 John 1:8). The “Fall” resulted in a corrupted human nature, which affects both the nonbeliever and believer. However, the Christian’s relationship with God is based on Christ’s righteousness. In a broader sense, all humans live in a “fallen world.” Thus we all face trouble, suffering, sickness, death, etc. These conditions will continue until Christ returns and establishes his kingdom.

¹⁰ God did not purpose to create robots but rather personal beings who could choose to love him. “Freedom of choice” is viewed in different ways. Christian libertarians believe that a person is the absolute originator of his/her own actions. They do not deny the power of influence, but the person has “dual ability” – to do, or not to do. Christian “determinists” do not believe in *absolute* freedom. “Soft determinists” (“compatibilists”) argue that free human action can be compatible with determinism. Free action can be compatible with causal conditions that incline the will, as long as those conditions do not constrain the will (that is, to cause one to act contrary to his/her desires). Compatibilists do not accept “dual ability,” given that a person will act according to his/her circumstances and desires, which are determined. These philosophical differences are part of the larger debate concerning the tension between God’s sovereignty (rule, control) and human responsibility. See Jay’s article on the ICF website.

¹¹ Some may ask, “If God is good and all-powerful, why does he allow humans to sin?” To take away human freedom (even to sin) would contradict God’s intentions to create the type of human beings and world that he has, and besides, it would not really work in the world as we know it (think through it). See Jay’s *Evil & Suffering*.

- Why Can't God Just Overlook Sin?
 - The Bible teaches that God is good, loving, and all-powerful. If so, why doesn't He just overlook sin? There are *some* things that God *cannot* do! He cannot do what is contrary to His own nature. Since God is holy, righteous and just, He *cannot* just overlook sin. However, since God is also merciful and gracious, He has provided a way for our sins to be forgiven (through Jesus Christ). Jesus Christ is "the Way" back to the "tree of life" (*John 14:6; Revelation 22:1-2*). That is the "good news!"

God's Promise for the Nations

The "fall of man" is not the end of the story! God has a plan to restore the harmony of the original creation. God's statement to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 points to this plan.¹² God's purpose and plan become increasingly clear as we continue through the Bible. His purpose and plan are seen in "God's Promise for the Nations."

Reflection/Application

- Think about the example of the first humans. Reflect on these questions: In what ways are *my* attitudes and actions similar to theirs? In what ways am *I* tempted to do the wrong things? How do my wrong attitudes and actions affect the relationships in my life?
- Because of man's sin against God, the relationship was broken, resulting in a lack of true peace, joy, purpose, and hope (the blessings of abundant, everlasting life). How would you characterize your relationship with God? The Bible reveals God's plan to reconcile people to himself. How are you responding to God's plan and purpose revealed in the Bible?

Prologue to the Promise

The first 11 chapters of Genesis might be considered the introduction to the Bible (or the "prologue" to the main story, which is God's program to restore harmony, including God's full blessing upon human beings). The first 11 chapters discuss two major topics: 1) God & creation; and 2) God's creation ruined (caused by sin and its spread throughout the world).



- ❑ Chapter 4 records the account of Cain & Abel (Adam and Eve's first sons). This is a continuation of Adam and Eve's story, and involves the first murder. The result was God's judgment - separation from God.
- ❑ Chapter 5 records a genealogy (Adam to Noah).
- ❑ Chapter 6-9 records the account of the great flood. Humans had become so wicked, so evil, all of the earth was corrupted. So God sent a flood to destroy the earth. Among humans, only Noah and his family were saved.
- ❑ Chapter 10 records a genealogy (Noah to the clans of Noah's sons)
- ❑ Chapter 11:1-9 records the account of Babel, where prideful man aspired to make a name for himself. God scattered them.
- ❑ Chapter 11:10-32 records a genealogy (Shem to Abram)



The human situation is not getting better! But God has a plan. That plan emerges in Chapter 12, where we see "God's Promise for the Nations." See the ICF website for this study series.

¹² Many interpreters call Genesis 3:15 the "protoevangelium" (first gospel), understanding it to represent the great struggle between God and the evil one, played out in the hearts and history of humankind. "The offspring of the woman would eventually crush the serpent's head, a promise fulfilled in Christ's victory over Satan – a victory in which all believers will share." From the *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 10.