

Chapter 02

Rebellion

Understanding / For your preparation as a leader / Page 28 - 37
Discussion / To use with your group / Page 40 - 47

UNDERSTANDING

What do I need to know about this passage?

The Temptation

Now we come to the next major point Genesis reveals about the human family: The Fall.

One of the most famous passages in all of Scripture is the temptation of Adam and Eve. At first glance, it might appear to be a simple story about a serpent (the devil) trying to get them to eat fruit from a forbidden tree.¹ But if we rise above a children's-book-view of this story and read it with a more educated adult mind, we will see there's a lot more going on.

Consider the strategy of the devil in his very first words to Eve: "Did God say, 'You shall not

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eat of any trees of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1). Think about it. Why does the devil ask that question? Notice how the tone of the question is a bit negative, painting a picture of God as a restrictive God, limiting her freedom, not letting her go to any trees of the garden. But that's not what God actually said. God's words emphasized the great freedom he was giving them: "You may freely eat of every tree in the garden." That sounds very generous, doesn't it? God warned them to avoid just the one. But the devil wants Eve to think of God as being too restrictive and limiting her freedom.

Eve replies by saying they can eat from "some" trees, but if they so much as touch the tree in the midst of the garden, they would die (Genesis 3:2-3). But did God actually say that? No. She doesn't mention the broad freedom God gave them in the garden. Instead, she exaggerates the one restriction in God's law ("We can't even touch it!"). We can see that she is starting to buy into the devil's view of God as an arbitrary law-giver who restricts our freedom.

It's at this moment that the devil goes in for the kill. He says to her: "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4).

¹What is the meaning of this tree? And why is it so dangerous? The tree symbolizes the limits of the human person, dependent on God and his plan for our lives (CCC 396). God invited our first parents to accept their limitations and trust in Him. To reject our dependence on him and his plan for our lives would be to break our relationship with him as our Father, which is a tragedy worse than physical death. As the Catechism explains, "The 'tree of knowledge of good and evil' symbolically evokes the insurmountable limits that man, being a creature, must freely recognize and respect with trust. Man is dependent on his Creator and subject to the laws of creation and to the moral norms that govern the use of freedom" (CCC 396). "Man's eventual eating from this tree symbolizes his unwillingness to accept this dependence on God. Man instead uses his freedom to try to establish what is good and evil for himself apart from God. He seeks to 'be like God' but without God (CCC 398). This leads to tragic consequences for man—separation from God and the introduction of sin and division into the human family. Through the law given in Gen 2:16-17, God wants to protect man from this grave danger" (Edward Sri and Curtis Martin, *The Real Story* (Golden: Epic Publishing, 2012), 148).

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Take in what the serpent is really saying here. His stating, “You will not die,” amounts to calling God a liar. According to the serpent, the tree is not harmful after all. In fact, it’s something that will make them like God. The reason God is telling them not to eat of this tree is that he is afraid they will become like him! According to the serpent, God made up this law to keep them in the dark and under his control.

Notice how the devil is not trying to get Eve merely to break a rule. He’s trying to get her to break a relationship. That’s what the first sin is all about: questioning God’s goodness and not trusting his plan. As the Catechism explains, “Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command. This is what man’s first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness” (CCC 397).

But where is Adam in all of this? Remember what God commanded Adam to do: guard (shamar) the garden. That’s his mission. Adam is to guard (shamar) the garden, protecting it from intruders, like a priest in the Old Testament would guard the sanctuary from any trespassers.

And this is what makes the temptation scene even more tragic. When the serpent shows up in

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the garden, whose responsibility was it to keep the intruder away? Adam’s. But where is Adam? Is Adam fulfilling his mission? Does he guard the garden? Was he away on business and not aware of the intruder? No. The Bible reveals that Adam is right there by Eve’s side during the temptation scene, that he goes along with the devil and eats of the tree with Eve. What a tragic failure! The one mission given to Adam in the garden was to guard it. The devil enters the garden, and he does nothing. The devil talks to his wife, tempting her, seducing her to break God’s commandment, and Adam who is right by her side does nothing. Nothing to protect her. Nothing to protect the garden. And most of all, nothing to protect his soul from being poisoned by the devil’s lies.

Suffering Hope

The next major point Genesis reveals about the human family is how sin separates us from God and how God has a plan to restore us to himself.

Sin has devastating consequences for the human family. Right after the fall, the Bible tells how man and woman hide from the presence of God (Genesis 3:10). How tragic: Adam and Eve are now running away from the God who lovingly brought them into existence, has a plan for their lives and wants them to be happy. This points to what sin is ultimately all about: turning away from God.

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As a result of this first sin, man and woman lost what can be called “the four harmonies”: the original harmony they had with God, the harmony they had with all creation, the harmony with each other and the perfect harmony they experienced within their own souls. Without the supernatural gift of God’s life dwelling in us, the human family ever since has been wounded, plagued by an inclination to evil and selfishness, which is the result of what Christians call “original sin” (CCC 405). As St. Paul explained, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Romans 7:15). Most of all, because of the first sin, man and woman not only die physically; the greatest tragedy is that they die spiritually and, unless something dramatic happens to change their tragic situation, they will live eternally separated from God.

This is what makes the end of the story of Adam and Eve so remarkable. It would be just and reasonable if God responded to Adam and Eve’s rebellion by rejecting them. But God still loved them, and he chose to show them mercy, not judgment. Right away he unveils his plan to rescue them: he foretells how the woman will have a descendent who will defeat the devil, crushing the head of the serpent and liberating the human family from his reign of sin and death (Genesis 3:15). The early Church

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called this passage the “protoevangelium,” that is, the “first Gospel,” because it points toward Christ, who will ultimately defeat the devil (CCC 401).

But God doesn’t just give a prophecy in his words about the future savior. He foreshadows how that savior will redeem the world.

Just as Adam was tested in a garden, so Jesus Christ will be tested in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39–46). But where Adam failed his test, Jesus will prove to be faithful right where Adam was unfaithful.

Whereas Adam ate from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Jesus went to the “tree” of the cross (see Acts 5:30). And in his passion, Jesus will take on the curses of Adam. Just as Adam was cursed with the sweat of his brow, thorns and thistles coming from the earth and ultimately facing death (Genesis 3:17–19), so Jesus takes on those curses, sweating drops like blood in the garden (Luke 22:44), wearing a crown of thorns on Good Friday (Matthew 27:29) and ultimately being killed (Luke 23:46).

Indeed, immediately after Adam and Eve’s sin, God is already revealing his plan for redemption.

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Additional Background

The Fall (CCC 397-398):

Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. This is what man's first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness. In that sin man preferred himself to God and by that very act scorned him. He chose himself over and against God, against the requirements of his creaturely status and therefore against his own good. Constituted in a state of holiness, man was destined to be fully "divinized" by God in glory. Seduced by the devil, he wanted to "be like God", but "without God, before God, and not in accordance with God".

Effects of the Fall (CCC 399-401):

Scripture portrays the tragic consequences of this first disobedience. Adam and Eve immediately lose the grace of original holiness. They become afraid of the God of whom they have conceived a distorted image – that of a God jealous of his prerogatives.

The harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now destroyed: the control of the soul's spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations

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henceforth marked by lust and domination. Harmony with creation is broken: visible creation has become alien and hostile to man. Because of man, creation is now subject "to its bondage to decay". Finally, the consequence explicitly foretold for this disobedience will come true: man will "return to the ground", for out of it he was taken. Death makes its entrance into human history...

What Revelation makes known to us is confirmed by our own experience. For when man looks into his own heart he finds that he is drawn towards what is wrong and sunk in many evils which cannot come from his good creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as his source, man has also upset the relationship which should link him to his last end, and at the same time he has broken the right order that should reign within himself as well as between himself and other men and all creatures.

Original Sin and Concupiscence (CCC 404-405):

How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam "as one body of one man". By this "unity of the human race" all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received original

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holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called “sin” only in an analogical sense: it is a sin “contracted” and not “committed” – a state and not an act.

Although it is proper to each individual, original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam’s descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin – an inclination to evil that is called “concupiscence”. Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ’s grace, erases original sin and turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle.

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The “Protoevangelium” (CCC 410):

After his fall, man was not abandoned by God. On the contrary, God calls him and in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil and his restoration from his fall. 304 This passage in Genesis is called the Protoevangelium (“first gospel”): the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent and the Woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of hers.

DISCUSSION

Genesis 3:1-7
 Genesis 3:15
 Genesis 17-19
 Luke 22:39-44
 Acts 5:30
 Matthew 27:29

Discussion guide for your Bible study

The Temptation

01. Launching Question:

Have you ever worked hard to make something perfect (an event, a paper, a project, or something else important to you) only to see it fall apart? What was your experience and how did you react?

Please read aloud:

Now we come to the next major point Genesis reveals about the human family: the Fall. One of the most famous passages in all of Scripture is the temptation of Adam and Eve.

Read Genesis 3:1-7

02. Consider the strategy of the devil in his very first words to Eve: "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any trees of the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1). Why does the devil ask that question? How does it contrast with God's actual command to Adam and Eve?

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Answer: Remember what God actually said in Genesis 2:16: "You may freely eat of every tree in the garden." He gave them great freedom! God warned them to avoid just the one tree because he knew it was harm them. But the devil wants Eve to think of God as giving this command because he is too restrictive and limiting her freedom.

03. Now let's look at Eve's response. How does Eve's response also contrast with God's actual command?

Answer: Eve replies by saying they can eat from "some" trees, but of the tree in the midst of the garden, even if they touch it, they would die (Genesis 3:2-3). But did God say that? No. She doesn't mention the broad freedom God gave them in the garden. Instead, she exaggerates the one restriction in God's law ("We can't even touch it!"). We can see that she is starting to buy in to the devil's view of God as an arbitrary law-giver who restricts our freedom.

Please read aloud:

Next, the devil goes in for the kill. He says to Eve: "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4).

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04. When the serpent says, “You will not die,” what is he claiming? Is he just making a simple clarification, or is there something more sinister in his words? And what is the devil implying about God in this passage?

Answer: Stating, “You will not die,” amounts to calling God a liar. According to the serpent, the tree is not harmful after all. In fact, it’s something that will make them like God. The reason God is telling them not to eat of this tree is that he is afraid they will become like him! According to the serpent, God made up this law to keep them in the dark and under his control.

Please read aloud:

Notice how the devil is not trying to get Eve merely to break a rule. He’s trying to get her to break a relationship. That’s what the first sin is all about: questioning God’s goodness and not trusting his plan. As the Catechism explains, “Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command. This is what man’s first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness” (CCC 397).

05. In what ways might you experience the temptation to doubt God’s goodness and his plan for your life? How might you

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be tempted to view his plan, his teachings or his moral law as restrictive? What does this passage teach us about the temptations we face today?

Allow the group to discuss.

06. We’ve looked a little bit at Eve’s response to the devil, but let’s go back and look at Adam’s response also. In Genesis 2, Adam was given the job to guard (“shamar”) the garden. In this moment, is Adam doing his job? What should Adam have been doing? How is Adam also responsible for the first sin?

Answer: The Bible reveals that Adam is right there by Eve’s side during the temptation scene and goes along with the devil and eats of the tree with Eve. The devil enters the garden, talks to his wife, and tempts her to break God’s commandment, and Adam does nothing. Adam fails in his one mission to protect the Garden and Eve.

Suffering Hope

Please Read Aloud:

As a result of this first sin, man and woman lost what can be called “the four harmonies” — he original harmony they had (1) with God, (2) with all creation, (3) with each other, and (4) within

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their own souls. They become plagued by an inclination to evil and selfishness which is the result of what Christians call “original sin” (CCC 405). St. Paul describes the effects of original sin like this: “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Romans 7:15).

07. How have you experienced what St. Paul is describing in your own life?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud:

Adam and Eve’s response to their sin is to hide from the presence of God (Genesis 3: 8-10). It would have been just if God responded to Adam and Eve’s rebellion by rejecting them. But instead, he immediately unveils his plan to rescue them. Let’s read the promise that God makes in Genesis 3:15.

Read Genesis 3:15

08. In this verse, God speaks about the conflict between the serpent and the woman and her seed. Why is this so important at this point in the story? Does this verse remind you of anything that will happen later in the Bible?

Answer: Right away God unveils his plan to rescue Adam and Eve: he foretells how the

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woman will have a descendant who will defeat the devil, crushing the head of the serpent and liberating the human family from his reign of sin and death (Genesis 3:15). The early Church called this passage the “protoevangelium,” that is, the “first Gospel,” because it points to Jesus and Mary, who will defeat the devil.

Please read aloud:

But God doesn’t only promise a savior, he also foreshadows how that savior will redeem the world. But where Adam failed his test, Jesus will prove to be faithful right where Adam was unfaithful. And in his passion, Jesus will take on the curses of Adam. Consider the following curses Adam experienced:

Read Genesis 3:17-19

Please read aloud:

Now consider what Jesus experiences in his passion:

Note to the leader: Consider having three different people in your group look up and read the following passages. Alternatively, you may read the following out loud if your group is unfamiliar with the structure of the Bible and finding these pages proves too difficult or time-consuming

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Read Matthew 27:29:

And plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Read Luke 22:44:

And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.

Read Acts 5:30:

The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree

09. How does Jesus in his passion take on the curses of Adam?

Answer: Just as Adam was tested in a garden, so Jesus Christ will be tested in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39–46). But where Adam failed his test, Jesus will prove to be faithful right where Adam was unfaithful. Adam ate from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; Jesus went to the “tree” of the cross (see Acts 5:30). And in his passion,

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Jesus will take on the curses of Adam. Just as Adam was cursed with the sweat of his brow, thorns and thistles coming from the earth and ultimately facing death, so Jesus takes on those curses, sweating drops like blood in the garden (Luke 22:44), wearing a crown of thorns on Good Friday (Matthew 27:29) and ultimately being killed (Luke 23:46).

10. Why is it important to recognize that God immediately responds to Adam and Eve’s sin with a plan for redemption? What does this tell us about God? And what might it mean for our lives?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. In particular, emphasize how this reveals God’s love and mercy and His desire to provide us with a way to be free from the sins that enslave us and the fullness of God’s plan in Jesus Christ. It would be just and reasonable if God responded to Adam and Eve’s rebellion by rejecting them. But God still loved them, and he chose to show them mercy, not judgment. Right away he unveils his plan to rescue them.