

Genesis 3–11

What went wrong? And how can the creation blessings be restored?

Chapters 3—11 of Genesis tell the story of mankind's sin and exile from the garden. Once sin entered God's good creation, death followed. Mankind's sinfulness spiraled out of control growing from the first murder to so much wickedness that God chose to wipe out all humanity, save one family. But even after the flood, mankind's wickedness continued to grow. It was like a whirlpool from which there was no escape. In the next section we will see how God began his rescue of all humanity by entering a covenant with one family. It is the tragic story of all humanity and of each human being—we all sin and fall short of God's glory.

But marriage stands as the one blessing not forfeited by original sin nor washed away in the flood. It is the creator's intention that the union of husband and wife would survive man's fall from grace and not be washed away in the flood. It is testimony to the Christian belief that the story of Adam and Eve and their marriage while fraught with danger is not without hope. The deep wounds caused by sin and death, will be assuaged by God's tender mercy. He does not curse them as he did the Serpent, Eve's child will one day crush the head of the Serpent, and at the end of chapter 3 he clothes their nakedness. And as we will see he renews the creation blessings to be fruitful and multiply after the flood.

The Story

Chapter 3 of Genesis is fascinating. Chapter 2 concluded with the man and his wife naked and not ashamed. Creation was good. God's plan that a man and a woman would become one is expressed physically, in their sexual union. Their relationship is intended to be fruitful. It is intended to bring forth life in the form of other persons, children. They are in the garden. Life is good. The whole scene is "good," in the sense of being both internally good and externally attractive. Out of the chaos of the opening lines of Genesis 1 has come a beautiful, ordered, and good creation. Husband and wife are one. There is no shame. All is as the Creator intended.

Into that idyllic picture comes another creature. This one, the Serpent, "was the craftiest of all the creatures that God had made." Many years later, this character will be identified as the "ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world." Revelation 12:9. He is a creature, not a god. And he is the enemy of God, human beings and as we shall see, marriage.

He begins the conversation with Eve with a question: "Did God say, 'you shall not eat of **any** tree of the garden?'" This is far from an innocent question. It is designed to produce doubt. God did *not* say they could not eat of any tree; he forbade only one tree. It is too bad that Eve continued to engage the Serpent who now plants a lie in her heart. "God knows you will not die, but that you will become like he is, deciding what is true for yourself."

The lie took root and warped her desires. The doubt and lie caused great mistrust of God and her husband. After all, who had told her about God's command if not Adam. Now she desires a kind of wisdom, a kind of life that was forbidden her. The Serpent's assault on their unity produced a catastrophic result. She ate from the tree!

Adam is not blameless. He is standing right there during the whole conversation, see verse 6. Why doesn't he say something? Why doesn't he defend God? Why doesn't he protect Eve from the lies of the serpent? The doubt and the lie warped his desires as well and he ate too.

Through this disobedience, we did become like gods in a new and terrible sense: we took for ourselves the prerogative that belongs only to the Creator—namely, to decide for ourselves, independently of him, what is right and wrong. Her husband joined in this act of rebellion, and all the relationships that Adam and his wife had were disrupted. Shame entered the world.

In their own relationship, their nakedness, which bore no shame in the Creator's plan, now brings shame. Their relationship with the Creator, too, is now clouded with guilt and shame. They hide from him in the garden and no longer enjoy the sweet conversation that has marked their time with him until now.

Order, which had been God's gift to all creation, is now thrown into disarray. The ground—our lovely garden—which had been ordered in beautiful variety is now filled with chaos and confusion. Thorns and thistles vie with wheat and vine.

The relationship of the husband and wife will suffer as well. Their unity is undermined by the mistrust caused by the Serpent's deceit. The order in their mutual love that the Creator established in chapter 2 will now be abused. That original order was about pouring oneself out in love, not about power. But now, the husband will not lay down his life for his wife as a loving equal, but rule over her as a monarch. Perhaps he will be kind, perhaps not. She will long for him, yet he will rule over her.

As Genesis 3 describes it, the post-fall reality of the husband and wife relationship has become all about power: the husband has it, the wife doesn't. Or at least, the husband has it explicitly and through physical domination; the wife struggles to have it indirectly, or to subvert it. One can almost feel the conflict, pain, and betrayal expressed in the text. The woman's life will become much harder. She will turn to her husband for comfort and protection but will find her problems not softened but compounded. To propose that the solution to contemporary women's plight is for them to grab or share power is to define the whole problem of humanity in the terms established by our sin itself. There is another way, a new way, a radical solution. For us Christians, fallen in Adam and Eve and saved in Christ, to be human is to be in relationship defined not by power, but by love and unity. As Paul will tell us, this is possible in Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.



Genesis 3:1–5

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 3:1–5

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Meditation

Leave it to the crafty Serpent to make God's loving commands seem harsh and unreasonable.

Our enemy often couches his worst lies in sweet and often innocent-sounding questions. Before we know it, we have swallowed the bait. Here he posed a lie in the form of a question. The woman followed with an exaggeration—after which the Serpent told a very clever lie, which must of have sounded something like this: "*God just doesn't want you to be like him. He knows that you can decide for yourself what is good and evil—after all, you know your own truth better than anyone else!*"

Music to an unscrupulous marketer's ear. Create a need that does not exist and fill it with a product that will make you want to come back, even if it kills you. Cigarette, anyone? It's best if you don't think too much about it. Trust me: you desire it, want it, need it! Just do it!

How much better it would have been to believe the Designer and follow his instructions. After all, he wanted to share what we tried to take: one life with him.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Genesis 3:6–10

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 3:6–10

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. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. ⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

Meditation

Their eyes were opened, and they saw their shame. They hid from God. Thousands of years after the writing of this account, St. Luke will tell a story about another couple, who are on the road to the town of Emmaus. It is quite possible that this couple is a husband and wife; they are returning home from the most devastating weekend of their lives. Their hopes for God's deliverance have been shattered on the cross with the cruel execution of their friend Jesus. A stranger walks with them, and as evening draws near, joins them for dinner. He takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. Like Adam and Eve, their eyes too are opened. But this time, they see God with them, in the person of their risen Lord. Shame and sorrow are replaced by joy and healing. The sad story of the garden has been reversed. In Christ we are invited into a union we could hardly have imagined.

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Genesis 3:14–19

Pray

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Reading: Genesis 3:14–19

The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." ¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." ¹⁷ And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Meditation

I'm guessing they imagined that the eating the fruit thing would go a different way. Now they know the truth. But it was not what they had been led to believe. Turns out they aren't God. They don't really have the ability to decide for themselves what is right and wrong. The consequences are horrendous. Poor Eve. She is going to suffer especially in the two areas that are distinctively feminine. She will suffer in being a wife and a mother. The good ground will be cursed. Adam (representing all humanity) will have to work much harder. Thorns and thistles—chaos—return to the ordered creation. Loving relationship between equals is now about power: who has it, who doesn't. It will not go well for the poor woman—now, or in the far foreseeable future. There is hope that the Serpent will one day be defeated, but things look like they will be difficult for a long time to come.

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Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

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Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Genesis 3:20–24

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 3:20–24

The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living. ²¹ And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them. ²² Then the LORD God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—²³ therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Meditation

The woman now has a personal name: Eve, the mother of all living people. Life will go on, albeit in exile from the garden and without access to the tree of life. However, the LORD God, in a remarkable display of compassion, eases their shame and covers their nakedness with clothing he has made for them. But this story is still about death and exile. When the land was in ruins and the Israelites were in exile in Babylon, when they no longer had direct access to their God because his glory had left the Temple, the great symbol of sacred space, they remembered the exile of our first parents from the garden. They remembered these stories, because there is a glimmer of hope here, and much more hope to follow. Exile from the garden is to be nowhere near the end of the very long story about God and his people. The day will come when Eve's child will crush the head of the Serpent. On that day, death will be defeated and humanity's long exile from the garden will come to an end.

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Genesis 6:1–8

Pray

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Reading: Genesis 6:1–8

When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. ³ Then the LORD said, "My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years." ⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown. ⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the LORD said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created —people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD.

Meditation

Things go from bad to worse. Adam and Eve have been kicked out of the garden. Their children quarrel and one kills his brother. The murderer is marked by God and sent to wander about the earth as an outcast. Now there are some strange relationships with the Nephilim, whoever they are. What is clear is that this is one more sign of the ever-increasing wickedness of human beings. God decides to wipe humanity off the face of his good creation, but again, as a preview of what will happen in Israel's long and troubled relationship with the Lord, he will rescue a remnant. Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord and, as we shall see, God will start over with Noah and his family.

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Genesis 8:1, 20–22; 9:1–3

Pray

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Reading: Genesis 8:1, 20–22; 9:1–3

But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; . . .²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.²¹ And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.²² As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."^{9:1} God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.² The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything."

Meditation

The devastating flood has receded, and Noah offers a pleasing sacrifice to God. Worship of God is the appropriate response of all humans. God promises to never again destroy his good creation. He renews the creation blessing and the promise that humans will be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. Blessings and promises are part of covenant making. The covenant blessing of children and family was not washed away by the flood. Not only that, but whereas Adam and Eve could eat only the plants of the earth, now people can eat all manner of foods. God's graciousness towards his people has been expanded.

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Genesis 9:6–17

Pray

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-Lord, make haste to help us.

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-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 9:6–17

For in his own image God made humankind. ⁷ And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it." ⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹² God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." ¹⁷ God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Meditation

God makes a covenant with Noah and his family. It is important to note that God is committing himself to Noah and his descendants. Most covenants are solemn promises that are binding on both parties. This covenant is mostly one-sided. God will never forget his promise. He will remember it forever and ever. In the stories that were told in the ancient world, the bow was the might weapon of war that the creator god used to slay his mortal enemy. He then fashioned the earth out of her vanquished body. Our story is not like that, of course; instead, our creator God, the Lord, hangs his bow in the sky as a sign that it will never be used to destroy the earth or all living things. Our own covenant obligations will be spelled out in due time. We do know, even at this juncture, that God will not tolerate wickedness. We also know that he will be faithful forever to his promises.

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Genesis 11:1–9

Pray

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Reading: Genesis 11:1–9

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." ⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Meditation

Human audacity has known no limits—ever. Here, as will be repeated throughout our sad history, human beings are trying to make a name for themselves. They are attempting to access the place where God dwells, to build a tower to the heavens. This story is not to be read as God thwarting genuine human creativity or the proper use of our authority as co-regents caring for God's good creation. No, this is one more attempt to usurp that which belongs only to God, here described as "making a name for ourselves." To prevent this, God causes confusion in their language and scatters them throughout the world. One day this curse too will be lifted. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit will empower the apostles to speak in such a way that each will hear in his or her own language. On that day, restored unity will be the blessing.

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