

Prayer

Bless us with Your presence, Lord God, in our daily lives;
Give us courage, Lord God, in the face of difficult situations;
Fill our hearts with great joy, Lord God, as we do Your will;
Inspire us to use all of the gifts You have given to us;
Lead us on, Lord God, with glory in our hearts;
AMEN, Lord God, and ALLELUIA!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Barak Obama

Pray for the family of Barak Obama, and pray especially that those who can guide him spiritually in the coming years will support him personally and have good access to him.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for food and drink and the sharing of it together
- Pray for those people of the world who are poorly governed
- Pray for deprived people of the world whose voices are not heard

Meditation

All the colours of the rainbow
belong to Him who made the light:

All species and varieties of creature
belong to Him who conceived real life:

All the peoples throughout the world
belong to Him who made us in His image:

All the knowledge ever discovered
belongs to Him who primed the Universe:

All paintings, books and objects of art
belong to Him who fashioned creativity:

All the notes of a symphony or song
belong to Him who made the sound of music:

All praise in the past, for now and for ever
belongs to Him who has done all things well!

Bible Study - Genesis 3:1-7

¹ Now the serpent was more shrewd than any of the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must 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 the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said "You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die."' ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die, surely! ⁵ for God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil.'

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, delightful to look at, and that the tree was desirable for wisdom, she took some of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then their eyes were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made simple clothes to cover themselves.

Review

This well known Biblical story brings to a sudden end the wonderful stories of Creation in Genesis, and tells the sorry tale of the fall from grace of the man and the woman created by God. There is no timescale given to this story by which we can connect it with the previous chapters, but we are left with the impression that what happened merely followed on from the creation of man and woman ('ish' and 'ishah' - see 2:23) as two interdependent beings. Historically we call this story the 'Fall', because it describes what is for us an observable fact, that the world in which we live, and especially men and women, are far less than perfect. Indeed, they have a general tendency to accept the temptation to do what is wrong and enjoy it, and this rebellion against their Maker has significant consequences that affect them not just individually, but their relationships with each other and also the world in which they have been set.

Adam and Eve? What happened in the Garden of Eden is widely known, and called the story of Adam and Eve. It is surprising therefore that the names 'Adam' and 'Eve' are not even in the story, and the two are simply referred to as 'the man' and 'the woman'. Adam was last mentioned before he was put to sleep by God (2:21), and the woman has yet to be named 'Eve' (at the end of the chapter - 3:20). Whatever else we can say about this scripture, the story must therefore be about 'people'. It is a story which is deeply rooted in the ancient history of the people of Israel and it explains why everyone, from ancient times until now, falls short of the image and likeness of God (1:27,28). It is relatively obvious to us that there is evil in the world, but the questions remain, 'where does evil come from?', and 'how extensive is evil?' The answer given in our passage to the second question is conclusive, for sin and evil are everywhere and no-one escapes its grip. The answer to the first question is given here, but it is not easily understood, and people are frequently bewildered by it.

Temptations, evil and sex Commentaries on this text say wildly different things about it, but most of them explain that the story focuses on the temptation of Eve (3:1-6). One traditional explanation is that the story continues from the end of chapter 2 to explain how sexual temptation and lust are the root of all evil. This is unhelpful, but many have followed this interpretation, including influential leaders of the church in times past (Augustine), and unfortunately, linking sex with evil has had a damaging affect on Christian morality for centuries. The whole story is really about human failing in general, for that is how scripture itself uses it in the New Testament (for example, Rom. 5:14ff, 1 Cor. 15:22, 1 Tim. 2:13,14). Genesis 3 does follow on from Genesis 2, though it tells us that although we are all gloriously made by the breath of God (Gen 2:7), all of us, in one way or another, have succumbed to the lures of evil. In detail, it describes how temptation works to draw people away from God and into the sinful realm of rebellion against the Creator; and this is the root of all evil.

What happened? In our passage today, Eve is tempted by the shrewd serpent with devious words, which become so twisted she is eventually uncertain about what God has told her. The serpent represents personal evil, but note that Satan is not mentioned here (it is only later on in the history of God's people that a connection is made between the serpent and Satan). The serpent questions Eve about God's instructions given to Adam about eating the fruit of the trees in the middle of the garden (3:1), and this one action

arouses the woman's desire both to eat the fruit and also rebel against God's instructions. Once she has expressed interest in the serpent's suggestions (3:3), she submits to further insinuations about God's truthfulness (3:4,5) and to the temptation to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge (3:5,6). After this, she gives the fruit to her husband, and he responds to his wife with no comment, lamely eating what is offered to him. As a consequence, everything that the serpent has said seems to become true; the man and woman do not die, their eyes are opened, and they immediately possess the ability to discern the sexual difference which divides them.

All this, however, is not God's perfect will for people, and the story continues in tomorrow's passage to agonise over the catastrophic division created between not only God and people, but between God and the rest of His creation.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Which forms of temptation are suggested to you by this story, and how are they experienced today?
2. Is there any reason why the woman is tempted before the man? What does this suggest to us today?
3. Is it possible to call the serpent's words 'prophetic' because they do in fact come true? To what extent are they still true today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

There is no harder challenge than to look carefully at the story of 'the Fall' and measure oneself against what it says. The apostle John says, 'If we say we do not sin, then we lie' (1 John 1:8). Today, I simply ask you as I ask myself, when do you take the time to examine yourself to see what is happening in your life and stand up to the issues exposed by Genesis 3? In what circumstances and to what extent do you succumb to temptation? Are you conscious of your temptation and sin? What will you do about this? Can you deal with this before Christ? From my experience, none of these questions goes away, and we can only deal with sin through repentance and by the grace of God.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Take time to spend with the Lord and ask Him to show you whether you are easily led by temptations of one sort or another. If you find that there is some aspect of your life which needs to be changed, do not hesitate to let the Holy Spirit help you change.*
- *Pray for the many people in our world today who do not fully understand the nature of temptation and sin around them, or indeed how they fall into it themselves. Pray for the light of Jesus to shine into the world.*

Final Prayer

We pray, 'forgive us our sin'; yet You know, Lord Jesus, whether we have repented. You know, Holy Spirit, whether we have yielded in spirit, and You know, Almighty Father, whether we are sincere in our words and actions. Lead us into true penitence, Lord Jesus, so that our prayers for forgiveness may indeed reflect the reality of our lives. AMEN