

Crisis *in* Eden



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:28; Rom. 8:17; Matt. 6:26; Gen. 2:15–17; 3:1–7, 10–19.*

Memory Text: “‘And 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’ ” (*Genesis 3:15, NKJV*).

After the Creation of the world, God declared everything was “very good” (*Gen. 1:31*). However, it’s obvious now that everything in the world is not “very good.” Despite various -isms and ideologies that, over the centuries, have tried to make things right, our world continues toward chaos, insecurity, violence, war, pollution, oppression, and exploitation. If the 20th century began with all sorts of optimism about the future and what humans could do to improve the future, the 21st century has certainly lost that optimism—and with good reason too.

How did we get into this situation? The answer is found in the great controversy, which, though beginning in heaven, had, unfortunately, come to earth, and fairly early on in earth’s history too.

This week we will look at how Satan was able to exploit human freedom and, thus, start the devastation that we all experience even today. The story of the Fall remains a powerful reminder that our only safety as human beings exists not only in believing what God tells us but, more important, in *obeying* what He tells us, as well.

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 9.*

Three Blessings

In the context of Creation, the phrase “and God saw that it was good” appears seven times in Genesis 1: light (*Gen. 1:4*); dry land and sea (*Gen. 1:10*); plants yielding seed and fruit trees bearing fruit (*Gen. 1:12*); sun, moon, and stars (*Gen. 1:16*); seas swarming with fish and skies filled with birds (*Gen. 1:21*); and beasts, cattle, and creeping things (*Gen. 1:25*). Finally, when God’s work is finished, we get the sentence: “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (*Gen. 1:31, NKJV*).

As well as declaring everything He made “very good,” God went a step further and “blessed” His creation in three specific areas.

First, He blessed the sea creatures and the birds. He encouraged them to “‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth’” (*Gen. 1:22, NKJV*). Second, when Adam and Eve were created, God blessed them, too, with similar encouragement: “‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth’” (*Gen. 1:28, NKJV*).

Read Genesis 1:22, 28. Both blessings begin in the same way, but what extra is added for Adam and Eve?

Humans share with fish and birds the divine encouragement to be fruitful and multiply, but the difference comes when Adam and Eve are given the responsibility to care for the earth and all its creatures. Here we see a glimpse of the significance of being created in God’s image. The Creator invited our first parents to be coregents with Him to uphold and care for the created realm (*see Rom. 8:17; Heb. 1:2, 3*).

The third blessing given in the Creation story is the seventh-day Sabbath (*Gen. 2:3*). Here is further confirmation that people are far more than just animals; they were created to enjoy fellowship with the Creator in ways none of the other creatures can. Here we see unmistakable evidence of the special place humans have been given in the Creation. Jesus underscored this point: “‘Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?’” (*Matt. 6:26, NKJV*). Without devaluing other creatures, He made it clear that people are unique and special on earth.

In what ways does the biblical Creation account give a dignity to humanity that an alternative view of origins, such as evolution, can’t? In light of the biblical account of human origins, ask yourself: Are you treating everyone as they deserve to be treated?

The Test at the Tree

God created everything by a series of separations with clearly defined boundaries: light and darkness, waters above and waters below, land and sea, night and day, creatures according to their kind, a day separated from the others, a woman separated from a man, and a tree set apart from the others.

Read Genesis 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18, 21, 24, 25. Why is it important that clearly defined boundaries are outlined even before the creation of human beings?

As well as God forming man, beast, and bird from the ground (*Gen. 2:7, 19*), He also caused beautiful trees with delicious fruit to “spring up” from the ground (*Gen. 2:8, 9, ESV*). God also chose a special piece of land in which He planted a garden. We can only try to imagine its beauty; the wonderful gardens we see today surely are a bare reflection of what Eden must have been like. In the middle of this specially planted garden in Eden (separated out from the rest of the world) there were two unique trees—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Fruit from the second tree was not to be eaten, or there would be severe consequences (*Gen. 2:17*).

Read Genesis 2:15–17. How is the idea of separation revealed here, in this test of Adam and Eve’s obedience to God?

The division is clear and concrete: eat from all the other trees, but not from this distinct one, which was separate from the others. There was nothing ambiguous about God’s words. Adam and Eve were created as moral beings, and morality cannot exist without freedom. Here was a test to see what they would do with that freedom. “The tree of knowledge had been made a test of their obedience and their love to God. The Lord had seen fit to lay upon them but one prohibition as to the use of all that was in the garden; but if they should disregard His will in this particular, they would incur the guilt of transgression.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 53.

What are some things in your life that you definitely need to separate yourself from?

The Fall: Part One

Described as more “crafty” than any other animal (*Gen. 3:1, NIV*), the snake became a powerful symbol throughout Bible history. Moses lifted up a bronze serpent on a pole to stop people from dying in a plague of deadly serpents during the Exodus (*Num. 21:5–9*). The same bronze serpent became an object of idolatry and of occult practice and was destroyed by King Hezekiah about seven hundred years later (*2 Kings 18:4*). In the book of Revelation, the “serpent of old” is clearly identified as “the devil, or Satan” (*Rev. 12:9, NIV*).

Read Genesis 3:1–5. What tactic did Satan use in his attempt to deceive Eve?

The first words uttered by the snake were words of cynicism and doubt: “ ‘Did God really say?’ ” (*Gen. 3:1, NIV*). Instead of Eve wondering why a snake was talking to her, she was immediately drawn into the faith-destroying taunts. When Satan asked, “ ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden?”’ ” (*Gen. 3:1, NIV*), the implication (based on the original language) was that God forbade them to eat from *all the trees*, when, in fact, that wasn’t what God had forbidden them to do.

God’s character is being questioned here. This is a direct attack on Him. The serpent must have confused Eve, because her reply adds a detail that, according to the biblical record, God did not give: “ ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, *nor shall you touch it*, lest you die.’ ” ” (*Gen. 3:2, 3, NKJV; italics added; compare Gen. 2:17*). The part about not touching it, she added, perhaps in her own confusion.

Satan’s success up to this point made him bold; so, he then directly challenged God’s authority: “ ‘You will not surely die’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, NKJV*). The fact that he, in the tree, was touching the fruit and remained alive made his statements believable. He then threw in the final thought: “ ‘God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’ ” (*Gen. 3:5, NKJV*). The tempter made it appear that God was not only dishonest but also withholding something good from them.

Satan mixed truth with error. What are some things people believe that are a mixture of truth and error? Why is that always a deadly mix, especially in terms of theology?

The Fall: Part Two

When God decided to create Adam and Eve, He stated that they would be made in God's image and according to His likeness (*Gen. 1:26*). The bait on the tempter's "hook" was that if they ate the forbidden fruit, they would become "like God." The reality is that they already were like God. They had been created in His image, but the sad fact is that in the heat of temptation, they lost sight of this sacred truth.

Additionally, God was the original provider of their food, but part of the rebellion involved Adam and Eve choosing something to eat outside of God-given boundaries. It would be like being invited to someone's home for a meal and, instead of eating from their table, you go to their cupboard or refrigerator and help yourself to something that attracts you. Not only would that be an insult to your hosts, but it would also show that you do not value your relationship with them.

Read Genesis 3:4–7. The tempter had assured Eve that by eating the fruit her eyes would be opened. What did Adam and Eve see when their eyes *were* opened, and what did that new sight symbolize?

Eve became overwhelmed by her senses (*Gen. 3:6*). The tree was beautiful, and as she sank her teeth into a piece of the fruit, Eve imagined that she entered into a higher state of existence. When she shared her experience with Adam, yes, their eyes were opened (*Gen. 3:7*), but they were embarrassed by what they saw.

One major issue here is the rejection of God as the Provider of every good thing and choosing instead a man-made solution to human need (in this case, the desire to eat). God had previously assured Adam and Eve of their food and had provided the menu. Their eating from the forbidden tree was a move outside of that provision and showed a lack of trust that was not warranted, especially given their unique circumstances.

What kind of "forbidden fruit" (which often appears so tempting, so pleasing, and so full of promise) is made available to us today? How can we learn not to make the same kind of error when presented with such a powerful deception?

The Consequences

We may be well into eternity before we understand fully how much damage was caused by that one incident at the tree. All that God did during Creation week started to unravel. Relationships that God established were fractured: between people and God (they hid from Him), between each other (Adam blamed Eve for his trouble), and between humans and the environment (the serpent became an enemy; the ground would now produce thorns and thistles and would only provide food after much human labor).

Read Genesis 3:10–19. What did Adam’s and Eve’s excuses reveal about how damaged they had already become?

Notice how God dealt with these excuses. Before God could redeem them, Adam and Eve had to admit responsibility for what they had done; so God carefully explained to them the results of their individual actions. First, though, the serpent was cursed and would eat dust, be loathed by the woman, and have its head bruised (*Gen. 3:14, 15*).

Then the Lord told Eve that she was to experience great pain in childbirth (*Gen. 3:16*). Adam, meanwhile, was to toil and sweat for food rather than live as a king (*Gen. 3:17–19*).

Adam and Eve were now faced with the choice of either continuing in rebellion or returning to God. Accepting responsibility for their wrong was their first step in returning to God, but even that acknowledgment was not enough to solve the problem caused humanity by sin.

There had to be another way to ensure the future of the human race. So, God provided an animal sacrifice to point to a Savior (*Gen. 3:21*). It was a creature, a snake, that had introduced them to sin, loss, and fractured relationships; it would be a creature, a lamb, that would point forward to the Deliverer, who would ensure restoration, reconciliation, and a future (*see Gen. 3:15*). However, rather than being regents ruling over the earth, Adam and Eve were now dependent on the earth and each other as never before. “Among the lower creatures Adam had stood as king, and so long as he remained loyal to God, all nature acknowledged his rule; but when he transgressed, this dominion was forfeited.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 26.

Immediately after the Fall, we were given hope of salvation. See Genesis 3:15. How can you make that hope your own? How can you learn to rejoice in it, knowing that it applies to you, regardless of your past choices?

Further Thought: Though we are a long way away from Eden, from the original Creation, there's still so much in creation that speaks to us of the goodness of God. Look around: we can see not only incredible beauty but incredible design as well, all of which testifies to our Creator's love. For instance, think about such things as apples, oranges, tangerines, strawberries, blueberries, avocados, tomatoes, lemons, limes, watermelons, almonds, pecans, pears, plums, carrots, peas, bananas, pineapples, pomegranates, broccoli, kale, brussels sprouts, onions, raspberries, cherries, celery, papaya, eggplant, rhubarb, spinach, melons, and on and on. Is it just by chance that all these are so tasty (well, some people don't like brussels sprouts!), so good for us, and just happen to grow out of the ground bearing their own seed? Of course not. Not everyone has access to these bounties, however, and there are floods and famines and pestilences, and people do go hungry. This is, of course, testimony to how greatly damaged our world has become because of sin. But if we can, for a moment, get "behind" the damage in creation and just view the creation itself—wow! What a powerful testimony to God's love. We just have to remember: the hope is not in the creation itself but only in the Creator Himself.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As human beings, we were never meant to die. Death is an aberration, something that humans should have never known or experienced. Hence, the universal abhorrence of death that we all feel is, no doubt, a vestige of what we have taken with us from Eden. Dwell on all the Bible promises of eternal life that we have been given. How can they help us to deal with the terrible trauma of death now?
- 2 What parts of the created world talk to you in a powerful way about the reality of God and God's love for us?
- 3 Read again in Genesis 3 about how Adam and Eve started justifying their sin. Why is that so easy to do? What are ways that we seek to do the same? That is, how often do we claim heredity, environment, or other people as being the causes of our mistakes? How can we get out of this dangerous mind-set and own up to our responsibility for our actions?

A Dream Comes True: Part 1

Ever since she was a little girl, Samantha loved to listen to the exciting stories about the *Luzeiro* mission boat. Fascinated, she imagined what it might be like to work as a missionary along the Amazon, just like Leo and Jessie Halliwell. Little did she know that one day her dream would come true.

After graduating from high school, Samantha was accepted into the nursing program at the State University of West Paraná in southern Brazil. While there, she faced a challenge because some classes were held on Sabbath. Although she was able to take the classes on alternate days, it meant staying in school an extra year. In the end, however, things worked out for the best.

At the end of her university experience, Samantha had many job possibilities, but her heart was in mission. When an invitation came offering the opportunity to be a volunteer missionary for a year in the Amazon region of northern Brazil, Samantha seriously considered the possibility.

“Jesus,” she prayed, “if You want me to go, please open all the doors for me. I don’t know what to do, but if You want me to go to the Amazon, I will go.”

After her prayer, doors began opening quickly. “I was given money for the tickets, and people gave me everything I needed. My heart’s desire grew stronger, and I knew that Jesus had a plan for me.”

Soon, Samantha was in the heart of the Amazon region, training with *Salva Vidas*, a supportive Adventist Mission organization that teaches volunteers to work in the jungles using health evangelism and giving Bible studies. After three months, the project coordinator approached Samantha: “I have a place for you, and that place is in a small village, and you will be a nurse on the *Luzeiro*.”

Samantha could hardly believe the news. “I was *so* happy!” she recalls. “Here I can use my nursing skills all the time. The people are very simple, with simple problems, and I can help them. This is exactly what I want to do—to educate people who don’t have any knowledge about health. I get to help, and I’m so happy!”

As a *Luzeiro* nurse, Samantha now works with ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) and is based in a village where she operates a small clinic. Every week she goes on the *Luzeiro XXVI* visiting many villages along the Amazon, and providing the only health care available to thousands of people.

Whether on the *Luzeiro* or in the village clinic, Samantha often faces emergencies where she knows only God can help. Many times she has seen His direct intervention in saving lives.

Early one evening, Samantha watched as a small boat headed to shore. As soon as the boat arrived, a man jumped out, holding his hand in bloodied bandages.

Quickly, Samantha unwrapped the cloth, finding mangled fingers and a mutilated palm.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.