

April 28- Genesis 3-5 The Fall

Chapter 3

Chapters 3-6 are written by the “J” author. Chapter 3 details “The Fall” of humanity and explains how original sin came to be. This is the explanation for why the world is broken the way it is. This chapter describes the “originating” sin, the one act of rebellion that started it all, and is fleshed out chapter by chapter of Genesis to showcase how that one “originating sin” became universally embedded in humanity (“original sin”). Sin is described in these first few chapters of Genesis as “human-initiated estrangement, separation, alienation, and progressively further travel away geographically from Eden.”

“The Law” was knit into the fabric of God’s good creation through God’s prohibition to eat of the tree of knowledge or of the tree of life. “The Law” is seen as important for proper human life in the world and exists to promote life and wellbeing for the humans. That being said, every time punishment is issued in these chapters, God meets that punishment with grace -benevolence the humans don’t deserve.

Vs. 1-12, The serpent is described as the craftiest of God’s creatures and has come to be associated theologically with the demonic forces opposed to God, but the creature is not evil in and of himself, but crafty. He represents the full range of options for the human beings (including those options which have been prohibited by God) . The woman’s initial response to the serpent is stronger than what God actually said -God only said don’t eat, not don’t eat or touch it. How often, however, does the touching lead to eating? The serpent told the woman what turned out to be the truth -that she wouldn’t die, and then uttered the phrase key to the temptation: “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” To say “God knows” is to imply to the humans that God hadn’t told them the whole truth about the trees they weren’t to touch, and this diminishes the trust the humans had in God in their open and intimate relationship. This is akin to telling children only the facts that they are mature enough to handle in the situation, it’s not that God was malevolently keeping facts from them, but that God was trying to shield them from the harsh realities of evil by just telling them “don’t eat it” rather than explaining in detail WHY they shouldn’t eat it. The serpent tempts by calling into question whether or not God really has the humans best interests at heart, if God doesn’t want the humans to be like God (humans were made in God’s image, afterall, so why shouldn’t they become fully godlike?). The primal sin is a mistrust of God and God’s word, for they didn’t trust that God had their best interests at heart and took matters into their own hands by eating the fruit to see for themselves what would happen. Both Adam and Eve were present with the serpent the whole time, this is a mutual temptation, a mutual eating.

Their eyes were opened, their innocence lost, they see the world full of good but also evil. Because they have violated the intimate relationship of trust they share with God, they know that they are naked and feel shame about God seeing them naked. They sew fig leaf clothing for themselves -fig leaves would have been prickly and uncomfortable! God walks in the garden in the evening, a sign of great intimacy and friendship. When God finds the humans hiding, God asks what happened, and Adam immediately throws Eve under the bus, not taking any responsibility at all for what they both participated in.

Vs. 13-24, The result of this originating sin is broken relationship between humans and God, among humans themselves, between humans and creation, and even within the human heart (self-loathing and shame). Eve throws the serpent under the bus, passing the blame to God's craftiest creation. As a result of this originating sin, the serpent is cursed to crawl on its belly and to be in constant strife with human beings. But God is merciful, instead of the humans dying instantly from eating the fruit, as God said in the original law-giving, the humans are not cursed, but shown how their actions of knowing both good and evil now have ripple effects into every aspect of their lives: marital relationship, childbearing, and agriculture. They now have knowledge that one day they will die (which they did not know before the Fall), and knowledge of death is the root cause of all fear, which leads people to do all kinds of terrible things! God cuts the apron strings, because Adam and Eve have grown up now, they will no longer receive their food handed to them in a perfect garden, now Adam will have to toil for their food by the sweat of his brow. Because God is gracious, God made them garments of soft animal skins, to replace the prickly fig leaf garb they made themselves. God sent them out of the garden of Eden, for if humans both know good and evil and live forever, then they will achieve divine status.

Chapter 4

In the story of Cain and Abel, we see the originating sin of Adam and Eve's quest for the knowledge of good and evil passed down to their children, Cain and Abel, to be born out as original sin. Both Abel and Cain have agricultural vocations. Why God favored Abel's gift of firstling lambs over Cain's gift of grain offerings is unknown, but antiquity would have understood that it was the divine right to choose what is pleasing and what is not. Cain's true, acceptable offering would have been the offering of his own righteousness if he could have kept his jealousy and temper under control. God promises Cain's acceptance if he "does well." This implies that if Cain resists the temptation to sin that is within him, then this will be as pleasing to God as Abel's offering of firstlings. Instead, Cain lets his anger best him and murders his brother in the field. Blood of humans or animals was considered sacred to God (blood contained the life force), therefore a matter of spilled blood was a matter for God to judge. Cain's sarcastic response to God's seeking of Abel implies that Cain did not consider himself his brother's keeper and

protector, that that was God's job. Where God did not curse Adam and Eve for their rebellion of curiosity, God curses Cain for spilling his brother's blood. He will no longer be able to produce food from the land where he killed his brother, he is cast out to East of Eden, as a vulnerable fugitive and wanderer, therefore he would have no rights or protection in foreign lands. Cain fears that this is a death sentence for him, for foreigners were not treated with human rights or dignity. But even in the midst of this curse, God places a blessing of grace. God places the "mark of Cain" on him so that no one would kill him. Following vs. 17, the text details the growth of the civilizations East of Eden, where his descendants would become the founders of cities, wandering shepherds, developers of culture, and makers of tools. In vs. 23 we see the way humans twist God's good gifts for their own gain. Lamech kills a man for merely wounding him (not an eye for an eye), and then uses the gift of the mark of Cain for his own justification -hardly what God intended!

As the descendants of Cain seemed to be going down an evil path, God's blessing and grace for the world would be restored through the descendants of Adam and Eve's third son, Seth.

Chapter 5

This chapter presents the first genealogy of the Bible, linking the stories of Adam and Noah. These genealogies (or Toledots -descendants) mark important transitions throughout the book of Genesis. We're reminded that God created humankind in the image and likeness of God, both male and female, and when Adam was 130 years old, that image and likeness of God were passed on to his son, Seth, and then had other sons and daughters. Notable among Seth's descendants: Enoch, the father of Methuselah, "walked with God" just as God had once walked with humanity in the garden. As a result of this close and intimate relationship with God, Enoch only lived about 1/3 a span of the life as his ancestors and seems to have been carried away to God like Elijah would later be, rather than through dying in the normal fashion. His son, Methuselah, would be the oldest recorded human, living to 969 years. Noah was named for the role he would play for the world- "the one who shall bring relief from our work and from the toil of our hands." Noah was 500 years old before he had his first kid! All 3 of Noah's sons are named in this lineage, not just his eldest. People often wonder about the mysteriously long lives recorded in Genesis. There are similar extremely long lives in records about the kings and patriarchs of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, so they could simply be following this pattern in Genesis. Another possibility: diminishing life span is a result of sin's cumulative effect on humans. As societies progress, sin becomes more pervasive and systemic, and human life spans are shortened by the stress of such "progress."