

## **SESSION 21: THE FIRST TEMPTATION, PART ONE**

Genesis 2:25-3:5

March 10, 2024

The other night Linda and I watched *Saving Private Ryan* again, and in the included extras both the film's director, Steven Spielberg, and the historian Stephen Ambrose described D-Day, the allied invasion of Nazi-occupied France, as "the turning point of the Twentieth Century"—the implication being that had D-Day not occurred, Hitler would not have been stopped, and thus the world would be entirely different as a result.

But Hitler's military efforts were in trouble *long* before D-Day. He and Nazi Germany would have eventually been defeated without that massive invasion—just not so soon.

Before us, however, in the third chapter of Genesis, is truly an epochal turning point—not just for any one century, but for the entire existence and history of mankind. In a manner of speaking it stands as the leading bookend, the "way in," as it were, for millennia of sin, depravity, corruption, deceit, and man's alienation from God. The *closing* bookend—not doing away with sin, but standing as the way *out* of man's alienation from God—occurred at the cross.

H. C. Leupold calls Chapter Three "the most tragic chapter in the Bible," and I would agree. There are other moments in God's word that are as tragic on a personal, or even national level—for example, King David's adultery and murder, that not only changed *his* life for the worse, but inflicted great pain and death on his extended family and ultimately Israel as a nation. But no other turning point in God's word comes close to the tragedy that occurred in the garden; it not only changed the course of human and animal kind—not least by the introduction of death—but inflicted turmoil and suffering even upon the very earth itself (Romans 8:22).

I am reminded of James' remark in his epistle regarding the awful wrong done by something as small as the human tongue.

**Read James 3:5-6.**

He concludes this in v8 by stating that “But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.”

Eve took a bite out of a piece of fruit—something many of us do every day—then she offered it to her husband and he did the same. Such a small thing; where’s the harm in *that*? But that small act of disobedience tore asunder the couple’s communion with their Creator, Yahweh God, and, like King David’s sin with Bathsheba, not only did they personally pay a price, but in Eden all of mankind forever after paid a price for their momentary rebellion. ❏

See 2 Samuel 11 and following.

Some claim that the story in Chapter Three is myth or allegory, meant to communicate a point by creating a fictional setting. It is too fantastical, they say, to be real. But that would be news to the apostle Paul, for one, who wrote,

**But I fear that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be corrupted from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)**

and

**For it was Adam who was first formed, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into trespass. (1 Timothy 2:13–14)**

Now, those verses are absent their context, but they make it clear that at least Paul did not consider Chapter Three of Genesis to be myth or allegory. And further, the last book in God’s word, Revelation, describes Satan in ways identical to how the serpent is described in Chapter Three.

**Read Revelation 12:9.**

Later he is bound and rendered impotent during Christ’s Millennial reign.

**And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; (Revelation 20:2)**

Thus, as Leupold writes, “Things are recorded as they actually transpired; this is a strictly historical account fully approved by the New Testament.”

**Read Genesis 2:25 to 3:5.**

Where do the events of Chapter Three fall in the *First Things* timeline? According to Luther, the Fall occurred on the sabbath, Day Seven. Perhaps—but I doubt it. All we can say with certainty is that it occurred after Day Six—days, weeks, months, years after? Who can say.

**v2:25**

**And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.**

I confess that v25 of Chapter Two was not included in our previous session initially as an oversight, but as I have prepared for *this* session and Chapter Three, I realized that that omission may have been a God-thing. I would say that the chapter break between Two and Three is *not* unfortunate (as it *is* between One and Two), but v25 is so critical to the narrative of Chapter Three that it makes sense to include it in the same package with Chapter Three. For v25 dramatizes the depth of the moral Fall that takes place in the next chapter. While not expressing the totality of what we lost in the Fall, v25 represents, it *stands-in for* everything mankind has lost since Eden.

*Luther:* Universal experience indeed shows us all these calamities; but we never feel the real magnitude of them until we look back to that unintelligible but real state of innocence, in which there existed the perfection of will, the perfection of reason and that glorious dignity of the nakedness of the human body. When we truly contemplate our loss of all these gifts and contrast that privation with the original possession of them, then do we, in some measure, estimate the mighty evil of original sin.

The best way I can imagine to grasp the depth of what man lost—that is, voluntarily gave up—in Eden, is to study the existence of Christ’s followers in the Eternal State. In Eden’s Fall evil was unleashed on the earth, only to be thoroughly and unequivocally expunged from the earth after the Great White Throne Judgment during the Eschaton. Just *before* that judgment Satan will have been thrown into the eternal Lake of Fire; after the judgment he will be joined there by death and Hades. After that, there will be the Eternal State: the new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem, and eternal paradise and communion with our Lord and our God (Revelation 20:7-22:5).

Then he showed me a river of the water of life, bright as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His slaves will serve Him; and they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night, and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them, and they will reign forever and ever.

(Revelation 22:1-5)

Chapter Three of Genesis can be organized in the following way:

1. Temptation: vv1-5
2. Fall: v6
3. Revelation: v7
4. Shame and Fear: vv8-11
5. Casting Blame: vv12-13
6. Consequences: vv14-20
  1. Serpent: vv14-15
  2. Eve: v16
  3. Adam: v17-19
7. Exile: vv21-24

## v1

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which Yahweh God had made.*

The first thing we need to establish is just who (or what) is this “serpent.” The Hebrew is *nahas* (naw-KHAWSH), and means just that, a serpent or snake (“as biting, in spite of charm”). This first sentence tells us that, by category, it was a “beast of the field”—i.e., the nomenclature tells us the serpent was considered wild, as opposed to domestic (e.g., cattle), and, of course, had been created by God.

Since in v14 Yahweh God will henceforth consign the serpent to a life moving about on his belly in the dust of the earth, we might rightly assume it was not first created that way. In fact, in a rare example of Hollywood getting something close to correct from the Bible, John Huston in his 1966 movie, *The Bible*, portrays the tempting serpent (shown in the shadows atop a limb in the tree) as a blend of human and snake, with arms and legs, but then after God’s curse becomes the slithering snake more familiar to us.

The British have a common phrase, “too clever by half,” which refers to a person who is intelligent, clever, but perhaps *too* clever, rendering their too-complex notions unsuccessful, or annoying to others. I’m wondering if the serpent, as initially created, might fall into this category. He was created clever, crafty, not unintelligent, but this makes him an easy target for the fallen Satan to use for his purposes.

The word translated “crafty” in most of our versions is *arum*, which means clever, cunning, shrewd, even sensible and prudent; it does *not* mean in itself *wickedly* crafty. The serpent is not Satan; he was not created wicked but “good” like the other beasts of the field. He is just a willing candidate for being used by Satan to tempt the humans. As such I would place him in the same category as Antichrist and his false prophet of the end times, and Judas, who betrayed Jesus.

**Read John 13:25-27.**

*And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’”*

Why the woman first? Why is she the one the serpent first tempts? I disagree with those who say it is because she is the weaker of the two (very often my wife will identify a ruse before I do). But what makes sense is that she had not heard the command and restriction firsthand, from Yahweh Himself, but (we can only assume) from Adam, secondhand. So it may not have had the same impact on her. On the other hand, we know from v6 that hearing it from the mouth of God directly was not sufficient to prevent Adam from giving into the the serpent’s temptation.

From this second sentence we learn that not only is the serpent intelligent and clever, but he is a beast who can speak, who can communicate with humans—in whatever the first language is.

Here the more literal LSB and NASB let us down a little, making it more difficult to understand what the serpent is really getting at. Here it is in the ESV:

**He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”**

Clever indeed; that's a leading question, isn't it. One way to hear the question would be for Eve to answer with a resounding *No! God did not say that we could not eat from any tree. He said we could eat from any tree except just this one.*

**Read Genesis 2:16-17.**

There is also another way to hear what the serpent is asking. Could he mean, *Did God say you cannot eat from all the trees—you can from all but this one?* The answer to this would have to be *Yes*. Either way, the wily serpent is choosing his words carefully, and they are meant to confuse.

Give credit to Eve that her response is right on:

**And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God said, 'You shall not eat from it, and you shall not touch it, lest you die.'"**

We will continue with this in our next session, but right now I would like to close with an excellent point Leupold makes in answer to the proverbial question—and one that may be simmering in your own mind:

*Leupold:* "Why must there be a temptation?" or "Why does God permit His chief creature on earth to be tempted? Does He not desire man's supreme happiness? Why, then, does He permit a temptation which leads to death and all our woe?"

The answer must always be that God will have only that count as moral behaviour worthy of a being made in God's image, which is freely given and maintained even where the possibility of doing otherwise offers itself. To do what God desires merely because one cannot do otherwise, has no moral worth. It would be a morality like unto that of beams which uphold the house because they have been put in place and cannot but bear their load. To do the right where there has never been an opportunity of doing wrong is not moral behaviour. The opportunity to do otherwise must present itself. This is temptation. A being who could not even suffer to be tempted would be a poor specimen of God's handiwork. But the true wisdom of God appears in this, that, though His creature falls, God is still able to achieve His original purpose through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, a redemption for which provisions are already beginning to be made in this chapter.

# SESSION 21

## The First Temptation, part one

Genesis 2:25-3:5

### An Historical Account

Some claim that the story in Chapter Three is myth or allegory, meant to communicate a point by creating a fictional setting. It is too fantastical, they say, to be real. But that would be news to the apostle Paul, for one, who wrote,

But I fear that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be corrupted from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)

For it was Adam who was first formed, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into trespass. (1 Timothy 2:13-14)

### Verse 2:25 a “stand-in for Everything Lost in the Fall

*Luther:* Universal experience indeed shows us all these calamities; but we never feel the real magnitude of them until we look back to that unintelligible but real state of innocence, in which there existed the perfection of will, the perfection of reason and that glorious dignity of the nakedness of the human body. When we truly contemplate our loss of all these gifts and contrast that privation with the original possession of them, then do we, in some measure, estimate the mighty evil of original sin.

### Organizing Chapter Three

Chapter Three of Genesis can be organized in the following way:

1. Temptation: vv1-5
2. Fall: v6
3. Revelation: v7
4. Shame and Fear: vv8-11
5. Casting Blame: vv12-13
6. Consequences: vv14-20
  - a. Serpent: vv14-15
  - b. Eve: v16
  - c. Adam: v17-19
7. Exile: vv21-24

### The Serpent

This first sentence tells us that, by category, it was a “beast of the field”—i.e., the nomenclature tells us the serpent was considered wild, as opposed to domestic (e.g., cattle), and, of course, had been created by God.

Since in v14 Yahweh God will henceforth consign the serpent to a life moving about on his belly in the dust of the earth, we might rightly assume it was not first created that way.

The word translated “crafty” in most of our versions is *arum*, which means clever, cunning, shrewd, even sensible and prudent; it does *not* mean in itself *wickedly* crafty. The serpent is not Satan; he was not created wicked but “good” like the other beasts of the field. He is just a willing candidate for being used by Satan to tempt the humans. As such I would place him in the same category as Antichrist and his false prophet of the end times, and Judas, who betrayed Jesus.

(over)

For complete notes and audios for each session, go to [DLAMPEL.COM/BIBLE-STUDIES/](http://DLAMPEL.COM/BIBLE-STUDIES/)



## Why Temptation?

*Leupold:* The answer must always be that God will have only that count as moral behaviour worthy of a being made in God's image, which is freely given and maintained even where the possibility of doing otherwise offers itself. To do what God desires merely because one cannot do otherwise, has no moral worth. It would be a morality like unto that of beams which uphold the house because they have been put in place and cannot but bear their load. To do the right where there has never been an opportunity of doing wrong is not moral behaviour. The opportunity to do otherwise must present itself. This is temptation. A being who could not even suffer to be tempted would be a poor specimen of God's handiwork. But the true wisdom of God appears in this, that, though His creature falls, God is still able to achieve His original purpose through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, a redemption for which provisions are already beginning to be made in this chapter.

For complete notes and audios for each session, go to [DLAMPEL.COM/BIBLE-STUDIES/](http://DLAMPEL.COM/BIBLE-STUDIES/)

