

The Fall



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 3; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:7–9; John 8:44; Rom. 16:20; Heb. 2:14; 1 Tim. 2:14, 15.*

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*).

Amid all that God had given our first parents in Eden also came a warning: “ ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’ ” (*Gen. 2:16, 17, NKJV*). This warning against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil shows us that, though they were to know good, they were not to know evil.

We certainly can understand why, can't we?

And, too, the threat of death attached to the warning about disobedience (*Gen. 2:17*) would be fulfilled: they would die (*Gen. 3:19*). Not only forbidden to eat from the tree, they also were driven from the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 3:24*), and thus had no access to what could have given them eternal life as sinners (*Gen. 3:22*).

However, amid this tragedy comes hope, which is found in *Genesis 3:15*, called the protoevangelium, or “the first gospel promise.” Yes, this verse presents the first gospel promise found in the Bible, the first time humans are told that, despite the Fall, God has made a way of escape for us all.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 9.

The Serpent

Read Genesis 3:1, 2 Corinthians 11:3, and Revelation 12:7–9. Who is the serpent, and how does he deceive Eve?

The text begins with “the serpent.” The syntax of the phrase suggests emphasis: the word “serpent” is the first word of the sentence. Also, “the serpent” has the definite article, indicating that this is a well-known figure, as if the reader already should know who he is. The reality of this being is, thus, affirmed from the first word of the chapter.

Of course, the Scriptures identify the serpent as the enemy of God (*Isa. 27:1*) and explicitly call him “the Devil and Satan” (*Rev. 12:9, NKJV*). Likewise, in the ancient Near East, the serpent personified the power of evil.

“In order to accomplish his work unperceived, Satan chose to employ as his medium the serpent—a disguise well adapted for his purpose of deception. The serpent was then one of the wisest and most beautiful creatures on the earth. It had wings, and while flying through the air presented an appearance of dazzling brightness, having the color and brilliancy of burnished gold.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 53.

When talking about the devil, in whatever form he appears, the Bible is not using mere metaphor. In Scripture Satan is depicted as a literal being and not just some rhetorical symbol or an abstract principle to depict evil or humanity’s dark side.

The serpent does not present himself as an enemy of God. On the contrary, the serpent refers to God’s words, which he repeats and seems to support. That is, right from the start, we can see that Satan likes to quote God and, as shall later be seen, even quotes the Word of God itself (*Matt. 4:6*).

Note also that the serpent does not argue immediately with the woman, but he asks a question that implies that he believes in what the Lord has said to them. After all, he asked: “ ‘Has God indeed said . . . ?’ ” (*Gen. 3:1, NKJV*). Thus, even from the start, we can see just how cunning and deceitful this being was. And, as we will see, it worked too.

If Satan was able to deceive a sinless Eve in Eden, how much more vulnerable are we? What is our best defense against his deceptions?

The Forbidden Fruit

Read Genesis 2:16, 17 and Genesis 3:1–6 (see also John 8:44). Compare the words of God’s commandment to Adam with the serpent’s words to the woman. What are the differences between the speeches, and what is the meaning of these differences?

Note the parallels between God’s conversation with Adam (*Gen. 2:16, 17*) and Eve’s conversation with the serpent. It is as if the serpent has now replaced God and knows even better than He does. At first, he merely asked a question, implying that the woman had, perhaps, misunderstood God. But then Satan openly questioned God’s intentions and even contradicted Him.

Satan’s attack concerns two issues, death and the knowledge of good and evil. While God clearly and emphatically stated that their death would be certain (*Gen. 2:17*), Satan said that, on the contrary, they wouldn’t die, stating that humans were immortal (*Gen. 3:4*). While God forbade Adam to eat the fruit (*Gen. 2:17*), Satan encouraged them to eat the fruit because by eating of it they would be like God (*Gen. 3:5*).

Satan’s two arguments, immortality and being like God, convinced Eve to eat the fruit. It is troubling that as soon as the woman decided to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit, she behaved as if God were no longer present and had been replaced by herself. The biblical text alludes to this shift of personality. Eve uses God’s language: Eve’s evaluation of the forbidden fruit, “saw that . . . was good” (*Gen. 3:6*), reminds us of God’s evaluation of His creation, “saw . . . that it was good” (*Gen. 1:4, etc.*).

These two temptations, those of being immortal and of being like God, are at the root of the idea of immortality in ancient Egyptian and Greek religions. The desire for immortality, which they believed was a divine attribute, obliged these people to seek divine status, as well, in order (they hoped) to acquire immortality. Surreptitiously, this way of thinking infiltrated Jewish-Christian cultures and has given birth to the belief in the immortality of the soul, which exists even today in many churches.

Think of all the beliefs out there today that teach there’s something inherently immortal in all of us. How does our understanding of human nature and the state of the dead provide us such powerful protection against this dangerous deception?

Hiding Before God

Read Genesis 3:7–13. Why did Adam and Eve feel the need to hide before God? Why did God ask the question “Where are you?” How did Adam and Eve seek to justify their behavior?

After they sinned, Adam and Eve felt naked because they lost their garments of glory, which reflected God’s presence (see Ps. 8:5, compare with Ps. 104:1, 2). The image of God had been affected by sin. The verb “make” in the phrase they “made themselves coverings” (Gen. 3:7, NKJV) was so far applied only to God the Creator (Gen. 1:7, 16, 25, etc.). It is as if they replaced the Creator as they attempted to cover their sin, an act that Paul denounces as righteousness by works (Gal. 2:16).

When God approaches, He asks them the rhetorical question “‘Where are you?’ ” (Gen. 3:9, NKJV), the same kind of question that God will ask Cain (Gen. 4:9). Of course, God knew the answers to the questions. His questions were asked for the benefit of the guilty, to help them realize what they have done and yet, at the same time, to lead them to repentance and salvation. From the moment humans sinned, the Lord was working for their salvation and redemption.

In fact, the whole scenario reflects the idea of the investigative judgment, which begins with the judge, who interrogates the culprit (Gen. 3:9) in order to prepare him for the sentence (Gen. 3:14–19). But He does it also to prompt repentance, which will ultimately lead to salvation (Gen. 3:15). This is a motif seen all through the Bible.

At first, as is so common with sinners, Adam and Eve both try to evade the charge, seeking to blame others. To God’s question Adam responds that it was the woman whom God had given to him (Gen. 3:12)—she led him to do it. It was her fault (and, implied, it was God’s, as well), not his.

Eve responds that it was the serpent who deceived her. The Hebrew verb *nasha*, “deceive,” (in Gen. 3:13, NKJV) means to give people false hopes and makes them believe that they are doing the right thing (2 Kings 19:10, Isa. 37:10, Jer. 49:16).

Adam blames the woman, saying that she gave him the fruit (some truth to this), and Eve blames the serpent, saying he deceived her (some truth to this, too). But in the end, they both were guilty.

Trying to blame someone else for what they have done? Why is it so easy for us to fall into the same trap?

The Fate of the Serpent

“ ‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel’ ” (*Gen. 3:15, NIV*).

What did the Lord say to the serpent here, and what hope is implied in these verses?

God begins His judgment with the serpent because he is the one who initiated the whole drama. The serpent, too, is the only being who is cursed in this narrative.

We reach here a kind of “reversal” of Creation. While Creation led to life, the appreciation of good, and blessings, judgment leads to death, evil, and curses—but also to the hope and promise of salvation. Attached to the somber picture of the crushed serpent eating the dust (*Gen. 3:14*) shines the hope of the salvation of humankind, which appears in the form of a prophecy. Even before the condemnations of Adam and Eve, which will follow, the Lord gives them the hope of redemption (*Gen. 3:15*). Yes, they have sinned; yes, they will suffer because of their sin; and, yes, they will die, too, because of the sins. But despite all that, there is the ultimate hope, the hope of salvation.

Compare Genesis 3:15 with Romans 16:20, Hebrews 2:14, and Revelation 12:17. How is the plan of salvation, as well as the great controversy, revealed in these texts?

Notice the parallels between Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12:17: the dragon (serpent), enraged (enmity); the seed (offspring); and the woman in Eden and the woman in Revelation 12:17. The battle (the great controversy) that moved to Eden, with the Fall, will continue to the end of time. However, the promise of Satan’s defeat already was given in Eden, in that his head will be crushed, a theme more explicitly revealed in Revelation, which depicts his final demise (*Rev. 20:10*). That is, right from the start, humanity was given hope that there will be a way out of the terrible mess that came from the knowledge of evil, a hope that we all can share in right now.

Why is it so comforting to see that in Eden itself, where sin and evil on earth began, the Lord started to reveal the plan of salvation?

Human Destiny

Read Genesis 3:15–24. As a result of the Fall, what happened to Adam and Eve?

While God’s judgment of the serpent is explicitly identified as a curse (*Gen. 3:14*), God’s judgment of the woman and of the man is not. The only time the word “curse” is used again is when it is applied to the “ground” (*Gen. 3:17*). That is, God had other plans for the man and the woman, as opposed to the serpent. They were offered a hope not offered to him.

Because the woman’s sin is due to her association with the serpent, the verse describing God’s judgment of the woman was related to the judgment of the serpent. Not only does Genesis 3:16 immediately follow Genesis 3:15, but the parallels between the two prophecies also clearly indicate that the prophecy concerning the woman in Genesis 3:16 has to be read in connection to the Messianic prophecy in Genesis 3:15. God’s judgment of the woman, including childbearing, should therefore be understood in the positive perspective of salvation (*compare with 1 Tim. 2:14, 15*).

Because the man’s sin is due to listening to the woman instead of listening to God, the ground from which man has been taken is cursed (*Gen. 3:17*). As a result, man will have to work hard (*Gen. 3:17–19*), and he will then “return” to the ground where he comes from (*Gen. 3:19*), something that never should have happened and that was never part of God’s original plan.

It is significant that against this hopeless prospect of death Adam turns, then, to the woman, where he sees the hope of life through her giving birth (*Gen. 3:20*). That is, even amid the sentence of death, he sees the hope of life.

As any loving parent, God had wanted only good for them, not evil. But now that they knew evil, God was going to do all that He could to save them from it. Thus, even amid these judgments, all hope was not lost for our first parents, despite their open and blatant disobedience to God; even though they—living truly in paradise—had absolutely no reason to doubt God, to doubt God’s words, or to doubt His love for them.

Though we tend to think of “knowledge” in and of itself as good, why is that not always the case? What are some things that we are better off not knowing?

Further Thought: Consider the connection between “the tree of life” and “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This relation already is suggested through the fact that they are both located “in the midst of the Garden” (*Gen. 2:9*). But there is more between the two trees than just a geographical relation. It is because humans have taken the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because they disobeyed God, that they lost access to the tree of life and could not live forever, at least in this condition. This connection underlies a profound principle. Moral and spiritual choices have an impact on biological life, as Solomon instructed his son: “Do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you” (*Prov. 3:1, 2, NKJV*). This connection reappears in the future heavenly Jerusalem, where only the tree of life is present “in the middle of its street” (*Rev. 22:2, NKJV*).

“When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal. The holy pair were to have no interest independent of each other; and yet each had an individuality in thinking and acting. But after Eve’s sin, as she was first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse. In many cases the curse has made the lot of woman very grievous and her life a burden. The superiority which God has given man he has abused in many respects by exercising arbitrary power. Infinite wisdom devised the plan of redemption, which places the race on a second probation by giving them another trial.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 484.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** God confronted Adam in Eden and asked him questions in order not only to establish his guilt but also to lead him to repentance. This motif reappears with Cain (*Gen. 4:9, 10*), the Flood (*Gen. 6:5–8*), the Tower of Babel (*Gen. 11:5*), and Sodom and Gomorrah (*Gen. 18:21*). How is the idea of an investigative judgment revealed in these incidents?
- 2** Why did Eve think that eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would give her wisdom? How could we avoid, in our context, making a similar mistake; that is, openly defying God’s Word in hope of something “better” than what God has offered us?

Forgiven in Prison: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The volunteers chose slips of paper with the names of inmates who had signed up for Bible studies at a prison in Spain. But nobody took one slip of paper. “Doesn’t anyone want to meet with this man?” asked Dante Marvin Herrmann, a 36-year-old theology student at Sagunto Adventist College.

“He’s too difficult to work with,” said one volunteer.

“He always mocks God,” said another.

Dante prayed and sensed a still, small Voice say, “Go visit Matías.”

A prison guard brought Matías, a young, clean-shaven man, to Dante in an empty dining hall of the prison’s maximum-security block. Unlike the serial killers and other hardened convicts locked up in the block, Matías didn’t have any visible tattoos or an angry scowl on his face.

“You don’t look like the other prisoners,” Dante said.

Matías laughed. “You don’t know who I am,” he said.

“I don’t really care who you are or what you did,” Dante said. “We all have made mistakes in our lives, and we can’t change the past.”

Matías took a close look at Dante. He saw blue tattoos covering his arms and stretched-out holes in his earlobes left by body piercing.

“Are you from the Seventh-day Adventist Church?” Matías asked. “You don’t look like the other Adventists.”

“God can change every one of us,” Dante replied. He told how he had sold his soul to the devil at 17, joined a street gang, and worked as a drug dealer before finding the love of God in the Bible and becoming an Adventist. When he finished, the hour allotted for Bible study was up.

“Can you visit me again, please?” the inmate asked. “I want to learn about this unknown God whom you spoke about. I’ve never heard about a loving God. I’ve only heard about an angry, condemning God.”

Dante promised to return the next Sabbath. Back at the college, Dante mentioned Matías to a teacher. “Do you know who he is?” the teacher asked. When Dante shook his head, the teacher suggested he do an online news search. The online search prompted Dante to pray. “God, this is very serious,” he said.

“Why did you send me to him?” He sensed a still, small Voice reply, “Dante, I have grace for you. I have forgiven you. I can forgive him too.”



This mission story, which concludes next week, illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan, “To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups.” Read more: IWillGo2020.org. The inmate’s name has been changed.

Key Text: *Genesis 3:15*

Study Focus: *Genesis 3; Rev. 12:7–9; Rom. 16:20; Heb. 2:14; 1 Tim. 2:14, 15.*

Part I: Overview

Introduction: In the first two chapters of the Bible, we learn that at each stage of Creation, six times God evaluates His work as “good” (*Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25*). At the end of the Creation week during His seventh assessment, God evaluates His work as “very good” (*Gen. 1:31*). Also, the first humans are described as ‘*arom*, “naked,” “innocent” (*Gen. 2:25*), not yet seduced by the serpent, who is characterized as ‘*arom*, “cunning” (*Gen. 3:1, NKJV*). Humans disobeyed God’s first commandment not to eat from the tree of knowledge (*Gen. 2:17*), and as a result, evil and death arose. In consequence, the first couple had to leave the Garden of Eden. It is in this context of hopelessness that the first prophecy of hope, the first gospel, is sounded. Significantly, the first Messianic prophecy (*Gen. 3:14, 15*) is located exactly in the center of the structure of the chapter (ABCDC₁B₁A₁):

- A. *Gen. 3:1–5*. Serpent-Eve, God absent: Temptation to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil
- B. *Gen. 3:6–8*. Adam-Eve: Human clothing
- C. *Gen. 3:9–13*. God-Adam-Eve: Investigative judgment
- D. *Gen. 3:14, 15*. God-Serpent: Messianic prophecy**
- C₁. *Gen. 3:16–19*. God-Eve-Adam: Suffering
- B₁. *Gen. 3:20, 21*. Adam-Eve: Divine clothing
- A₁. *Gen. 3:22–24*. God alone: Prohibition to eat from the tree of life

The structure of the chapter highlights two main themes: the theme of temptation and the theme of salvation.

Part II: Commentary

The Temptation of Eve

The first section of this text (*Gen. 3:1–13*) tells the story of the temptation and analyzes its mechanism. Ironically, the temptation begins with a theological conversation, or, more precisely, an exegetical discussion about the meaning of the Word of God: “ ‘Has God indeed said . . . ? ’ ” (*Gen. 3:1, NKJV*). The serpent initiates the discussion with a question to the woman,

who immediately responds. The dialogue between the serpent and the woman unfolds in two rounds. Let's note the strategy of the serpent and the woman's mistake.

Round 1 (Gen. 3:1–3).

The strategy of the serpent (read Gen. 3:1). What pedagogical method does the serpent use to approach the woman? Why does the serpent seem to agree with God? How does the serpent comment on the Word of God? What makes his comment dangerous and deceitful?

The mistake of the woman (read Gen. 3:2, 3). Why is the woman near the serpent? Why does she immediately respond to the serpent? Why is her response lengthy in comparison to the serpent's question?

Round 2 (Gen. 3:4–6).

The strategy of the serpent (read Gen. 3:4, 5). What are the two issues that the serpent addresses in his response to the woman? How are these two issues related to each other? What do these two arguments say about the woman's concern?

The mistake of the woman (read Gen. 3:6). What elements of the woman's response indicate the serpent's influence on her? Why did Adam not discuss with Eve her decision to eat the fruit?

As soon as Eve hears the serpent's last words, " 'you will be like God' " (*Gen. 3:5, NKJV*), she wants to be like God. The words that describe the first move of her temptation, "the woman saw that . . . was good," are an exact repetition of God's regular evaluation of His creation: "and God saw that . . . it was good." This parallel suggests, perhaps, that the woman's intention is to take the place of the Creator, as if she had herself created the fruit and owned it.

The Salvation of Humanity

The consequence of this disobedience had already been spelled out by God: it was death (*Gen. 2:17*). This perspective is immediately confirmed in the following texts that speak of a disrupted nature (*Gen. 3:17, 18*) and of the first human violence and the first death of a human (*Gen. 4:8*).

The first Messianic prophecy stands out then against the background of the first human experience of hopelessness. The prophecy has the form of a beautiful poem. The thematic structure and the word rhythm of this text suggest two strophes, or rhythmic systems composed of two or more lines repeated as a unit. After an introductory statement of three words, the first strophe (*Gen. 3:14*) progresses in six lines with an irregular word rhythm.

After an introduction of one word, the second strophe (*Gen. 3:15*) progresses in four lines with a regular word rhythm.

There is a strong contrast between the two strophes. The first strophe is negative and contains a message of hopelessness, which involves the serpent. The second strophe is positive and contains a message of hope, which involves the Messiah. In fact, the second strophe is the only positive message of the chapter—a window of light in the dark. Against the background of hopelessness, the fall of humanity and the cosmic perspective of death and evil, this biblical text announces the future salvation of the world in prophetic terms. According to this text, the redemption of humanity necessarily implies a fight with the serpent, who will oppose the seed of the woman; that is, a “man” to be born in the future.

Now, what is meant by the word *seed*? This word should neither be understood in a collective sense, referring to humanity or a people (Israel, for instance), nor in a particular sense, meaning a specific human individual. It is interesting to note that in the next line the “seed” has been replaced by the personal pronoun “he” (in Hebrew, *hu*’), which is the actual subject of the verb “bruise” (*shuf*). Thus, “he” receives a special emphasis in the structure of the paragraph and the syntax of the phrase: it appears as the exact center of the strophe at the very moment when the poetic rhythm shifts from four beats to three.

This rhythmic shift indicates that this pronoun is the hinge of the passage. Moreover, “he” is the first word in the phrase, thus giving it emphasis. Out of the 103 passages in which the Hebrew pronoun *hu*’, “he,” is translated in the Septuagint, Genesis 3:15 is the only occurrence in which it does not agree with its immediate antecedent.

Indeed, the Greek form of the pronoun (*autos*) refers neither to the woman (it is not feminine), nor to the seed (it is not gender neutral). Rather, *autos* refers instead to a male individual. This syntactical irregularity shows us that the translators had in mind a specific person, a man in real history, the Messiah. This Messianic interpretation of Genesis 3:15 is even attested by the Hebrew Scriptures. One of the most eloquent testimonies of this view is found in Psalm 110, where the words of Genesis 3:15 reappear and are directly applied to the Davidic Messiah. The words of the psalm, “ ‘Till I make Your enemies’ ” (*Ps. 110:1, NKJV*), are indeed a verbal repetition of the first words of the Genesis promise “I will put enmity.”

These are the only two texts in the Bible where this association of words is used. Moreover, it also is connected to the imagery of the enemy crawling under the foot as an expression of that same idea of victory (*Ps. 110:1*). Also, the familiar theme of “crushing the head” in Genesis 3:15 reappears here and is repeated twice (*Ps. 110:6, 7*).

These numerous parallels between the two passages suggest that the author of Psalm 110 referred to the prophetic promise of Genesis 3:15 and interpreted it in a “Messianic” sense. The one who was portrayed in Genesis 3:15 as crushing the serpent is now explicitly identified as the future Davidic Messiah. In Psalm 110, the work of the Messiah goes even beyond the agenda of Genesis 3:15. The Messiah not only crushes the enemy as the seed of Genesis 3:15, but He also is now called to sit on the right hand of God to share His Kingship and rule with Him (*Ps. 110:1, 2*). The Messiah also judges and executes kings and many nations (*Ps. 110:5, 6*), having God on His right side. He even receives a cultic function: He is a priest serving at the head of a cortege of priests, and this priesthood is extended toward eternity (*Ps. 110:4*). Moreover, the interplay between the names of the Messiah, called *Adoni*, and the Lord, called *Adonai*, even suggests an intention to identify the Messiah with the Lord Himself. This Messiah is Jesus Christ on the heavenly throne (*Matt. 22:44*).

Discussion and Thought Questions: Read Romans 5:8 and Revelation 12:7–9. Why is Jesus fulfilling this prophecy? How does this Messianic prophecy inform the Messianic ministry of Jesus Christ? Why is it important that God is the one who must fight against the serpent and die in the process?

Part III: Life Application

As he walked in the woods, a young man heard a bird singing. He turned and, to his surprise, saw a little bird that had fallen from a tree. With care and great empathy, the young man took the fragile little creature in his hand and tenderly put the little bird in a pile of warm animal dung nearby. However, the little bird kept singing. A fox, who heard the bird singing, caught it and devoured it. There are three lessons to this fable. First lesson: when someone puts you in the dung, this act does not mean that he intends evil to you. Second lesson: when someone takes you out of the dung, this act does not mean that he intends good to you. Third lesson: when you are in the dung, why sing?

Discussion and Thought Questions: How do these three lessons apply to the problem of evil in the world? How do they help you cope with evil in the world and in your life?

Discuss the first lesson (*read Gen. 3:17–19*). Why is there evil and death? Are evil and death normal conditions of the world? Although

