

## Genesis 3:1 – 7

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’’ <sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; <sup>3</sup> but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’’ <sup>4</sup> The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die! <sup>5</sup> For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ <sup>6</sup> 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 desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

### Historical and Cultural Background

- The serpent
  - An ancient symbol for an opponent of human beings, in ancient Egypt, Canaan, Mesopotamia, and Greece.<sup>1</sup> In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a snake steals Gilgamesh’s power of immortality.
  - The serpent motif is found in the first confrontation of Moses with Pharaoh, since it was known that the crown of the Egyptian Pharaoh contained a serpent (Ex.4:3; 7:9 – 12) as the symbol of power trying to obstruct God’s blessing on Israel and through Israel, the world, and again in the wilderness when the second generation of Israelites were rising out from the sins of the first generation (Num.21:4 – 7). The book of Revelation identifies ‘the serpent of old’ as Satan in Revelation 12, who wanted to corrupt Adam and Eve to prove to God that angels should not serve them (Ps.91:11 – 12; 1 Cor.6:3).
  - ‘It is no accident, after all, that our Ancient Foe first appears in Holy Scripture as a snake— imagery that follows the devil all through the canon to the closing vision of the Revelation to St. John. As philosopher Leon Kass puts it, “For the serpent is a mobile digestive tract that swallows its prey whole; in this sense the serpent stands for pure appetite.”’<sup>2</sup> However, I think it is more likely that the serpent is used as a symbol for its venom, a slower-acting poison that kills a person slowly. Jesus referred to demons as ‘serpents and scorpions’ (Lk.10:19), likely because the influence of demons acts within the person like venom.
- Names for God:
  - Elohim: translated as ‘God’ in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, probably meaning something akin to ‘the God of power’
  - YHWH Elohim: translated as ‘LORD God’ in Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, probably meaning something akin to ‘the Lord God who is here’ since the name YHWH is probably close to a sound for breathing
- The original garden scene: <sup>7</sup> Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. <sup>8</sup> The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. <sup>9</sup> Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. <sup>10</sup> Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers... <sup>15</sup> Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> The LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; <sup>17</sup> but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’

---

<sup>1</sup> Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p.135–8

<sup>2</sup> Russell D. Moore, ‘Love, Sex, and Mammon: Hard Times, Hard Truths, & the Economics of the Christian Family’, *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, <http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=22-02-003-e>, accessed December 17, 2012

## Questions

1. Introduction: Show the video clip of Scar tempting Simba in *The Lion King*. How does Scar tempt Simba?
2. What do you think about the serpent's strategy here?
3. Which name of God does the serpent use in v.1? Why is that important?
  - a. Eve starts speaking about God as powerful but perhaps distant and not intimately close.
  - b. In fact, the serpent's opening statement is so patently obnoxious that Eve is drawn into this conversation just to 'clear God's good name.' But in so doing, she also starts to use the more distant, less relational name for God, Elohim. That is the snowball that starts the avalanche. Once we start to see God as distant, then we start to think that we need to fight His battles for Him, that He won't intervene, that He has left us alone, that He doesn't care about us, that He's abandoned us, that He doesn't have our best in His heart, that He's just using us and milking us for all He can, that we can't really trust Him. How quickly that line of thinking develops, and we see Eve walk straight down that line.
  - c. Illus: It's easy for us, too. If we think of God as distant, then we try to fight His battles without His strength. Then we 'do something for God' on our own strength, and we eventually become bitter. This is especially true when we set out to become a doctor, lawyer, politician, or influential in business so that we can 'influence people for God.' Then what happens? We hit a really rough semester. Or we get a bad grade, or our friendships don't go well. And then we suddenly get mad at God. We feel confused – Why is this so hard? God, I was doing this for You – why won't you help me succeed? Or, we make great plans in ministry, and when it is hard, we ask, 'God, why is this so hard? I'm doing this all for you!' God doesn't guarantee outcomes. He promises to walk with us and to help us withstand whatever comes. Yet how easy it is for us to become obsessive-compulsive about other things. Then we see God as a distant taskmaster, just out to use us, even though it is really our own ambition that we never really surrendered to Him. So we question His goodness and we start to wonder whether we can really trust Him. This is exactly the progression that leaves us vulnerable to more lies.
  - d. What Eve should have done is remember that God's name revealed to her and Adam was YHWH Elohim, the God Who is Here. And she should have simply brought the whole conversation to Him. He would have answered the serpent with His authoritative word. And we can do the same.
4. Why does the serpent say something about God forbidding them from eating the fruit from all the trees? It starts Eve off thinking about God limiting them. Even if it's untrue, it shapes her frame of mind. The serpent wants to portray God as stingy.
5. Why does Eve say, 'You shall not touch it?' She overstates the boundary - why?
  - a. Is it because she doesn't remember correctly in the heat of the moment?
  - b. Is it because Adam didn't tell her correctly and overstated it for her?
  - c. In either case, this misperception becomes problematic because when she touches the fruit and doesn't die, this immediately lends credibility to the serpent. Making God out to be more strict than He is never helps anyone.
  - d. Illus: Saying that God forbids alcohol completely is wrong. He forbids drunkenness (Eph.5:18) and underage drinking (Rom.13:1 – 7). But alcohol is not completely forbidden. Yet it would be easy to imagine how someone who has been told all their life that alcohol is evil then takes a sip, doesn't get immediately affected, and then does a complete 180 degree shift because they think that God has lied.
  - e. Illus: Christians have historically said, 'Don't date, dance, or drink,' when Scripture doesn't limit those things off from us. God has concerns about when we engage on those things, but they aren't categorically wrong. Some people seem to take pleasure in being more strict than God, as if it's somehow wise or virtuous. I don't think so. I think it's dangerous.
  - f. Secondly, and even more troubling, is that Eve has started to go down the mental path of God being a stingy miser. She rebuts the serpent with, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat.' That is technically correct, but it has only one verb in Hebrew. So it's a thin statement compared to God's hearty 'Eating you will eat' back in 2:16.
6. Then, Eve redraws her mental map. She says that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is in the middle of the garden.
  - a. But she's wrong. The tree *of life* is. Where the tree of knowledge is is unspecified. But Eve somehow 'sees' the tree of knowledge as being at the center. Her focus has already shifted.

Rather than look at the middle of the garden and see the magnificent tree of life, which she is free to come and eat from at all times, she redraws her mental map.

- b. The center of her attention is the one thing that is forbidden. It's as if her relationship with God is utterly defined by limitations. Satan's ploy has worked.
7. Next, the serpent puts all his cards on the table. Having inserted the seeds of doubt in Eve's mind, he now moves her farther along that path. He flatly contradicts God. <sup>4</sup> The serpent said to the woman, 'You surely will not die! <sup>5</sup> For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'
  - a. He gets her to question God: 'Was that really the Author's intention? How do you know? Does God really want your good?'
  - b. She now entertains the thought that God is holding her back; He's keeping her down! How does the serpent do this? By getting her to focus on the one thing that God has denied her. How easy it is, but how ironic as well, that in this vast world, dripping with God's generosity, Eve takes her eyes off all that she is given and focuses on the one thing that she is denied.
  - c. Illus: You know where this story is taking us. How easy it is to take our focus off God and onto the things that are forbidden. How easy it was for Boromir in the *Lord of the Rings* to focus in on the Ring, the one thing that was forbidden. How easy it is for any one of us to focus on someone else who has the body...or the personality...or the gifts...or the money...or the friends...or the significant other that we so desire. Even though God has said, 'Do not covet!' How easy it is to listen to the serpent's hiss, to believe that God is miserly after all. And from that point, how easy it is to narrow our focus down to the thing that we think we were denied, so that it all becomes so confusing. Everything that is good and true about God now seems obscured, and everything that is false suddenly seems self-evident.
8. Now is it wrong to want to be like God? Not in the way He intended. In fact, God had deliberately set up the world and the garden and humanity so that they would be like Him: We are in His image, creating life as He created life, spreading order and beauty as He spreads order and beauty. God had a program designed for them to be like Him, in progressively more and more ways, over time, but in His tutelage and using His curriculum. In many ways Scripture tells us to be like God, but not in this particular way.
9. Eve falls completely victim to the lies. The fruit dangling on the tree of knowledge has captivated her eye. In fact, the word 'eye' or 'saw' is repeated in v.5, 6, and 7. The eye's focus reflects the heart's focus. <sup>6</sup> 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 desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.
10. Where was Adam? He is revealed as having been 'with her' in v.7, just silent as Eve carried on this conversation. The one who exercised his authority over the Creation by speaking is now silent. Unfortunately, rather than heading into a brave new world, Adam and Eve introduce insecurity and preoccupation with self into human life. Whereas before, Adam and Eve focused gratefully on God and then on each other in appreciation for God giving them to each other, their focus now turns downward, to themselves, to their nakedness, to their shame. They become not merely self-aware, but self-concerned and self-centered.
11. What is the impact? They have internalized into themselves what should have been left external: the authority to define good and evil. God left it on the tree to teach them that the definition of good and evil is older than them, more fixed and immovable than them, and most importantly, outside of them! Now they have taken into themselves the defining of good and evil, and since then we as human beings struggle with wanting there to be a good and evil, but also wanting to define it for ourselves. This is the birth of relativism. We will see it develop in the story.