

Amazing Truths of the Pentateuch (4)
Where did it All go Wrong?
(Genesis 3:1-7)

Introduction:-

The importance of this chapter cannot be underestimated both for understanding the rest of the Bible, as well as for rest of the world as we know it today. All that we experience and know of our world today, in terms of its brokenness, tragedy, and loss of meaning, has its origins in the Garden of Eden, centred around one particular tree, whose influence on world history has been enormous. Let us now look a little more closely at Genesis 3 in order see how this chapter provides the "key" to history.

1. Enter the Serpent (verses 1-5)

Whatever is said about the Serpent in these opening verses, one senses a subtle and sinister atmosphere in terms of its presence and role. Is the Serpent the Devil? We are not given that association in any direct way, as the Serpent here is introduced in verse 1 as "more crafty" than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made, making it one of the unclean animals of Leviticus 11:41-45. Therefore, here the Serpent perhaps qualifies as an apt symbol or instrument of something more sinister and evil, even though in the ancient world the snake was regarded as an object of long life, wisdom, and healing, as illustrated at Numbers 21:6-9, when Moses was exhorted by the Lord to make a serpent and lift it up on a pole as a means of healing the Israelites who were being bitten by serpents in the wilderness. This particular incident would be transcended and fulfilled in Christ at John 3:14-16. Finally, at Revelation 20:2 an association is made between the Dragon, that ancient serpent, and the Devil, which Jesus may have supported at John 8:44 when he spoke of the Devil as a murderer and the Father of lies from the beginning. And so here the Serpent is introduced with a speaking role, which does not appear to cause the woman any apparent alarm or surprise. But why appear to the woman and not to the man? Perhaps the answer to this question relates back to Genesis 2:15-17, where it was only to Adam himself that the Lord had given the command about not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and therefore, the serpent's "craftiness" would also target the woman's second-hand knowledge of this original event, with the view of catching her off guard with regard to detail. In any case, the Serpent's first question, veils a half-truth and misrepresentation about God's goodness and original command to Adam at Genesis 2:16-17. The question is also clever, to which a simple yes or no response is impossible if the woman decides to continue the dialogue. The woman then replies with her own addition of "touching" to the original command in verse 3, but by this time, the Serpent had drawn her in sufficiently enough (like an insect caught in a spider's web), to challenge the legitimacy and truth of God's statement about physical and spiritual death that would come as a result of eating from the Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. Finally, the Serpent accuses God of having selfish and unworthy motives in verse 5, and of withholding important information that could benefit Adam and Eve beyond their wildest dreams! But the reality was only half-true! As we will now see.

2. When something Good for God becomes something Wrong for Man (verse 6).

In her previous response, the woman showed hints of distancing herself from the Creator, by following the lead of the Serpent in using the word "God" and not "Lord God" of the Creator. And now, the full range of senses take control, including the words "see" and "good" which are only attributed to God in Genesis 1. And so instant

satisfaction and the Serpent's suggestion takes precedence over obedience to the command of God not to eat from the fruit of this tree back at Genesis 2:16-17. Throughout Scripture, the essence of sin is to put human judgment above divine command. And for this reason, this incident involving the Serpent, may have involved God's "testing" of Adam and Eve, as well as humankind's first "temptation" by the Serpent, to see whether they would fulfil the demands of a passage like Deuteronomy 8:2-3 which says: "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and test you, in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger, and then feeding you with manna, which neither you or your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." Not only did Jesus use this text against the Devil's first temptation in the wilderness to satisfy his hunger by turning a stone into bread (Matt 4:4; Luke 4:4), but was this not the very issue with this Garden of Eden episode, where the forbidden fruit of the forbidden tree would not only test Adam and Eve's obedience to God's original command, but would also teach them to trust in God's on-going word and goodness to them, in the belief that God always has the human's best interests at heart, even though they do not know everything. Finally, Adam was with Eve both as a silent witness, as well as an active participant in this act, making him just as culpable in the act of eating the forbidden fruit (verse 6).

3. A Shocking Discovery and the "Naked Truth" (verse 7)

Whilst this narrative does not address the larger question of the origin of evil itself in our universe (not even Jesus offered a viewpoint on this subject), it does however address the issue of the origin of human sin and its universal affect upon our world (cf. Job 1:6-2:10). In the light of this passage, T.E. Fretheim (*The Pentateuch* 1996, p. 78), suggests that the primal sin may thus be best defined as mistrust of God and God's Word, which then manifests itself in disobedience and separation from God ... Rather than speak to God about the issue, Adam and Eve silently consider the tree and the wisdom it offers. The issue is not the gaining of wisdom, however, but the way in which it is gained - For the wisdom literature tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). What this entails can be seen from the result. Only God can view the creation as a whole; humans do not have such a perspective, nor the wherewithal to handle their new knowledge very well... Their eyes are opened, in that they now see each other and the world differently ... They now have the autonomy they desired, but not the perspective to handle it well .. Left to their own resources they now see themselves as "naked" for the first time, through the "craftiness" of the Serpent. The words "naked" and "craftiness" play upon each other in the Hebrew language. As a result, immediately guilt and shame grip them, and as a result, they attempt to hide from each other and from God. The quest for moral self-autonomy has led them into a perplexing and dangerous new world that they can neither handle well nor negotiate. This path promises much, but delivers little.

Conclusion:-

David Atkinson (*The Message of Genesis 1-11*, 1990, p. 83) sums up in this way. *Temptation begins with trivia. How can it be that so great a fall can begin with so small an incident? One piece of forbidden fruit! Surely the whole world will not fall apart for such a trivial thing? And yet so often our spiritual health and destiny does depend on the one thing in our lives which blocks our way to God. For each of us, the God who gives us all things richly to enjoy, also asks of us that we trust and obey him (end of quote). Are we prepared to give everything over to God today? Amen.*