

Commentary for Lesson 1

March 1, 2020

Because of Sin

Focal Passage: Genesis 3:8-24

Background Text: Genesis 3:1-24

Purpose: To embrace the changes that God's covenant offers us

Note: For those readers who use supplementary commentaries to prepare for each week's lesson, we will post downloadable commentary on AdultBibleStudies.com through the summer quarter. We will publish an annual commentary for purchase for Fall 2020–Summer 2021.

A Choice Is Made (Genesis 3:1-13)

The serpent is the most shrewd and cunning of all the creatures God made. The serpent is not Satan or a symbol of evil or of death. He is a creature of God who introduced to humankind the possibility of disobedience to God's will.

In verses 1-5, the serpent asks the woman a question that is a distortion of God's command in 2:16-17. The woman corrected the serpent but added something that God did not say, a prohibition of touching the fruit. The serpent then accused God of lying and of wanting to keep godlike power away from the humans.

In verse 6, the woman listens to the serpent and then considers the tree. Its fruit looked savory; the tree was beautiful and was to be coveted as a source of wisdom. The ability to know good from evil does not seem to be the point of the rule against eating the fruit of this tree. The man and the woman were expected to know that eating from the tree was wrong, and they were expected to choose to obey God's law. Instead, the woman decided to satisfy her appetite, curiosity, and desire for power.

That wisdom is related to power is evident in the Old Testament's treatment of wisdom in general. Wisdom is seen as a way to master life and its problems. Ideally, wisdom leads not only to an ability to handle the world but also to self-mastery. Wisdom is often seen as a gift from God, and to have wisdom is believed to be a worthy desire.

What the woman and the man failed to consider in deciding to eat of the tree was that "the fear of the LORD" is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7). Of course, this proverb is not explicitly stated in this story, but the principle applies: The first priority in gaining wisdom is a respect for and an awareness of

one's proper place in relation to God. The man and the woman were unwilling to accept the limits of God's created order. They were free to choose, and they chose more knowledge over more trust.

In verse 7, the Hebrew word rendered "knew" (NRSV) or "realized" (NIV) also means "to experience," or "to come to know." *To know*, in the sense desired by the woman and the man, then, is to be in full possession of mental and physical powers. What they got instead was shame. They saw themselves in a new light, and they didn't like what they saw.

Modern psychology tells us that shame is a "master emotion" that influences all our other emotions. Shame arises from a sense of failure and brings with it self-loathing and feelings of unworthiness. Shame, thus, affects our basic sense of self and is experienced most often as embarrassment or humiliation. Shame is a normal feeling in some circumstances, but it can be harmful when it controls our basic ideas about who we are or how worthy we are.

Knowledge from the fruit of the tree brings shame (verse 7) and fear (verse 10). The man and the woman experienced these feelings, even before God confronted them with their disobedience. Choosing to be disobedient gave them knowledge, but it was a knowledge of failure and of unworthiness. This was not knowledge that, as the devious serpent had promised, was to be desired. They were embarrassed about their bodies and were afraid of God.

According to verses 8-13, another result of their new knowledge was fear of God because they knew they had done wrong and felt guilty for it. The man and the woman, in trying to defend themselves from responsibility for their disobedience, distanced themselves from one another and from God. The man tried to place the final blame on God, who created the woman. The woman tried to blame the serpent. Instead of harmony and oneness between Creator and creation, there was shame, anxiety, and alienation.

Consequences of the Choice (Genesis 3:14-24)

The serpent, for his part, was condemned to a life of lowliness, crawling in the dust, and of hostility with humans. The woman was condemned to bear her children in pain. She would still desire her husband, for together they would create children, but their relationship had changed. They were created to live together in oneness of flesh and spirit. But because of their disobedience, they would now live in a broken relationship that would be expressed in her pain and in his ruling over her.

The man would continue to till and tend the earth as he had done in the garden, but this work would become toil. There would be antagonism between the man and the ground, just as there would be between the serpent and humans and between the man and the woman. The harmony of God's original creation had been broken.

The story does not make clear whether the man and the woman were created mortal or immortal. God says in verse 19 that the fate of humankind was to return to the ground in death, just as was promised in Genesis 2:17. This seems to imply that death is the result of disobedience to God's law. But God sent the man and the woman out of the garden to keep them from eating of the tree of life (that was in the garden from the beginning, 2:9) and becoming immortal (verses 22-23). This implies that they were created mortal.

The Hebrew word for "Eve" (verse 20) is similar to the word for "living." She was to be blessed with children and honored as the mother of humankind.

The clothes that God made for Adam and Eve are a symbol of God's protective care. God's power and care went with them. Though their relationship to God was damaged, it was not destroyed.

God said that the man and the woman had become "like one of us" (verse 22), like divine beings (perhaps referring to the heavenly council). They were now capable of thinking about and experiencing the full range of human possibilities, good and evil, but they would not gain immortality. Immortality would be no substitute for life in the garden. The cherubim guarded against any further access to the garden or to the tree of life. Humankind must live with the consequences of disobedience.

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