

The Provocation *and* Provision



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 1-3.*

Memory Text: “Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’” (*Genesis 3:9, NKJV*).

A toy company produced a doll called Cindy Smart that spoke five languages, read well, told time, and could do simple math. Cindy was the first doll that would do what it was told. Those who first met Cindy were a little spooked. How could a doll do all these things?

The answer is good computer programming, a 16-bit microprocessor in the belly, and an optical scanner that allows it to recognize numbers or letter-shaped objects. In many ways Cindy Smart was just an advanced version of Chatty Cathy, one of the first pull-string dolls that could *speak*.

Yet, no matter how complicated or even intricate Cindy Smart is, the doll is still just a computer, programmed to do what it's told. Free will is not an option for Cindy, no matter how *smart* the doll is.

In contrast, we're not just quantitatively different from Cindy in that we can say more, but qualitatively different: We have been given moral freedom, something totally alien to Cindy. This issue of free will is the crucial difference, one that gets to the heart of the matter as we look at the rise of sin—and its cure.

The Week at a Glance: Why, in order to love God, must we be free? Why must freedom entail the possibility to do wrong? How did God respond to the fall of Adam and Eve?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 1.*

To Love God

Read the following texts: Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, John 15:9-11. What are they all admonishing us to do, and why must we have freedom, moral freedom, in order to obey?

Students of the Bible are familiar with the record that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He was not dependent on preexisting matter or conditions. He brought everything into being by His word, His *logos*, which is the expression of His mind (*Ps. 33:6, 9; John 1:1-3*). Infinitely perfect Himself, He made everything flawless and beautiful. God is love, and everything He does is consistent with His perfect love and infinite wisdom. Upon His intelligent beings He bestowed the noble attributes of personal individuality and freedom of choice. But choice, by its very nature, involves the option of choosing between right and wrong. Hence, the risk of human rebellion was there from the beginning.

At the same time, God desires us to have personal, mutually satisfying fellowship with Him (*Ps. 36:5-10*). He also endows us with wisdom, knowledge, love, and the capacity for joy. These relational qualities can have real existence only in beings who have freedom of will, something not found in Cindy Smart.

When was the last time you ever heard of a happy computer, a joyous PC, or a loyal and loving laptop? Why can't these things, which can do amazing intellectual feats, ever be happy, loving, or loyal?

To love God, we have to be free. It's as simple as that. Love cannot exist without moral freedom, and moral freedom can't exist without the capacity to do wrong.

"God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34.

A science-fiction story is told about a man who, having lost his wife, had her replaced by a robot that looked, talked, felt, and acted exactly as his wife did. If he hadn't known any better, he would have had no idea that this wasn't she. In the end, however, he sent her away, because the experience wasn't the same. What do you think was missing, and what does that have to do with the day's study?

Key Text: *Genesis 1–3.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To remind us of our heritage, created by a loving God.
2. To help us understand sin and its origins.
3. To illuminate God’s plans to rescue and to restore us to communion with Him.

Lesson Outline:

I. Creation—God Designs His Creatures for Relationship With Him (*Gen. 1:27*).

- A. An infinitely perfect God created a flawless world, inhabited with sinless people.
- B. God endowed us with relational qualities that include the gift of freedom of will.
- C. True relationship with God means moral freedom, which cannot exist without our having the capacity to choose to do wrong.

II. God’s Creatures Withdraw From Their Loving Creator (*Ezek. 28:14-17*).

- A. Lucifer, a free moral agent, begins a campaign of subversion.
- B. Our God of infinite wisdom and love seeks to convince Satan of his error.
- C. Satan, exiled from heaven, spreads his dissent on earth.

III. Salvation—the Plan to Rescue and Restore (*Gen. 3:8, 9, 15*).

- A. Humanity believes Satan’s lies about their Creator.
- B. God initiates a search for His rebellious creatures.
- C. God shares His plan for humanity’s redemption, our blessed hope.

Summary: Before humanity chose to believe Satan’s lies, God planned for our rescue. In the cool of the evening, He went in search of our lost parents after they fell. He shared the blessed hope of our restoration through the gift of a Savior. This promise includes the termination of sin and Satan. It extends to each of us the offer of restoration to fellowship with God.

COMMENTARY

The Provocation and Provision.

Introduction. God is love (*see 1 John 4:8, 16*)—that is life’s foundational truth. No true answer to any mystery lies outside the boundaries of this all-encompassing truth. God’s love is active, engaged, purposeful.

When sin, a wholly negative and unloving force, arose, God launched a response designed to eradicate sin and treat all perpetrators and victims of evil in a manner entirely consistent with His love. Love is infinitely wise. It communicates, educates, draws lines of distinction between good and evil, preserves freedom of

Satan's Defection *(John 8:44).*

Scripture informs us that Lucifer rebelled against God. What factors led him to choose this path of opposition, and with what effect? *Isa. 14:12-14, Ezek. 28:14-17.*

Lucifer, Ellen White tells us, gradually becoming self-infatuated, withdrew from loving his Creator and began to covet supreme power and authority. Jealous of Christ, who is the Creator and coequal with the Father (*Heb. 1:1-3*), Lucifer began a campaign of subversion, maliciously insinuating that God was autocratic, His laws arbitrary, and His expectation of worship and service from the creation unreasonable. Ingratitude, egotistic ambition, self-love, covetousness, dissatisfaction, hostility, deceit, malice, and a craving for worship and power were the fruits of Lucifer's pride. God created Lucifer a perfect being without any propensity toward moral confusion or failure. Yet, as a free moral agent, Lucifer was at liberty to diverge from harmony with the God who brought him into existence and gave him his exalted station.

Attitudes and actions, of course, have consequences. Departure from God's law is sin (*1 John 3:4*), and the wages of sin are death (*Rom. 6:23*). Lucifer was "full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty," "perfect in [his] ways" from the day he was created (*Ezek. 28:12, 15*). He dwelt in the very presence of God as the anointed cherub, the chief communicator of divine revelations to the universe. Thus, he stood entirely without excuse for his seditious estrangement from the Lord. Through his crafty misrepresentation of God, Lucifer (renamed Satan, or "adversary," after his fall) seduced one-third of the angelic host into siding with him (*Rev. 12:4*).

Satan's representation of God and His way could not be treated as acceptable. Truth and righteousness are not a matter of subjective opinion but of absolute, unalterable revelation that shapes character and conduct.

"In great mercy, according to His divine character, God bore long with Lucifer. The spirit of discontent and disaffection had never before been known in heaven. It was a new element, strange, mysterious, unaccountable. Lucifer himself had not at first been acquainted with the real nature of his feelings; . . . yet he did not dismiss them. He did not see whither he was drifting. But such efforts as infinite love and wisdom only could devise, were made to convince him of his error. . . . He was made to see what would be the result of persisting in revolt."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 39. Notice: An all-wise, all-powerful God would not forcibly stop Lucifer's moral slide. Why not? What does that tell us about the sanctity of moral freedom?

choice, defines consequences, upholds what is right and good, eradicates what is wrong and injurious, redeems what is redeemable, and purges what is not.

I. Loving God.

Healthy personal identity consists of certain irrevocable qualities:

- a. consciousness
- b. capacity to differentiate between right and wrong (moral options)
- c. power of choice (will)
- d. ability to communicate
- e. capacity for personal relationships
- f. ability to love, to have an unselfish concern for the welfare of others
- g. trust in God, the Creator and Sustainer of life, and a communicative relationship with Him
- h. obedience to God and a clear sense of accountability to Him

Lacking these qualities, personal identity is seriously impaired, if not negated. Rooted in the Creator's plan is the determination that humans, made in His image, shall retain all the characteristics of individuality forever, without compromise or curtailment. When our inner being is healthy, then we know and love God freely and perpetually discover fresh aspects of the truth that in His "presence is fullness of joy," at His "right hand are pleasures forevermore" (*Ps. 16:11, NKJV*).

II. Satan's Defection.

Gradually, Lucifer, the highest ranking of created beings, began to turn his thoughts toward himself. Egotism prompted him to take credit for all the abilities and attractive force he had, as though he were the originator of it all, when, in reality, he had received all as a gift from God. His gratitude and worshipfulness toward God dwindled, and he filled the void with a craving for admiration from his fellow angels. Festering pride began to poison his whole moral nature and infect him with antagonism toward God and a malicious determination to discredit Him.

Lucifer's character change became so profound that his name (which meant Light Bearer) was changed to Satan (adversary). He dwelt in spiritual darkness. Satan became a spiritual parasite—willing to feed on the life of God and exploit His bountiful provisions but determined to pose as one superior to the Source of life and to bend the infinite power of God to his own self-serving ends. What perverse blindness! What disjointed, delusional thinking! This is the mystery of iniquity. Though powerless to create and unwilling, as well as impotent, to provide the least of life's blessings, Satan wanted to usurp God as the ruler of the universe. Satan's ambition was as devoid of logic as it was of decency. Conscious, persistent deviation from God's moral order produces a steel-hearted rebellion, unmoved by love or reason and opposed to wisdom and life.

Satan's Earthly Exile

Read Luke 10:18, Revelation 12:4-9. What happened to Satan after his rebellion in heaven?

Revelation 12:12 tells those on earth to beware, because the devil has come down to us having great wrath. And though that warning was given in the context of the Cross and the doom that the Cross spelled for Satan, the Eden story nevertheless presents us with a prototype, a model, on how the devil, who “deceiveth the whole world” (vs. 9), works to deceive each of us even now.

Read Genesis 3:1. Compare it with Genesis 2:16, 17. What ploy did Satan use to set his trap?

How fascinating that Satan used a mixture of truth and error. He took a direct command from God and simply rephrased it in a way that sounded almost as if he were repeating what God said, only he put a different spin on it. In other words, he mixed just enough truth with error in order to make it sound right.

Read Genesis 3:2,3. What does it say about Eve's knowledge of God's command and, thus, her responsibility for her action?

Though deceived (*1 Tim. 2:14*), Eve, by her words, showed that she knew what God had told her to do. That's a powerful lesson for us: We could save ourselves a lot of heartache, sin, and deception if we simply obeyed the clear commands of God, no matter how much we might not understand a certain situation or all the variables in it. Deplorable as Eve's sin was, Adam transgressed with eyes wide open. Even amid their ignorance, they could have saved themselves from deception simply by obeying God, trusting that His way was the best way, even when they didn't fully understand it.

Read Genesis 3:6. What were the things about the tree that led Eve to disobey? What principles were at work there? How are these same principles manifested today?

III. Satan's Earthly Exile.

Satan's assumed independence from God subtly perverted all his thoughts, words, and actions. His heart bore a kind of fruit never before seen in the universe—deceit, hatred, treachery, destructiveness. But just because it was so strange and so cunningly disguised by its rebellious originator, sin had to be given time to manifest its true character in all its ramifications. This must be allowed in order to preserve peace, harmony, and freedom in the universe. It was morally imperative for each of the angels and other spiritually intelligent beings throughout creation to evaluate the contrasting character and fruits of good and evil, truth and error, righteousness and unrighteousness.

God determined to give this same freedom of choice to Adam and Eve, progenitors of His newly created race of beings. "God might have created them without the power to transgress His

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 1:31, Isaiah 14:12-14, John 15:9-11, 1 John 4:10.*

- ① In Genesis, we are told repeatedly that what God made was not only good, "it was very good" (*Gen. 1:31*). As you read the Creation account in Genesis 1, 2, imagine what it would be like to walk as a perfect being in a flawless world. What would that world look, smell, feel, and taste like? 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10 tells us, "'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard . . . but God has revealed . . . to us'" (*NKJV*) His wonders and what He has prepared for us. What does this tell you about God and His original plan for His created companions?
- ② God is love. The heavens and earth, even in their current sinful state, announce this fact. Scripture records His acts of love through the narratives of ordinary human beings. Even in our rebellious condition, God seeks an active, ongoing relationship with His creatures. What does this tell you about God? Why would He risk creating us in His image, especially when this means we would have the freedom and capacity to choose to do wrong?
- ③ Into a perfect world the ultimate villain entered. Lucifer saw a reflection of himself and, in self-infatuation, withdrew from his loving Creator and began to covet supreme power and authority. How does such evil manifest itself in the world? What are some of the ways it insinuates its ideas into a perfect society? How does this help you recognize Satan's attacks on your life? Where can you find hope for renewing your allegiance to God?

“Ayecah”? (*Gen. 3:6-23*).

Bewitched by Satan’s subtle and not-so-subtle lies, the human race fell. Instantly, the whole relationship between heaven and earth changed. The paradigm of Paradise radically shifted. The harmony, the peace, and the balance of Eden shattered. At that moment, the history of the universe altered. Satan’s rebellion, once confined only to himself and the fallen angels, had now gained a foothold in a new world. The issues at stake had become momentous.

Read Genesis 3:9. What is the first thing that the Bible records as said by God to fallen humanity, and why are those words so important even for us today? What do we see foreshadowed in them?

The Hebrew word *ayecah* translates into “Where are you?” Thus, the first thing that God communicates to His fallen creatures is a question, a question that, in a sense, He has been asking ever since. He doesn’t ask it in order to know; He asks it in order to force Adam and Eve to confront what they had done.

“Ayecah?” What we see here is not a condemnation but already the first of what will be endless pleas to Adam and Eve and all of their descendants to acknowledge their sinful position, to acknowledge their need, and to acknowledge that God is here to save them.

“Ayecah?” God comes to them. God is seeking them out. Though we often view Genesis 3:15 as the first gospel promise, already here, in this simple question, “Ayecah?” we see the beginning of what will end only at the close of probation: the Lord seeking us out and taking the initiative to save us.

Read the following texts: John 3:16, Rom. 8:3, Gal. 4:4, 1 John 4:10. In what way do they reflect what we’ve seen in Genesis 3:9? What principle do we see in these verses, and how have you experienced this principle in your own life?

requirements, but in that case there could have been no development of character; their service would not have been voluntary, but forced. Therefore He gave them the power of choice—the power to yield or to withhold obedience.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 23. Lured by Satan’s subtle sophistry, Eve accepted Satan’s discrediting comments about God. Having doubted God’s words of truth and relying on her own reason, coupled with Satan’s false testimony, she became confused and fell into transgression.

Witnessing

EPCOT Center, an educational theme park located in Orlando, Florida, attracts millions of visitors each year. They are drawn to its futuristic inventions and cutting-edge technology. A large building, devoted entirely to the power of energy, is located on the grounds. Children (adults too!) are drawn to one area in particular—the robotic pets.

These little metal creatures, which come in all sizes, shapes, and colors, follow commands to “roll over,” “shake hands/paws,” “beg,” and so on. They nuzzle, cuddle, and follow wherever you go. Speak crossly to one and its tail stops wagging, its ears droop, and it turns slowly away from you. It often becomes necessary to remind oneself that these marvels of humankind’s imagination technology are not real and that a stern command to one of them to “stop biting” does not *truly* hurt its feelings!

No matter how clever, cute, or realistic humankind’s creations appear to be, they are completely devoid of the one quality that defines God’s human creations—the ability to choose between right and wrong. Throughout our lesson this week runs the thread of God’s great compassion in permitting us the freedom to choose between right and wrong, good and bad, sin and sinlessness. The choices we make and their resulting influence on others are of paramount importance to God.

Others will have the opportunity to glimpse the scope of God’s love and compassion through our personal example and witness. If the choices we make reflect *His* nature, our witness will have a profound and positive effect on others with whom we come in contact. If, however, our choices cause others to turn away from the Father and His plan of salvation, our witness will have the opposite effect and will strengthen Satan’s evil influence. How important it is, then, for ourselves and for those around us, that our daily witness, through action, thought, and deed, be entirely reflective of the heavenly Father and His pure love for us. During this week, what a powerful example we will be within our home, our community, and our workplace if we demonstrate to all that we have chosen to exercise our free will to follow the Father’s path to eternal life.

God's Intervention and Gospel Foreshadowed *(Gen. 3:15)*.

Almost immediately after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they recognized their fatal mistake. A chill crept over their cold souls, and they knew that something vital had died within them. Their beautiful garments of light and glory, exhibiting their natural harmony with God, disappeared (*Gen. 3:7*). As they stood naked and ashamed, gone was their customary joy over God's daily visit with them for fellowship and instruction (*vs. 8*).

How did Adam and Eve attempt to cover their nakedness? *Gen. 3:7*. **What spiritual lesson does this point to, concerning mere human effort to remedy the effects of sin and improve our moral condition?** *Isa. 64:6, Rom. 10:3*. **How was this same principle seen in Cain's offering?** *Gen. 4:3*.

The fall of Adam and Eve hadn't taken God by surprise. No sooner did they fall and no sooner had He gotten a confession from both of them (*Gen. 3:12, 13*), then He proceeded to give them the great hope found in Genesis 3:15, understood as the first gospel promise.

Read Genesis 3:15. What is it saying that offers the fallen couple hope against the serpent? *See also Rom. 16:20, Eph. 6:11, 2 Tim. 2:26, Heb. 2:14, 1 John 3:8, Rev. 20:10*.

Notice, too, how, when dealing with the serpent, the Lord asked no questions and sought for no confession (*Gen. 3:14*). He simply condemned the serpent while, in the next verse, He offered the promise of hope to Adam and Eve. This promise included the termination of sin and its originator, Satan. Thus, the glory of God's everlasting gospel was disclosed in this judgment setting, a setting in which He definitively reveals the mysteries of His will and the marvels of His grace.

How would you respond to the charge, "Why was God so harsh with Adam and Eve? After all, what did they do other than eat a piece of fruit?" What is being missed in this charge?

IV. "Ayecah?" ("Where Are You?").

God goes in search of the lost. On the very day of Adam and Eve's transgression, the Son of man came into the Garden of Eden to seek and save them. Terrified and alienated by sin, Adam and Eve would never have taken the initiative to seek God. Grace makes the first overtures, and grace completes the work of redemption.

Needless to say, God knew where Adam and Eve were, but rather than move in on them as an arresting officer, He gave them opportunity to come out, to respond to His call of love, and to confess their sin.

V. God's Intervention and Grace Fore-shadowed.

God's plan of redemption, which He began to unfold to our first parents on the day they sinned, met the crisis in full. Adam and Eve had distrusted God's promises, disbelieved His word, and rejected His authority. This brought on a fatal degradation and paralysis of moral power. No longer spiritually minded, no longer drawn to God, they were "dead in trespasses" (*Eph. 2:1, NKJV*). Christ covered the nakedness of their spiritual destitution with the covenant of His promise of redemption and clothed their bodily nakedness with the skins of animals, whose death typified His own future sacrifice that would pay the price and ensure all the provisions of the gospel.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: What type of people does the world view as heroes, and why? Who are your heroes? Why?

Verses for Group Focus: *Revelation 12:1-12.*

What is humanity's situation that human beings should need the cross of Christ?

Thought Questions:

- 1 Assuming that the woman in Revelation 12:1-12 represents God's people, what messages do you think Jesus is seeking to convey to those who read this passage?
- 2 What similarities and differences do you see between Eve and the woman in this passage?

Application Questions:

- 1 How does a person overcome Satan? (*See Rev. 12:11.*) What does "by the blood of the Lamb" (*NIV*) mean? What does "by the word of their testimony" mean (*NIV*)?
- 2 What message is God conveying to you through this passage? To the church?

Further Study: Read Joshua 24:15, Job 1:6-12, 38:4-7, Revelation 22:17, and Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 33–43.

“God permitted Satan to carry forward his work until the spirit of disaffection ripened into active revolt. It was necessary for his plans to be fully developed, that their true nature and tendency might be seen by all. . . .

“It was therefore necessary to demonstrate before the inhabitants of heaven, and of all the worlds, that God’s government is just, His law perfect. Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe. The true character of the usurper and his real object must be understood by all. He must have time to manifest himself by his wicked works. . . .

“Had he been immediately blotted out of existence, some would have served God from fear rather than from love. . . . For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, he must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, and that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might be forever placed beyond all question.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 41, 42.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell carefully and prayerfully on the last sentence in the Ellen White quote above. What is she saying? What do these words tell us about the character of God? From a human perspective, with so much suffering and anguish, wouldn’t it have been better for God simply to have destroyed Satan from the start? If not, why not?**
- 2 Compare Genesis 3:15 with Revelation 12:17. What parallels do you see? What message is in there for us, today?**
- 3 What lessons are there for us in the fact that sin could arise in such a perfect environment as heaven?**