

Genesis

A Curse and a Promise: Hope for Redemption

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church
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Introduction

It is a grim scene indeed in which the only glimmer of hope is that things can't get any worse. Yet we allowed ourselves to be consoled that way in our last lesson. The human story crashed into failure and loss. Adam and Eve were tested by God to prove and confirm them in their love. The only way they could have passed the test was to live by faith. Although they could not see God, they had His Word of commandment and many evidences of His goodness. The visible serpent and the easily observed appeal of the forbidden fruit were challenges to them, but they could have counted the invisible truth as the one that was binding on them. Had Adam believed God and acted on that trust, he would have thrown himself into combating the interloper, even if it meant suffering. This, after all, was the covenant God had made with him. God's gift of blessedness in the Garden would be preserved through obedience to His simple command. Love of God would have made Adam willing to do whatever it required to protect God's name, his bride, and the garden. But Adam chose self-love. The rest is history.

If there were no hope in this history, it would have ended there. God would simply have blotted everything out and started over again, much like a cook disposes of a first batch of cookies that got burnt. That the story continues at all means hope, even if it is only modest. As we move on through the rest of the details of Genesis 3, we want to be on the look-out for more signs of hope. This is going to take a special kind of eyesight, however, because immediately after the fall, the light in the Garden starts to dim. There will be the chill of a dark shadow casting itself over what was once luminous in its glory and perfection. How will the human creatures be different? What will they say to God? What will He say to them? And, for the burning question, what will He do to them? The answers to these questions will occupy us for the next two lessons.



Genesis 3:7-15

7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

8 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. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate."

14 The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; 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 seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel**



Questions on the Text

Discovery and Effect

Read Genesis 3:7-13

1. What is the first effect of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. How do they respond? (vs. 7)
2. What is the second effect of their disobedience (vs. 8)
Adam and Eve's actions in vss. 7-8 give evidence of a change within them and of harm done to their relationship with one another and with God. This is the systemic change that the Church teaches us will continue in humanity through procreation. Because that means that every one of us is affected by this radical change, in the next few verses we will watch carefully how this plays out in the way they respond to God's questioning.
3. Adam and Eve might well have expected God to mete out punishment then and there. But instead, He asks a number of questions: "Where are you? Who told you that you were naked? What is this thing that you have done?" Doesn't God know all this already? Why does He ask? Is this a sign of hope? Why?
4. Read Adam's first answer to God (vs. 10). What prompted him to hide from God? How is this another consequence of his "opened" eyes?
5. When God asks the man if he has disobeyed, how does he respond (vs. 12)? How is the woman's response similar (vs. 13)?
6. In these exchanges between God and His creatures, there is a glaring omission on the part of Adam and Eve. What is it?
7. From this passage, make a list of all the consequences of man's disobedience in the Garden. God had told them that they would die if they ate the fruit. What kind of death was it? Do you think they knew they were dead?

Curse and Promise

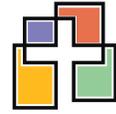
Read Genesis 3:14-15

[Before we proceed, let us pause long enough to make sure we read between the lines. In the face of Adam and Eve's complete blindness to their living death, as is evidenced by their lack of remorse, what might God have been justified in doing? We would find no fault in Him if He declared, "You ungrateful wretches-away with the likes of you!" This is a moment in which we can dare to let hope grow. Does He perhaps still love them? Watch for the clues.]

8. Having listened to their excuses, God pronounces the verdict. Why do you suppose God begins His response to Adam and Eve's disobedience by cursing the serpent (vss. 14-15)?
9. Remember that when God speaks to the serpent, He is actually addressing the Devil. Vs. 14 is written in highly symbolic language. What does it mean? In other words, what will the Devil's destiny be, according to this imagery? Read also Isa. 14:12-15; Luke 10:17-19; Rev. 12:7-9; 20:7-10.
10. In vs. 15, God announces a battle (that's what "enmity" means). Did a battle already exist in the universe? How will it be different now?



Catholic Scripture Study



Catholic Scripture Study



Questions on the Text (cont).

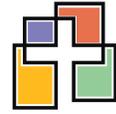
11. Apparently mankind will continue long enough to produce a woman and her seed who will engage in this battle. Is this another sign of hope?
12. Why do you suppose the battle begins between the serpent and "the woman"?
13. We need to determine everything we can about this "woman and her seed." First, can this "woman" be Eve? Why or why not?
14. In Hebrew thought, men have "seed," not women. The phrase, "her seed," is highly irregular. What question does it lead you to ask?
15. The "seed" of the "woman" will bruise the head of the serpent, while the serpent will bruise his heel. What is the difference between these two kinds of wounds?
16. If the serpent, Satan, is a fallen angel, and the "seed" is able to overcome him, what does this indicate about the kind of power the "seed" will have? What makes this profoundly unusual?
17. Why will this battle be a stunning humiliation for the devil? And why is it a breath-taking sign of hope for the humans?



Questions for Reflection

One of the best ways to meditate on God's Word is to take it deeply into your life through memorization. The suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the text in the lesson. Or you may choose one of your own. For further reflection, consider these questions:

1. To stand naked and exposed before God can cause us such pain that, like Adam and Eve, we try to find ways to cover it. We make excuses, we stay too busy, we spend our energy on the faults of others. Ask God for the grace to be honest about those places in your life that you try to cover with fig leaves. He can't heal you if you won't show Him the wound.
2. Although God knew exactly what had happened in the Garden, He asked for a verbal accounting of what Adam and Eve had done. Here we see, in its original context, what God wants men to do when they disobey Him. We must confess it. In addition to exposing ourselves to Him to see us, we must take responsibility for our actions in a very human way-with words. Are you taking advantage of the opportunity to do this that the Church gives to us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? This is how the Church preserves that moment in the Garden, enabling us to confess our sin, to detest it, to resolve not to repeat it, and to receive forgiveness. Consider how to make this a regular practice in your life.
3. Did it break your heart to watch Adam and Eve not recognize God's love for them? Ask Him to help you recognize His love for you even when it comes in a form that frightens you.
4. Take a few moments to make sure you fully comprehend the manifestation of God's love for you in this lesson. If Adam and Eve, in their rebellion, did not stop God's love, what can that mean for His love for you? You might want to be on your knees when you think about this.



Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder

What kind of eyesight is it that leads to blindness? It is the false sight that Adam and Eve received as the promise from the serpent. Their vision was so distorted and disordered that they could no longer see God, each other, or even themselves properly. The consequences of their choice to disobey God are seen immediately in this part of Genesis. Working hard to make themselves presentable and cover their shame, they make clear to us why all of us, whether we want to admit it or not, know deep inside of us that something is wrong with us. Blinded in our inherited human nature, we sometimes try to cover this feeling of shame with bravado or accomplishments or activity. Sometimes we numb our awareness of it through sensual inebriation. We fall victim to endless "self-esteem" concerns, always trying to overcome the drag we feel on our souls. We are like Lady Macbeth, washing and washing but not coming clean: "Out, out, damned spot!" And that is only the beginning.

As God approaches His rebellious children in the Garden, in an attempt to draw them to Himself and examine what has gone wrong, they flee and hide. They mistake His nearness for trouble instead of help. Given every opportunity to renounce what they have done and throw themselves on His mercy, they mistake His questions for accusations instead of Fatherly concern. Not recognizing that acknowledging their fault is the first step to its remedy, they cast the blame away from themselves, making rehabilitation impossible. If this is how it is now between God and man, something really big will have to happen. Man not only has a death sentence hanging over his head, he is also walled in by spiritual blindness. Just as he distorted bad into good (not eating into eating), he distorts good into bad. How will God ever penetrate man's world?

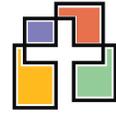
Before we examine the answer to this question, one thing becomes perfectly clear. If there is to be a solution, it must come entirely at God's initiative. Adam and Eve are in no position to help themselves. They are barely able to even perceive the magnitude of the problem, let alone remedy it. If God truly loves these creatures and does not intend to give up on them, He will have to do all the work to save them from disaster.

That's precisely what He does. The first step He takes to un-doing the catastrophe sets the tone for the rest of man's history. God promises to defeat His enemy, the devil, through an astounding reversal. Human beings-"the woman and her seed"-will engage in a divine battle and prevail. In one glittering promise, God declares His authority over the devil, His love for humanity, and His chosen method of operation-reversal. If this is the way it really is between God and man, what is there to fear? As St. Paul exuberantly asks, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31)

Catechism Connection

Excerpted from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

On the consequences of the Fall - "Scripture portrays the tragic consequences of this first disobedience. Adam and Eve immediately lose the grace of original holiness. They become afraid of the God of whom they have conceived a distorted image-that of a God jealous of his prerogatives. The harmony in which they had found themselves...is now destroyed: the control of the soul's spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions.... Harmony with creation is broken.... Finally,...Death makes its entrance into human history." (399-400)



In this lesson, we observed that:

1. The knowledge of good and evil that Adam and Eve received from the forbidden fruit was the experience of it. Where once there was only goodness, now there is shame and danger and blame. In the twinkling of an eye, although nothing in their environment had changed, everything inside of them did. They lost the grace God gave them at creation to see truthfully and live accordingly. They lost "original justice"-perfect love of God and man-with their "original sin."
2. Although God would have been justified in eliminating these creatures and perhaps starting over, He seeks them out as they hide from Him and tries to draw out from them an accounting of what they did. Instead of accepting this as help, they reject it as an intrusion, trying to preserve innocence that has already been lost.
3. It appears that God has a plan to continue with mankind, but first He must deal with His enemy and theirs, the serpent. He condemns the devil to a life as the least of all creatures (and this was the one who chided Adam and Eve for their creaturely submission). Beyond that, He declares that one day, human beings-a "woman and her seed"-will finish the battle begun that day. The "seed" will be the one to strike the deciding blow to the devil, being bruised in the process. Though he will be born of woman, he will have a power that is divine.
4. This pair cannot be Eve and a son she might bear, since she and her husband have already fallen victim to the enemy's treachery. The pair to come will be descendants of Adam and Eve, although not affected by the fall of their original parents. They will be in opposition to, not collusion with, the enemy. There is no mention of a husband or father. These two provoke our curiosity; they are humans worth waiting for.

A Message from the Authors

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