

Keeping our eyes on the big picture...



*"You may eat freely from every tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die."
Genesis 3:2-3*

Revisiting Genesis Chapter 3

A careful reading of Genesis Chapter 3, the story of the temptation in the Garden of Eden, raises a question. You might like to stop reading this and take a look before continuing!

Did you spot it?

"And the LORD God commanded him [the man], "You may eat freely from every tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die."

Genesis 3:2-3

The first-time reader is most-likely expecting Adam and Eve, having eaten the forbidden fruit, to drop dead like Ananias and Saphira did when they lied in another 'beginning story' – the birth of the church (in Acts 5:1-11).

But they did not! They did, however, become aware of their nudity and felt the need to cover-up. They sowed themselves aprons from fig leaves and hid from the Lord God. When God confronted them, Adam was certainly alive enough to blame his wife, and Eve to blame the snake. Following their banishment from the garden from which there was no going back, they went on to have children Cain and Abel (4:1-2). So, on the face of it,

the snake seemed to be right whereas God was wrong:

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Genesis 3:4-5

How are we to understand this? Surely the Bible does not intend us to conclude that God was wrong whilst the 'crafty' snake was right!

The intention of the writer is to provoke us to think, just as Jesus did when He told parables where the meaning was not immediately obvious on the surface. Spiritual understanding is something that we need to search for. In Proverbs 4:7, the expression 'get wisdom' has the thought of *actively seeking* spiritual understanding. If we want to understand the significance of Genesis 3, we need to dig a little deeper.

The key phrase is, "*in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die.*" (v.3). God intends that we stop in our tracks and think – what does that really mean? The word 'day' in the Bible mostly means a 24-hour period, but not always. It sometimes means an indefinite period of time (as in Genesis 2:4 and Isaiah 22:5). Similarly, 'die' mostly refers to physical death but not always. Sometimes it is used metaphorically

to refer to a quality of life without God. One Old Testament example of this is Deuteronomy 30:19 and another New Testament use is John 5:24. A particularly relevant example is the phrase spoken by the father of the prodigal son to the elder brother in Luke:

“We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

Luke 15:32

So in Genesis 3, God was warning that the consequence of refusing His command would be a life changing experience, a new day and a loss of the kind of life they had been enjoying. In rejecting the command of God in the garden, Adam and Eve lost out on a quality of life that they could have continued to enjoy – a life in communication and fellowship with God, enjoying His favour. Instead of being able to live in fellowship with Him, they were banished from His presence. Instead of enjoying His provision and blessing they reaped conflict with each other, toil, and struggle with the earth which supported them. They also lost their opportunity to eat of the tree of life and “live forever”. They were on a downward slope to physical death.

And this is the situation we find ourselves in too, before receiving Jesus. In this passage at the beginning of the Bible, God sets out His diagnosis of “*the human condition*”. In the following chapters, our situation is fully exposed. Our capacity for sin and disobedience is not always down to external enticement; sometimes it comes from within. The story of Cain and Abel shows how one person responded to the fact that he was not as equally favoured by God as his brother.

This is a powerful story full of meaning. And it is not just a story about two individuals in the past - Adam and Eve. It is the story of each one of us. We can all identify with their problem. We all have that tendency to do our own thing in our own way. There’s something about human nature that doesn’t like being told what to do – even by God! An unpalatable truth!

We might wonder whether God would ever give up on humankind. Perhaps the situation is hopeless and beyond redemption? The story of the flood in Genesis 9 reassures us otherwise and every time we see a rainbow, we can be reminded that God will never give up on the human-race.

The wonderful truth is that God has a solution and Genesis chapters 12 onward describe the unfolding plan of God’s remedy beginning with a man – Abraham and his family - who became a nation (Israel). When we reach the New Testament’s Book of Romans, we find that Paul in explaining the gospel returns to the beginning to contrast the blessing of being ‘in Christ’ and not ‘in Adam’. (See chapters 5-8)

It is significant that the book that begins our Bible is matched by the book that ends it. In Revelation 20, the deceiver - Satan, pictured as snake back in Genesis - is permanently removed. In Revelation 22, there is a picture of ‘*Eden restored*’. The tree of life returns. There is healing for the nations. There will be no more curse. There is the free gift of the water of life!

In these times of challenge and real struggle, it is good to keep our eyes on the big picture. God has diagnosed our problem and He has provided a solution. Things will not always be as they are now. Be encouraged! Be strong! Be faithful and trust God!

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