

Growth Group Leaders' Guide  
Cole Community Church  
Genesis, Chapter 3  
Week of Sept. 28, 2008

## Introduction

**What if there was no Chapter 3 in Genesis? In Chapters 1 and 2, we see God's perfect creation, without flaw or fault. There is perfect fellowship between mankind and God. In Chapter 4 and beyond the biblical story is filled with wickedness, jealousy, rebellion, judgment, anger, violence, murder, corruption and worse. What happened? What brought sin and evil into the world and what is God doing about it? Without Chapter 3, we would have no explanation for God's need to redeem mankind. Without the events of Chapter 3, God would not need to provide a means to salvation. Chapter 3 is the pivot on which everything turns. It is called "the fall of man."**

Suggestion to leaders: Have your group read the entire chapter first. The questions and the discussion for each do not always follow the text in sequence.

Genesis is about origins or beginnings.

- Chapter 1 was the origin of creation itself.
- Chapter 2 included the origin of marriage.
- Chapter 3 is about:
  - the origin of sin
  - the origin of death
  - the beginning of redemption

### **QUESTION 1. What can we learn about the character of:**

**The serpent? See also, Rev. 12:9.**

Chapters 1 & 2 do not prepare us for the serpent. He simply appears abruptly in verse 1 of Chapter 3. We are told he is crafty (NIV, NASB) or "subtle" (KJV). But Genesis gives no information about who he is or how such craftiness found its way into God's perfect creation. We can deduce from the two preceding chapters that he must have been created by God. Many understand the serpent (a snake or snake-like creature) to have been possessed by Satan who in turn is the personification of evil. Chapter 3 explains the introduction of sin and evil into the world, but the creation of evil (Satan) itself not explained. He just shows up in verse 1. But, there are clues elsewhere.

Revelations 12:9: “The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”

John 8:44: You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

See also Isaiah 14:12-16 and Luke 10:18 for other possible references to Satan.

### **Eve?**

At the beginning of the Book, she doesn't even have a name; she is just “the woman.” Only after the fall, when God has described the consequences of their actions, does Adam name her “Eve” in verse 20. Her name means living “because she was the mother of all the living.”

That the serpent chooses her, not Adam, to deceive suggests she is innocent and susceptible. At least the serpent thinks so. God gave the command to not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil to Adam in 2:17 before Eve was created. Yet Eve knows the command because in 3:2 she repeats it to the serpent – with some elaboration adding that they must not touch it (God is not quoted as prohibiting touching). The serpent does not have to try very hard. Eve is so beguiled by the promise of the fruit – that it is good to eat, pleasing to the eye, desirable for gaining wisdom (vs. 6) that she chooses to disobey God and satisfy her own desire.

### **Adam?**

Adam is strangely passive in this text. In verse 6, Eve gives Adam the fruit and he simply eats it. There is no report of any objection from him. Did Eve practice the same deceptive arguments on Adam that the serpent used on her? We don't know. But Eve seems to have put up more objection to the serpent than Adam does to Eve. When confronted by God, Adam's defense is pitiful, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” (vs. 12) He does not even claim (as Eve does in vs. 13) to have been deceived.

**QUESTION 2. The serpent is described as “crafty” (NIV) or “subtle” (KJV). Describe how he uses his cunning to deceive and entrap Eve. Eve clearly knows better (vs. 2); why does she fall for it? How does Adam get included in the serpent's trap? Who is at fault?**

The serpent begins with feigned innocence: “Did God really say ...?” (vs. 1)

Then he baits his hook with a partial truth that hides a lie: “You will not surely die” – the lie – “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” – the partial truth because once they eat their eyes are opened they do see (vs. 7). Eve seems to fall for this argument primarily because she wants to. She is captivated by the possibilities the fruit of the tree presents: “Good, Pleasant, Desirable” (vs. 6). She sees three temptations, physical food, aesthetic satisfaction, and - perhaps most of all - intellectual advancement by knowing good and evil. She puts her own desire ahead of God’s command and thereby brings about something the world has never known before – sin!

Some commentators note a parallel between Satan’s three temptations of Eve and his later three temptations of Christ in Matthew 4, Mark 1 and Luke 4. Making stones into bread is an appeal to food, having the kingdoms of the world offers a pleasant satisfaction, casting himself from the temple requires intellectual trust of the Father. Jesus resists the temptations, Eve does not.

John warns against the same three temptations. “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” 1 John 2:16. Evil does not change its ways. It doesn’t need to. The temptations work as well today as they did in the Garden of Eden.

And they worked on Adam. For all of his docility [Eve: “Here Adam, eat this.” Adam: “Yes, dear.” Crunch.], Adam makes his choice too.

Who is at fault? Adam blames Eve (vs. 12). Eve says it is not her fault because she was “deceived” (vs. 13). She blames the serpent. The serpent says nothing (thus demonstrating better sense than Adam and Eve). God blames them all.

Note that God asks both Adam and Eve what they have done (vss. 11 and 13) – though it was obvious enough. God seeks a confession, a recognition of sin, and does not get it. Only excuses, someone else is at fault, not me. God doesn’t even try with the serpent. He simply curses him (vs. 14).

**QUESTION 3. God told Adam (Gen 2:16) “you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” In Chapter 3, what do we learn is wrong with knowing the difference between good and evil?**

What the serpent says is true, “the eyes of both of them were opened.” This is of course symbolic. They have not been physically blind. “Opened eyes” means they have gained knowledge they did not have before. “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil;’” (vs. 22). First they learn they are naked. They must have known this, but now it has new significance (*i.e.*, “new knowledge”) to them. Using fig leaves they hide their nakedness (vs. 7). Hide from whom? Each other. Then they hide from God (vs.8). Why? Adam says “I was afraid” (vs. 10). Knowledge of good and evil brings new things into the world – shame, separation, and fear. These are not punishments imposed by God; they are natural

consequences of violating God's commandment – like the harm that comes from trying to ignore the law of gravity.

Discussion question: How much of the world's evil is attributable to just these three things – shame, separation, and fear? And we are only beginning to see the consequences of the fall.

Their eyes are opened, but they do not like what they see. It is true that God knows the difference between good and evil, but for humans to understand these abstract concepts will not give them the power and majesty of God. Instead, it drives them away from perfection. One commentator likens Adam and Eve to a violin string stretched across the instrument. It is constrained because it was designed for a particular purpose. Once it is freed from these constraints it can no longer be used to make music. Adam and Eve had limited knowledge and ability compared to God, but when they attempted to free themselves from their limitations, they harmed themselves.

The ability to know the difference between good and evil brings with it the terrifying responsibility to actually make the distinction. Our recent study of Proverbs repeatedly emphasized the need to teach and learn wisdom that we may avoid temptations. The biblical evidence and the evidence around us show our inability to meet that responsibility.

**QUESTION 4. What are the consequences of Adam's and Eve's choices? Describe the result for:**

**The serpent. What is different about God's approach to him?**

God gives Adam and Eve a chance to speak first. He asks them "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (vs. 11) "What is this you have done?" (vs. 13) Knowing evil, God gives the serpent no such chance. "Because you have done this, Cursed are you . . ." More importantly, although he curses the serpent, he does not curse Adam or Eve. In speaking to Adam later in vs. 17 God says, "Cursed is the ground because of you," but he does not curse Adam himself. In addition to condemning the serpent as the lowest form of existence, below "all the livestock and all the wild animals!" he also puts "enmity between you and the woman" (vs. 15 – but save the rest of verse 15 for the answer to Question 5).

**Eve.**

There are two specific consequences for Eve (vs. 16):

1. "Pain" (NIV) or "sorrow" (KJV) in child birth. That which should be joyful is tainted by suffering, as is all of existence.

2. “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” There is an ironic justice to this since Adam has shown no capacity to lead his wife. He was the meek follower of Eve’s leading to eat the fruit. Eve’s striving for independence instead results in dependence.

### **Adam.**

Because the ground itself is now condemned, Adam’s life will be one of toil to extract sustenance from it. Because Eve is now dependant upon him, he must make a life for both of them. One result of Eve’s dependence and of Adam’s passive submission to his wife’s enticement to eat the fruit is that he must now step up to his responsibilities and learn to lead.

There are other consequences for both Adam and Eve. Most notable is that they are expelled from the Garden of Eden. “Eden” in Hebrew means “delight.” Their actions introduced sin and evil into the world. The world in which they and their descendants live can no longer be a place of delight.

Discussion question. A matter often debated is whether God’s words to Eve and then to Adam are prescriptive or descriptive? If they are prescriptive, God is imposing punishment. If they are descriptive, God is only identifying the natural consequence of defying His commandment. Does this difference matter? Why?

### **QUESTION 5. Does Chapter 3 describe a God of love, mercy and forgiveness?**

#### **How?**

Emphatically, yes! Many – especially non-believers – read or hear this story and perceive in it only a vengeful, angry God of condemnation inflicting pain and suffering on mankind. How, they ask, can we believe this to be a loving God, seeking an intimate relationship with the very man and woman he seems to revile? But the chapter is replete with the evidences of God’s love.

- God seeks out Adam and Eve. “But the LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’” (vs. 9.)
- He gives them each an opportunity to confess and repent (vss. 11 & 13). That they do not do so is their failing, not God’s.
- As noted earlier, God spares Adam and Eve the terrible punishment he inflicts on the serpent. He does not curse or condemn them. Instead, He immediately begins His work of redemption. We see this in several different ways in this text:
  - Vs. 15: Speaking to the Serpent (the embodiment of evil) God says: “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed [or “offspring,” NIV] and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on

the heel.” Theologians use the word “protevangelium” literally “first gospel” for this verse because it is the earliest promise of the coming Messiah, His suffering and His ultimate triumph over evil. Satan's evil seed will wound this seed of woman, Jesus, but then Jesus will mortally wound Evil.

See Luke 10: 17-20 and Romans 16:20 for explanations about the fate of the serpent.

- Vs. 20. “Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.” Does it seem odd that in the mist of learning God’s consequences Adam suddenly decides to name his wife? Adam gave his wife a name that means “living” or “life” because he heard and immediately understood the offer of hope and promise about the seed of woman. Thus, at the very origin of death, Adam names his wife “Life.”
- Vs. 21 “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.” At one level, God is still caring for His creation. They get upgraded from fig leaves to skins. It is a picture of God’s concern for the needs of his people, even when they (we) are sinners. On another level, many see this as prefiguring the ultimate sacrifice of Christ which would provide the covering for sin.
- Because they might “take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” God sent them out from the Garden of Eden. (Vss. 22-23.) Thus He insures both their ultimate physical death and spiritual death in the form of separation from God. That is an act of mercy, because it is through death that we can be reborn. See: Acts 5:20; Romans 6:3-5.
- There is no going back (vs. 24) but the promise of the Redeemer is already made. The grace of God is manifested even in the presence of the person of evil. The promise is:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. Revelation 2:7 (NIV).