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A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

HUMANITY'S PURPOSE AND FAILURE (2:4-3:24)

The Place of the Passage

Genesis 2:4-3:24 amplifies in greater detail the compressed statement of God's purpose for humanity in Genesis 1:26-31. The terse, poetic language of chapter 1 is explained in a narrative of the creation of humanity in the garden-sanctuary of Eden in chapter 2. When God's command to Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:16-17 is disobeyed in chapter 3, at the instigation of the serpent, consequences ensue for everyone involved. Sin invades the universe. Nevertheless, God's grace still abounds in his judgment, as the offspring of the woman will conquer the serpent (Gen. 3:15) and procreation and dominion will continue, though only through pain (Gen. 3:16-19).

The Big Picture

Humanity, the crown and pinnacle of creation with a commission to fill the earth with image-bearers, fails in that calling and faces consequences.

God's Purpose for Humanity (Genesis 2)

— God's special role for humanity seen in Genesis 1:26-30 is amplified in chapter 2. How is God's special blessing on humanity evident (Gen. 2:4-9)?

— Many scholars recognize Eden as the first sanctuary and dwelling place of God, corresponding to the later temple. Just as a river "flowed out of Eden to water the garden" next to the tree of life (Gen. 2:10-14), so in the Bible's climactic vision a river flows from the presence of God in the temple, surrounded by trees that bring life (Ezek. 47:1-12; Rev. 22:1-2). Also, this river is surrounded by gold, bdellium, and onyx stone (Gen. 2:12), just as gold filled the temple (e.g., Rev. 21:18), bdellium recalled the manna (Num. 11:7) in the ark of the covenant, and onyx stones were placed on the clothing of the priests (Ex. 25:7; 28:9). Finally, after sin enters the garden, cherubim protect the garden and tree of life from unclean humanity (Gen. 3:24), just as the cherubim guard the ark of the covenant (Ex. 37:7-9; I Sam. 4:4). Indeed, "he built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever" (Ps. 78:69), and Eden is called "the garden of God" and "the holy mountain of God" (Ezek. 28:13, 14). Consider the significance of Eden as the first temple. If Eden is the sanctuary of God, what does that tell us about the whole cosmos, or about Adam's role?

— Just as Adam was to "to work and keep" the garden sanctuary of Eden (Gen. 2:15), so the priests were to *keep* "all the furnishings of the tent of meeting . . . as they minister at

the tabernacle” (Num. 3:8). What does this teach us about Adam’s role? Consider also that Jesus, the Second Adam (I Cor. 15:45), was himself the final priest (Heb. 7:23-28).

In Genesis 2:18-25, how does God provide help for Adam to fulfill his calling?

Humanity’s Failure (Genesis 3)

— While Adam and Eve were to care for the sanctuary of Eden by subduing the beasts and obeying God’s word (Gen. 1:28; 2:15-17), they end up being subdued by a beast by compromising God’s word and are exiled from the sanctuary of Eden (Gen. 3:24). Compare carefully how God’s instructions are subtly changed from God’s original instructions in Genesis 2:16-17 to their recollection in Genesis 3:1-5. What changes do you see?

— In what ways do these subtle changes to God’s word reflect a distorted picture of God’s character in Genesis 3:1-5?

— Look carefully at the consequences of sin in Genesis 3:7-13. How does sin break down relationships, both vertically between God and humanity, and horizontally between Adam and Eve?

— For this sin, God’s punishment is swift and sure. Describe the punishment for each of the following, noting how Adam and Eve’s punishments link up with their original calling in Genesis 1:28:

1. Serpent:
2. Adam:
3. Eve:

— However, even in the midst of punishment, God’s grace and gospel are evident. Describe the promise that is present even in the punishment of Adam and Eve:

1. Adam:
2. Eve:

— How is God’s grace evident in Genesis 3:20-21? What hints do we have about the coming sacrificial system and Jesus, the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)?

Gospel Glimpses

PROTO-EUANGELIUM — Genesis 3:15 is widely seen to be the proto-euangelium (“early gospel”), the earliest declaration of the divine grace of the gospel. Although the serpent would bruise the heel of the offspring of the woman, the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. As a result, Genesis focuses on the offspring of the woman by tracing this line through many genealogies. The hopes of this offspring and seed of the woman finally crystallize around the seed of David. Eventually, the serpent does bruise the heel of Jesus at the cross, but Jesus crushes his head at the resurrection. Furthermore, a glorious promise is given to those who are in Christ, that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20).

GOD'S GRACE EVEN IN PUNISHMENT — Although Genesis 3 ends with the account of God's punishment for Adam and Eve, his promise endures even in the face of his punishment. Though Eve will have pain in childbearing, she will still bring forth children. Though Adam will have pain in eating what comes from the ground, the ground will still produce food for him. Disobedience does not remove them completely from the realm of God's promise, but this promise endures even in the face of their disobedience.

GARMENTS OF SKIN — The first animal is killed to clothe Adam and Eve's nakedness in Genesis 3:21. Though nakedness did not cause them shame before the fall, sin immediately brought shame at their nakedness, so that they hide themselves (Gen. 3:8). However, God covers their nakedness with the skin of an animal. This looks forward to the ministry of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29; cf. Zech. 3:1-5). In a similar manner, we are to "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light," which is to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:12, 14; cf. Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10).

Whole-Bible Connections

THE RIVER FROM EDEN — The careful reader will notice that the river flows "out of Eden to water the garden" (Gen. 2:10), outside of which are the nations such as Cush (2:11-14). Just as there was a gradation of holiness in the temple from God's presence (the holy of holies) to where the priests ministered (the holy place), and from there to the outer court of the Gentiles, so there is a gradation of holiness from God's presence (Eden) to the place where the first priest Adam ministered (the garden), and from there to the nations outside the garden. Similarly, just as the river flows from God's presence in Eden through the garden to the nations, so the water of the temple flows from God's presence through the holy place to the nations (Ezek. 47:1-12) to bring healing to the nations (Rev. 22:2). In the new earth, a river will flow once more (Rev. 22:1), this time with no need for a temple—since the restored fellowship anticipated by the temple is finally achieved by the work of Christ (Rev. 21:22).

FIRST ADAM, SECOND ADAM — Where Adam failed in his confrontation with the serpent in Genesis 3, the second Adam Jesus succeeds. When Jesus, the "son of Adam" (Luke 3:38) confronted the serpent (4:3), he did not take what was "good for food" (Gen. 3:6) but declared "man shall not live by bread alone" (Luke 4:4), refused what was "a delight to the eyes" (Gen. 3:6) when he saw "all the kingdoms of the world" (Luke 4:5-6), and was not led astray by what would "make one wise" (Gen. 3:6) by casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple (Luke 4:9-12). As a result, "as one trespass [of the first Adam] led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness [by the second Adam] leads to justification and life for all men" (Rom 5:18).

Theological Soundings

WORD OF GOD — The weeds of sin grow quickly when God's Word has not taken root in our hearts. The serpent did not tempt with radical departures from God's command in Genesis 3 or Luke 4 but only slight deviations. However, the best "bridle to control

all passions” is the power of God’s word. This illustrates the truth of the psalmist: “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11).

THEOLOGY AND OBEDIENCE — Our view of God directly affects our view of obedience. Instead of referring to God as the covenant keeping Lord (Yahweh) God, Eve simply refers to him as the distant God (Elohim) of power who created all things (Gen. 3:3). While God lavishly allows them to “eat of every tree of the garden” (Gen. 2:16), Eve minimizes God’s permission by saying, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden” (Gen. 3:2). Although God commands them not to eat of the forbidden tree, Eve maximizes the prohibition by adding “neither shall you touch it” (Gen. 3:3). While God warns “you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17), Eve minimizes the consequences of sin by saying only “lest you die” (Gen. 3:3). These subtle changes neglect the lavish character of God in covenant relationship to his people and instead reflect a concept of God as a stingy kill-joy who robs his people of life. With such a twisted view of God, no wonder Eve disobeys!

WORK — Work is not a result of the fall. Meaningful work was present even before the fall (Gen. 2:15). Although the fall brought pain and toil to our work (Gen. 3:17–19), work itself is part of God’s perfect plan in the sanctuary of creation.

DEATH — God warned that if they would eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would “surely die” (Gen. 2:17). The serpent said, “You will not surely die” (3:4), and it is true that they did not die physically. However, they were immediately exiled in general from the abundant and verdant life in Eden (Gen. 2:8-14) and in particular from the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). Furthermore, a sentence of death is pronounced on the day of Adam’s sin that is executed later (see similarly the sentence of death on Shimei in 1 Kings 2:37-46). In this way, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

Glossary of Terms

Sin: Any violation of or failure to adhere to the commands of God, or the desire to do so.

Sanctuary: A place set aside as holy because of God’s presence there. The inner sanctuary of the tabernacle and the temple was called the Most Holy Place.

Grace: Unmerited favor, especially the free gift of salvation that God gives to believers through faith in Jesus Christ.

Judgment: Any assessment of something or someone, especially moral assessment. The Bible also speaks of a final day of judgment when Christ returns, when all those who have refused to repent will be judged and punished (Rev. 20:12–15).

Cherubim: Angelic guardians of the holy places.

A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE : GENESIS (HUMANITY'S PURPOSE AND FAILURE)
WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

Read Genesis 4:1-11:26 in preparation for the next lessons.

Based on Genesis 2 answer the following questions:

1. How was the earth watered at first (2:5,6)?
2. Where did man first live (2:8)?
3. Describe the trees of the garden (2:9).
4. Name and describe the rivers in Eden (2:10-14)
5. What responsibility did man have in Eden from the beginning? What lessons does this teach us about work (2:15)?
6. What restriction did God place upon the man (2:16,17)? What consequences would follow from eating the forbidden fruit?
7. What lessons can we learn from the fact that God gave man this command? What does this show about God and about man?
8. Explain why God decided to make woman — i.e., what need did she meet in consideration of the expression “help meet” (2:18)?
9. Describe how God made woman (2:21,22).
10. What lessons can we learn from the creation of woman? What does this show about her purpose and nature? What lessons can we learn about marriage from Gen. 2:24?

CLASS NOTES

Lined writing area consisting of 20 horizontal lines.