

Paradise Lost



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Gen. 3:1–4:26.

Memory Text: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (*Genesis 3:15*).

In the 1600s, British writer John Milton wrote his famous poem, *Paradise Lost*, about the fall of our parents in Eden. Using a powerful imagination, Milton said that he sought, with this poem, to “justify the ways of God to man.” In it, Milton painstakingly described not only the garden bliss of Eden (“flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose”) but Satan’s ruse to bring Adam and Eve’s demise, all part of his bitter struggle against God (“Better to reign in hell,” Satan says, “than serve in heaven”).

Of course, we know what happened; after the serpent’s long beguiling speech to Eve, “her rash hand in the evil hour/Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate.” And the rest, as they say, is history.

Fortunately, we know not only the past but the future and God’s promise of Redemption. According to Milton’s poem, “the Son of God freely offers himself a ransom for man,” which is what the Bible says, as well (*1 Tim. 2:5, 6*), and with that offer comes the hope of eternal life for all who accept it.

This week we look not at Milton’s poem but at the original account that inspired it, the Fall as revealed in Genesis, and from it learn not only about the disaster of the Fall but the hope of Redemption.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 28.

The Serpent

Genesis 3:1 introduces a new and, considering what came before, unexpected element—the serpent. Though the things that “creepeth upon the earth” (*Gen. 1:25*) were not specifically named, a serpent surely could have been among them. It probably wasn’t even extraordinary that the serpent appeared in the Garden. However, that it was talking and that it enticed Eve toward evil, that’s a new element not explained by anything in the previous two chapters, in which everything created was “very good” (*vs. 31*).

How do these texts, taken together, help us understand more about that serpent, who he really was, and why he appeared? *Job 1:6-11, Isa. 14:12-14, Ezek. 28:14-17, Mark 1:13, Luke 10:18, John 8:44, 2 Cor. 2:11, 11:3, 1 John 3:8, Rev. 12:9, 20:2.*

If someone were to have had only the first chapters of Genesis, they would have no understanding of who this serpent was and how he appeared in God’s perfect creation. How could he speak? Why did he seek to deceive Adam and Eve? How did he get there?

What this shows is how important it is for us to use the whole Bible in order to understand truth. The appearance of the deceiving serpent implies a whole other scenario not revealed in the first two chapters of Genesis. (It does hint at it though. Where?) To understand better what was going on, people needed more revelation. In time, God provided it.

Also, one of the more unfortunate consequences of living in the modern age has been the tendency to downplay the reality of Satan, to make him simply a symbol for evil. It’s considered foolish actually to believe in a literal, personal supernatural evil being. Popular culture has in many minds made him into nothing but another Hollywood figure, along with Batman, Spiderman, and Superman. Of course, that’s always been Satan’s tactic, to hide himself. In the Garden, he hid behind the serpent; today, he has more sophisticated methods. However he does it, the results are the same: People are deceived, at the peril of their eternal lives.

Do you ever find yourself doubting Satan’s existence? If so, how can you be protected against this deception?

Key Text: *Genesis 2:17, 3:6*

Teachers Aims:

1. To reveal the serpent as a great deceiver.
2. To explain that sin has immediate results and consequences, as well as long-range ones.
3. To show the effects of sin in the lives of Adam and Eve and in the lives of their children.

Lesson Outline:

I. Deception in the Garden (*Gen. 3:1, 4*)

- A. Satan appears in the guise of a serpent in order to deceive Eve.
- B. The serpent uses deception to appeal to Eve's intellect, physical senses, and emotional nature.
- C. Adam and Eve disobey God's explicit command not to touch or to eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the Garden.

II. The Immediate Results of Sin (*Gen. 3:7, 8*)

- A. Guilt and shame cause the first couple to hide from God.
- B. Man and woman experience the immediate consequences of their disobedience.
- C. Alienation, hostility, and hard labor are some of the first results of sin.

III. Life After the Fall (*Gen. 3:15*)

- A. After the Fall, God gives Adam and Eve a glimpse of the hope of salvation through Christ.
- B. Genesis points to the conflict to come between good and evil.
- C. The experience of Cain and Abel is one of the first accounts of the catastrophic results of sin.

Summary: Through the influence of the great deceiver, Eve chooses to disobey an express command given by God. She persuades Adam to do so, as well. As a result, Adam and Eve suffer the grave and inevitable consequences of their actions.

COMMENTARY

"Take, eat." Just two small words. And through them sin came into the world. The serpent who first spoke those words to Eve has been enticing the human race with them ever since. What were the consequences to our first parents and to their children of heeding those words (and ultimately, to us)? We will look at these questions in the context of the stories of Adam and Eve and of Cain and Abel. Most important, we will look at the provisions that God made to uplift us from the Fall.

I. Wise as Gods

Eve eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because she thinks it will make her "wise" (*Gen. 3:6*). The serpent tells her that

The Fall (*Gen 3:1-6*)

How clear had been God's command to Adam? How did the tempter seek to confuse the issue with his question and obscure the exact meaning of God's stipulation? *Gen. 2:16, 17; 3:1.*

According to Eve, what additional command, not recorded in Genesis 2:17, did the holy pair understand? *Gen. 3:3.*

Having first questioned the divine stipulation, to what did the serpent now resort? *Vs. 4. (Compare John 8:44.)*

Satan started out by mixing truth and error; once the bait was taken, he resorted to full-fledged error, blatantly contradicting God's explicit command. How often things work like that even today. Someone starts out with a doctrine, a teaching, that contains both truth and error but, later, when taken to its logical conclusion, it winds up as pure error. How crucial that we always be on our guard!

Genesis 3:6 states the reasons Eve ate the fruit anyway. It appealed to her physical (food), aesthetic (pleasant to the eyes), and intellectual (makes one wise) nature—a nature that God had given her. In other words, Satan took the gifts that God gave Eve and used them against her. If this worked so well with an unfallen being in Paradise, how much more so with fallen creatures?

What do these verses say to us in the context of our fallen natures?
Rom. 13:14; Phil. 3:18, 19; 1 John 2:16.

The reality of sin, of temptation, of the lure of the flesh, is an ever-present reality in the lives of all humans. The difference, however, is not to be enslaved to physical, mental, or even intellectual passions.

Make a list of texts that you could give to a Christian who feels weighed down and discouraged over his or her spiritual or moral state. What do they say, and what hope is found in them?

its fruit will make her “like God, knowing good and evil” (*vs. 5, RSV*). The phrase “good and evil” is a totality, meaning everything. Strangely, Eve disbelieves God’s warning about what would happen if she were to consume the forbidden fruit; yet, she craves His attributes. Just as strange is the fact that she eats the fruit when both she and Adam already have a likeness to God (*Gen. 1:26, 27*). Nothing makes sense when it involves sin. Impulsively she “took” and “ate” (*Gen. 3:6*), two verbs with powerful consequences. Wanting Adam to join her quest to be a god, she gives him some of the fruit, and he eats too. Paul writes that Adam is not deceived (*1 Tim. 2:14*) when he eats the fruit. Inspiration tells us that he is not even hungry. He understands the full significance of his act of disobedience.

The serpent is partly right in what he tells Eve. Sin always has a grain of truth in it, because evil is always a distortion of something that was originally good. The serpent says that she will gain new knowledge. And she does. Both she and her husband now intimately know guilt, shame, fear, and a host of other things that they suddenly realize it would have been better never to have learned. The couple become aware that they are “naked.” That sense of nakedness is a feeling not just of embarrassment but of fear (*Gen. 3:10*). Nakedness in the Bible means far more than being unclothed. The biblical symbol suggests weakness, neediness, and helplessness (*Deut. 28:48; Job 1:21; Isa. 58:7; Rev. 3:17, 18*). Clearly, the knowledge of the effects of sin and evil are better left to Divinity than to finite human beings.

The human couple make pathetic attempts at self-concealment (*Gen. 3:7*). Out of His compassion God replaces their futile efforts with His own provision for them (*vs. 21*). And so it is today. God covers our nakedness with His glory and righteousness. The new knowledge of sin does not cover Adam and Eve with glory but leaves them exposed to shame. The human race would have to live with the fatal consequences of that knowledge until Someone else would say “Take, eat” (*Matt. 26:26*). Jesus turns those two verbs from precursors of death into a foretaste of eternal life, because He who is God chose to humble Himself unto death to save us (*Phil. 2:6-8*). Thus, the words that brought sin into the world now become the ones that offer salvation.

II. Not His Brother’s Keeper

Adam and Eve need look no further than the lives of their children to see the tragic seeds of their rebellion take root. But God promises them a Deliverer. Perhaps in those words Eve speaks after the birth of her first son, “I have gotten a man from the Lord” (*Gen. 4:1*), she expresses the longing that this would be the Promised One. Little could Eve know when she first held him in her arms that he would one day murder his brother and flee into exile, thus depriving his parents in a moment of not one but two sons.

In this story of envy and fratricide, Bible students often focus on the contrasting ways in which the two brothers worshiped God. Usually

The Fallen (*Gen. 3:7-24*)

In the fulfillment of the serpent's promise, the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened, but their dream of enlightenment turned into a nightmare. This, the first of countless subsequent satanic schemes, demonstrates that the devil's promises of precious gold are delivered only in the form of tinsel. Deprived of the glory of holiness, burdened by the sense of guilt, their physical nakedness revealed in a consciousness of inner nakedness, the first pair sought to hide from God and to fashion their own covering.

In your own experience, or what you have seen happen to others, what other "wonderful promises" have turned into hellish nightmares? What principles can we learn from these sad accounts? See also *Judges 17:6, Prov. 14:12, Mark 4:19, 1 Tim. 6:10.*

Look at the immediate results of the Fall. First, alienation arose between Adam and Eve (*Gen. 3:7*); then between them and God (*vs. 8*); nature itself suddenly turned more hostile (*vss. 16-18*); the relationship between Adam and Eve changed even more so (*vs. 16*); there was the reality of death (*vs. 19*); there was a change in how humanity related to toil (*vs. 19*); and Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden (*vss. 23, 24*). If only they could have seen in advance the consequences of their actions!

What's fascinating, too, is that the serpent told Eve that they would be like gods, knowing good and evil. He was right (*see vs. 22*). It obviously wasn't in God's will for humans to know evil; He wanted to keep them innocent and dependent upon Him, like children (*see Deut. 1:39*). God had given them only good (*tov*); everything that He created was only "good" (*tov*). The Creation in Genesis 1, which was "good" with no evil, taken together with Genesis 3:22, reaffirms the idea that God wanted only good, not evil, for humanity.

How can you preserve or (if need be) regain some innocence? What things are you doing that are, perhaps, making that goal more difficult? What changes do you need to make?

we regard Abel as someone who put his dependence on God and Cain on self. But the difference between them involves even more.

The Hebrew word for the offering of each brother is closely associated with the grain offering of Leviticus 2 and designates them as “gifts.” They apparently both brought them to express gratitude to God. But Cain had no real gratitude in his heart. Genesis 4:4, 5 declares that “the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard” (*NRSV*). The offering reflects the giver. Thus, the real problem is not with Cain’s offering but with Cain. Abel’s purity and godliness rebuke Cain’s selfishness, so Cain murders him. The taking of life is a prerogative that belongs only to God. Following the footsteps of his parents, Cain wants to be like God. He covets God’s power, not his holiness. Such would-be

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 3:1, 4:16-22, Romans 16:17-20, 2 Timothy 2:15, 1 Peter 5:8*

- 1** If Adam and Eve were perfect beings, where did the weakness that Satan exploited come from? Is God in some way at fault? Why, or why not?
- 2** One of the things we can learn from Genesis is how seriously we are to take the reality of Satan. It is quite popular among people who regard themselves as sophisticated or enlightened to ignore or downplay this literal reality. Why is it dangerous to assume that Satan is merely a symbol of evil? Conversely, is there danger in attributing too much influence to Satan to escape responsibility for our shortcomings?
- 3** Satan mixed truth and error in his efforts to persuade Eve to follow his direction. Can you think of any examples of this today? How can we ourselves avoid being deceived?
- 4** Satan promised Eve that she would know good and evil and that she would thus be godlike. Did God intend us to know evil? What do you think this meant to Adam and Eve, given that evil was an unfamiliar concept to them? Why did they find it attractive? Can you think of examples today of evil that is presented as harmless and desirable or as a form of liberation?
- 5** Cain, the first murderer, was also the progenitor of the first city builders, craftsmen, warriors, and (one could argue) civilization itself. Does this mean that human civilization is evil, or even a necessary evil? How does this relate to the suspicion—among Adventists and others—of cities as being particularly sinful?

Hope for the Fallen

After the Lord came down to the Garden and all the participants were together, He issued His judgments upon them all.

Read Genesis 3:14-19. What was pronounced upon them? What were the immediate, as well as the long-term, consequences?

Even before Adam and Eve heard about toil, pain, submission, thorns, and the judgment upon them for their transgression, God granted them words of hope and promise. Verse 15 not only offers the first glimpse of the gospel but also presents a compressed history of the conflicts between the family of the serpent and the descendants of the woman. The genealogies of Genesis develop the lines of those who chose “sonship,” either with the devil or with God. And the rest of Scripture continues to depict the struggles between God’s people and their enemies. The conflict announced in verse 15 points past the immediate actors in the drama and toward the entire conflict between good and evil as it was to be played out on the earth, a conflict that we ourselves are part of right now.

Compare Genesis 3:15 with Revelation 12:17 (*see also Rev. 12:9, 20:2*). What common elements are found in both texts? How do these verses show how the principles of the conflict first expressed in Eden will be manifested at the end of time?

Despite the blatant transgression on the part of Adam and Eve, and despite their sorry attempts to justify their actions, the Lord offered them hope that although there would be enmity between them and the serpent, the serpent’s head would be crushed; that is, it would be destroyed. Here we see the first promise of the gospel, of what Jesus would do for fallen humanity.

Keeping in mind today’s lesson, read Hebrews 2:14. What hope does this text offer to you amid the struggles you face in your part in the great controversy between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent?

gods are self-centered. Unlike the true God, they do not care for others. This is Cain's fundamental problem.

We observe his self-centeredness and arrogance in the answer he gives when God asks him, “‘Where is your brother Abel?’” (vs. 9, NRSV). Cain replies, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” (vs. 9, NRSV). The first murderer is indeed not his brother’s keeper, though he should have been. God created human beings to care for one another just as He cares for all created beings. But sin always drives wedges between people. Those wedges or barriers can be jealousy, hate, blame, or an infinite list of other problems.

It would take God coming in the flesh, our Elder Brother, to show humanity what it meant to be a true Keeper and also to right the wrongs of the first Adam. Whereas Cain took his brother’s life, Jesus

Witnessing

Fooled and manipulated by a thing of great beauty! Betrayed by something that was not what it seemed to be. Lulled into doing something utterly destructive as a result of letting the defenses down—just once! Discovering that the promise made was not the promise kept. Losing everything in an instant, all because doubt crept in where it had no place to be.

Sounds like breaking news you’d hear on TV about the latest political scam or insider trading scandal, right? Actually, this story first made headlines in Eden around six thousand years ago. Ever since the sordid details of Adam and Eve’s fall were first written down, its aspects have repeated themselves with heart-sickening regularity in the lives of earth’s inhabitants.

We can’t be too diligent, therefore, in guarding against the powers of Satan, the archenemy of Jesus Christ. Satan is creative beyond imagination, and his ability to present degenerate, immoral, and perverted activities as attractive and winsome is par excellence. He does not hesitate to use an array of the most alluring temptations to lead someone to spiritual destruction.

Satan works overtime to build new, and yet unknown, attractions designed solely to override the salvation-focused efforts of God’s servants. He knows that he is going to burn in hell, and he intends to take with him as many people as possible.

So, can anything be done about him? By the grace of God, yes! Satan is vulnerable when he comes face to face with a Spirit-filled Christian. He is unable to withstand the onslaught of the powerful plan of salvation. He falls before the presence of Christ Jesus and His true followers. Each Sabbath school member is a warrior for Christ. Each member witnesses by accepting the responsibility to lead nonbelievers away from the devil’s traps and toward the promise of eternal life.

The devil’s still going to burn; but by God’s grace, when he does, he’s just going to be a lot lonelier than he imagined.

After the Fall (*Genesis 4*)

Genesis 4 very quickly gets into the story of Cain and Abel. Though many years passed since the Fall, the Bible quickly gets into some of its catastrophic results. The enmity predicted in Genesis 3:15 and hinted at in Cain's jealousy was manifested in full force in the murder of Abel. This murder demonstrated that Cain was a follower of Satan (*see John 8:44*).

Why did God accept Abel's sacrifice but reject his brother's offerings?

Gen. 4:3-7. (Compare with Lev. 17:11, Heb. 9:22. See also Heb. 11:4.)

Notice in Genesis 4:6 and 7 how God dealt with Cain. God tells Cain to do well, to obey, and thus he shall "be accepted." He says this, though, in the context of sacrifice, which is needed because no matter how well we do, it's still not good enough to save us. We see here, then, a balance between the law and grace and faith and works. Cain, apparently, understood neither, as reflected in the sacrifice he offered, as well as in his refusal to "do well" (*see 1 John 3:12*).

How does Romans 5:17–6:6 reflect the balance between faith and works as in the story of Cain and Abel?

Cain discovered that people cannot hide anything from God (*Gen. 4:9, 10*) and that the divine Sovereign will right all wrongs. As punishment for his callous sin, the earth, which had been forced to drink innocent blood, would withhold its strength from the murderer (*vss. 11, 12*).

Meanwhile, verses 17 through 24 disclose a picture of rapid moral decline, as well as technical and cultural advances. Polygamy and murder characterize the family of Cain. Yet, the Bible writer does not attribute only evil to the descendants of Cain; their achievements are recognized. He notes that artisans, craftsmen, pastoralists, and agriculturalists descended from Cain.

The chapter concludes with a reference to Seth, who replaced Abel. Seth became the ancestor of the line of pre-Flood patriarchs who bridged the period between Adam and Noah.

Have you ever been envious? Isn't it a wretched feeling? In what ways did that envy have the potential to turn into something even worse? Why is falling before the Cross your only hope in getting victory over this emotional scourge?

gave up His so that we might partake of life eternal through Him. Whereas the first Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, Jesus, the Second Adam, resisted temptation in order to hold out to a starving world the bread of righteousness and the fruit of the Spirit. Of these provisions He bids us, “Take, eat,” and through the psalmist declares, “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (*Ps. 34:8*).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: When children are learning, they ask all kinds of “Why?” questions. Often they ask just to hear you respond. In Genesis 3:1, the “cunning” (*NKJV*), “crafty” (*NIV*), “subtle” (*KJV*) serpent asks, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” It has been said that “there are no right answers to wrong questions.” What was wrong with the serpent’s question? What was he trying to insinuate to Eve? How can we avoid asking the wrong questions about God and what He offers us?

Thought Questions:

① “Ye shall not surely die” (*Gen. 3:4*). Such a small sentence containing a devastating lie. It makes no logical sense that Eve, Adam, or humanity would listen to Satan’s accusations against God. (Read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 52–62.) Discuss what humanity has lost as a consequence of believing this lie. How do insights from the Bible and *Patriarchs and Prophets* on the origins of the evil and chaos of our world help protect us against its ultimate consequences? Whom do you know who would benefit from having you share these discoveries?

② From a beautiful, sinless paradise to the first murder, a brother killing his brother, seems such a huge failure. How did things go so wrong so fast? What does this tell you about sin? Share a personal testimony of God’s involvement in your life when He turned failure into victory. What practical steps do you take each day that help to keep you from failing again?

Application Question:

As you review the story of humanity’s separation from God, where do you find hope? Reread Genesis 3 and 4 as a Sabbath school class. Make a list of each text that contains hope. Discuss how those texts reflect the whole theme of Scripture, humankind’s debacle, and God’s infinite salvation. What makes this hope tangible, even as we wait for our Savior to return? Covenant as a class to spend time in the Scriptures each week looking for other pictures of hope. How will you make your discoveries fruitful in blessing some other person?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 52–62, 71–81; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 3 and 4.

“Satan represented to the holy pair that they would be gainers by breaking the law of God. Do we not today hear similar reasoning? Many talk of the narrowness of those who obey God’s commandments, while they themselves claim to have broader ideas and to enjoy greater liberty. What is this but an echo of the voice from Eden, ‘In the day ye eat thereof’—transgress the divine requirement—‘ye shall be as gods?’”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 55.

“The ‘seed’ is put in the singular, indicating, not that a multitude of descendants of the woman jointly shall be engaged in crushing the serpent’s head, but rather that a single individual will accomplish this. These observations clearly show that in this pronouncement is compressed the record of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, a battle that began in heaven (Rev. 12:7–9), was continued on earth, where Christ again defeated him (Heb. 2:14), and will terminate finally with Satan’s destruction at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:10). Christ did not emerge from this battle unscathed. The nail marks in His hands and feet and the scar in His side will be eternal reminders of the fierce strife in which the serpent bruised the woman’s seed (John 20:25; Zech. 13:6; EW 53).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 233.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ A lot of unanswered questions remain regarding the Genesis account of the Fall. When you meet God face to face, what are some of the questions you might ask regarding this account? Meanwhile, why is it so important to trust God now despite having many unanswered questions? See also 1 Cor. 4:5, 13:12.
- ❷ Discuss reasons we as Adventists believe that Satan is a real being of incredible deceptive power. Why is it important for us to hold to this belief?
- ❸ Sing together, as a class, a hymn or song that acknowledges the victory and promises we have in Jesus.