

Genesis 3: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Genesis chapter 3 For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

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.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, Where are you? And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.

He said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? The man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.

[1 : 41] Then the Lord God said to the woman, What is this that you have done? The woman said, The serpent deceived me, and I ate. The Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock, And above all beasts of the field.

On your belly you shall go, And dust you shall eat, All the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise his heel. To the woman he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, But he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, And have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, You shall not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the plants of the field.

[2 : 52] By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken. For you are dust, And to dust you shall return. The man called his wife's name Eve, Because she was the mother of all living.

And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife Garments of skin, And clothed them. Then the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us, In knowing good and evil.

Now, lest he reach out his hand, And take also of the tree of life, And eat, And live forever. Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, To work the ground from which he was taken.

He drove out the man, And at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim, And a flaming sword that turned every way To guard the way to the tree of life. Chapter 3 of Genesis begins by introducing us To the character of the serpent.

The serpent, we are told, is shrewd. There is a pun here upon the word for naked That has just been used of the man and the woman, And some translators have tried to capture this With plays such as The man and the woman were nude, And the serpent were shrewd.

[4 : 05] Samuel Bray and John Hobbins, In their recent translation, Described the serpent as smooth and shrewd, Suggesting nakedness with that word smooth. And the serpent seems to be associated With the beasts of the field in some way.

He has a cunning, An ability to navigate the world That humanity can learn from. Now if we think about the animals, One of the things that the animals do for us Is teach us how to negotiate new environments.

We follow their tracks. We go to the watering holes that they lead us to. And the serpent is in many ways A creature that seems to be fitted To teach Adam and Eve concerning the wider world.

And he questions the woman. The woman in many ways is the weakest point Of the situation in the garden. Why is that the case? Well she hasn't received the commandment Concerning the tree directly from God.

And so she's relying upon knowledge To receive second hand from Adam. And if you pay attention To what the serpent says to her, He's playing off two pieces of information Against each other.

[5 : 08] In chapter 1 verse 29 The man and the woman are told That all the fruit of the trees Has been given to them. And then in chapter 2 verses 16 and 17 The man alone is told about this one restriction.

And so the serpent plays off That first piece of information That she has received first hand Against the second piece of information Which she has not. And when God challenges them Later about the commandment He challenges Adam in particular.

If you read the text carefully You should notice If you read it in the original Hebrew Or if you read it in the King James Bible That it's a singular pronoun that's used.

It's Adam in particular that is challenged. Adam was the one commanded And it was a commandment Delivered chiefly to him. Now the woman also enjoys Privileged access to the heart of the man.

So if you want to get to the man It's very good to go through the woman Because she can break through his defences In a way that the serpent could not directly. Note the serpent's promise You will be like God Or like the gods Knowing good and evil.

[6 : 14] I think it might be better To take this as a reference to the gods. And the serpent himself Is presumably one of these. It maybe makes more sense Of what's taking place. That God is surrounded by the gods.

Now the gods are not The pagan deities As we understand them Within the ancient Near East. They're the angels. They're the rulers of the world That God has established and created. They're created beings.

They're a court That fits within a monotheistic framework. That's very different from the polytheism Of the nations round about.

But scripture talks about the gods On many occasions in the Old Testament. And here I think might be one of them. The serpent's promise Is that they will be like One of the ruling creatures.

One of the angelic beings. One of these beings that rule within the world. If only they eat of this fruit. And later on it seems That they do in fact Become like one of the gods Knowing good and evil.

[7 : 10] And it would seem to me That it makes more sense To refer that to the gods Rather than God himself. The serpent makes an insinuation That the woman never effectively challenges.

Now note what he says. He suggests that God has withhold All the trees of the garden. But he didn't do that. He didn't say that they couldn't eat Of any of the trees.

There was just one tree That was forbidden to them. And the insinuation there Is that God is not a good giver But that he is fundamentally withholding. And the woman never effectively Diffuses that.

And that can so easily Become our attitude. We can think of God As one who's holding back His good gifts from us His children. But at the very heart Of the story of creation Is a story of God Who is the good giver.

Who wants to give us Good gifts. And those things Which he has withheld from us Are withheld for a good reason. And that is the insinuation That the serpent brings At this initial point.

[8 : 11] There's also a confusion Of what is good to our senses And what is morally good. The woman sees the fruit And it seems good for food Desirable to make one wise Etc.

It's the delight of the eyes. And yet That is not necessarily The same thing As being morally good. Something that is good In a moral sense Is not necessarily The same thing As something that seems Visually Or appealing Or appealing to our tastes Or whatever it is.

And that distinction Between those two things Is a very great part Of what it means To gain moral perception. Infants often Can't distinguish Between what tastes good And what is actually Good for their bodies.

And that sort of distinction Is the distinction That the woman And the man Seem to act And lack In this passage. Should maybe reflect a bit Upon the meaning of nakedness.

Nakedness can be associated With infancy. And infancy Has two key things Associated with it. Moral innocence Not sinful And so in the same way As an adult is.

[9 : 22] And there's less of a sense Of interiority So there's less of a sense Of shame associated. And then there's less glory. Glory is something That is to do With our status Our honour The way that we appear To others The way that we have Standing in the world And in the sight of others.

Now infants don't have that yet. And so they run around Quite happily naked Without having a strong Sense of interiority Or a sense of honour And glory That would give them Any qualms about it.

Whereas when we grow up We can have a strong sense Of for instance Being underdressed. We go to a party And everyone else is Dressed up for the event And we're actually underdressed.

We're maybe wearing jeans And some shirt That isn't particularly neat Or And we feel that we stand out. And so that sense Of being underdressed Is a sense of a lack of glory.

And that nakedness That the man and the woman Experience at this point Suddenly hits them With a force Is in part A sense of being underdressed And it's also a sense Of exposure to judgment.

[10 : 33] It's exposure to the gaze Of the other. Now the naked human being Is in many ways The peeled human being. The being Human being that has been robbed Of their outer covering.

Clothing is quite natural to us. Clothing is that which glorifies us. When we become mature We tend to dress up For special events To show status To show our importance Whatever it is.

And these are not bad things. But then there's also That sense of shame When clothing is removed. And that sense of shame Is a sense of a lack of glory A lack of integrity Whatever it is.

And an exposure To the judgment Of others. Now opened eyes As Adam and Eve Experience Are eyes of judgment. Eyes that can see things In their interior character.

The infant doesn't wear Clothes in part Because they have no Strong sense of interiority. And when two people Become one flesh They should be able To be naked And unashamed With each other.

[11 : 33] But yet our shame Can be seen Even in our most Intimate acts and relations. A shame that is Founded upon In part Our loss Of integrity And our loss Of innocence.

Moral innocence. Even in these Most intimate acts And relations We can set up Psychological barriers. Barriers of technique. Or something else To prevent ourselves From being truly exposed And vulnerable To the gaze Of the other person.

We're shrinking away. We're trying to hide ourselves As Adam and the woman were. Later in scripture We can see That key human beings Gain the knowledge Of good and evil And become like the gods In certain respects.

These aren't necessarily Bad things in themselves. And it seems That the knowledge Of good and evil Might have been given To Adam and Eve If only they waited. The problem is They're like kids Joy riding in the parents' car.

Not waiting for the proper time When they come of age They might be given The keys And taught how to Drive themselves. Adam Note Shifts blame to the woman But also to God.

[12 : 40] He says The woman whom you gave To be with me She Etc. The man is suggesting Not merely that God Is a God Who is withholding As the serpent Insinuated earlier But that God Gives bad gifts.

The woman Is not a good gift. She is a gift That has led him astray That has caused All this upset. And God Is ultimately The one responsible. Now there are Three judgments Associated with The three participants.

And there's a promise Contained in the Judgment to the serpent. The promise of the one That will crush The serpent's head The seed of the woman. And here in embryo We see the story Of scripture Being presented.

We saw it to an extent In the previous chapter With the promise Of a man leaving His father and mother And being joined To his wife And the two Becoming one flesh. That anticipates What happens in Christ And the church.

But here We see the seed Of the woman Is anticipating The great form Of redemption In Christ. How God Will ultimately Defeat And conquer The serpent.

[13 : 43] That he will Destroy the works Of the devil. That is the purpose For which Christ came. Both the man And the woman Are to be frustrated In their relationship With that from which They were taken. The woman's task Focuses on the Filling work Of bringing life And forming the heart Of human society.

But she will find That her husband Rules over her Rather than acting To strengthen her. Now her desire Will be for her husband. I don't think That's a statement That she wants To take his place.

I think it's more A fact that she Wants him. She wants him To act on her behalf. She wants him To be on her side. And yet she finds That he frustrates her.

He rules over her. He does not Use his strength In her And to come To her aid And her support. Rather he frustrates her And subjugates her In different ways.

[14:50] And all this frustration Can be seen As purely curse. But there's a form Of grace here as well. It keeps sin On a tighter leash. By putting enmity Between the woman And the serpent.

It's kept on a Tighter leash Than it would have been Otherwise. And there's a blessing Here. To know that Human Sinful human beings Cannot exert The full force That they might like In shaping the world To their sinful desires.

Not just the temporal end But also our end In the sense Of our final purpose. It forces us
To consider ourselves Before judgment. And so God Casts the man And the woman Out
of the garden.

Some questions To think about. First of all Why is the woman Named Eve? What is the significance Of that name? Second Can you observe Some literary parallels And connections Between the judgment On the woman And the judgment On the man?

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