

Genesis 2:8 – 3:6: Temptation and punishment

John Nordin Jan. 2008

Genesis 2:8-9 ⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:15-17 ¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ 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 die."

Genesis 3:1-5 ¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,¹ knowing good and evil."

Genesis 3:6-7 ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were

Eden is a location that contains a garden.

Primeval paradise is found in some other creation stories.

What is the symbolism of the trees?

- Tree of life – also 3:22, 3:24, Prov. 3:18, 1 Enoch 24:4, Rev. 2:7, 22:2, 14, 19, etc.
- Tree of the knowledge of good and evil – here and 2:17 only.

Revelation 22:2 ... On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Man placed in the garden, not created there.

The need for self-discipline implies the existence of a moral choice.

Do they know what death is? Is there no promise of a heaven?

But, they don't die (cf. 3:3) – at least not immediately.

Snake – invokes fear in many cultures.

Where does evil come from? Is a) God good, or b) God in control?

Narrative assumes the existence of moral choices.

Once a conversation starts with the snake, the temptation is already effective.

The snake is lying, the woman misrepresents.

cf. Gilgamesh epic

What is "the knowledge of good and evil"?

- Sexual knowledge (cf. 7, uses of 'fruit' and 'garden' as sexual metaphors, Babylonian myth)
- God-like total awareness
- Ability and need to make choices; assuming moral responsibility for your life.

opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

- Discernment; ability to tell ultimate evaluation of events.
- Used in Bible to indicate coming of age.

“According to Sforno, the knowledge of good and bad refers to man’s ability to choose the sweet even when it is harmful and reject the bitter even when it is beneficial [i.e. to perceive beyond the seemingly obvious.]” Talmud, translated by Zlotowitz

“After he ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, he possessed the power of choice; he could now willingly do evil or good to himself or to others.” – Ramban, but wasn’t eating a choice?

Who is being blamed here? The woman ate, but the man did not stop and didn’t refuse. The man knew the prohibition.

Does this support a view of woman as ‘temptress’?

Why would gaining knowledge make them want to cover up? Assuming the (post-expulsion) embarrassment of nakedness?

⁸They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." return." ¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." ¹⁶ To the woman he

Why does v.8 sound even more ‘anthropomorphic’ than the rest of the passage?

Why do they hide? Shame of disobedience more likely than shame of nakedness.

Neither the man nor the woman repent.

said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." ¹⁷ And to the man¹ he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Context & Issues

- Read it backwards. Start around the campfire on a clear night after some event that causes reflection on the human situation.
- Men and women: twisted relationships are the consequence of sin.
- Relationship of humans to created world.
- Human situation is one of mystery and confused intentions.

Questions

Final words:

Sources:

Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the book of Genesis, part 1*, Magness, 1964

Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, Eerdmans, 1990.

Ramban, *Ramban (Nachmanides) Commentary on the Torah, v. 1* Shilo, 1971.

Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary, Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

W. Sibley Towner, *Clones of God: Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible*, Interpretation v59:4, October 2005, p. 341-356.

Meir Zlotowitz, Bereishis, *Genesis: A new translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, midrashic and rabbinic sources*. Mesorah, 1987