

05. Genesis 3:1 – 24





## Part Two. The essential ('original') character of sin (Genesis 3:1-24).

### Temptation and crime (3:1-4)

I.

- Now the serpent was more crafty [‘ârûm] than any other wild animal that YHWH God had made. It asked the woman, ‘Did God really say that you were not to eat from any tree in the garden?’ The woman answered the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said: ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not touch it, lest you die.’ And the serpent said to the woman: ‘You will not die!







## Genesis 3:5-7

God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasant to look at, and that the tree was desirable so as to become wise, she took some of its fruit, and ate, and she gave it to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

And the eyes of both were opened and they realised that they were naked [*arôm*] [*vulnerable*] and they sewed fig-leaves together to make themselves loin-cloths.







Ezekiel 28:11-17 – A lament for the king of Tyre

‘You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God ... You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God ... You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour. So I threw you to the earth.’



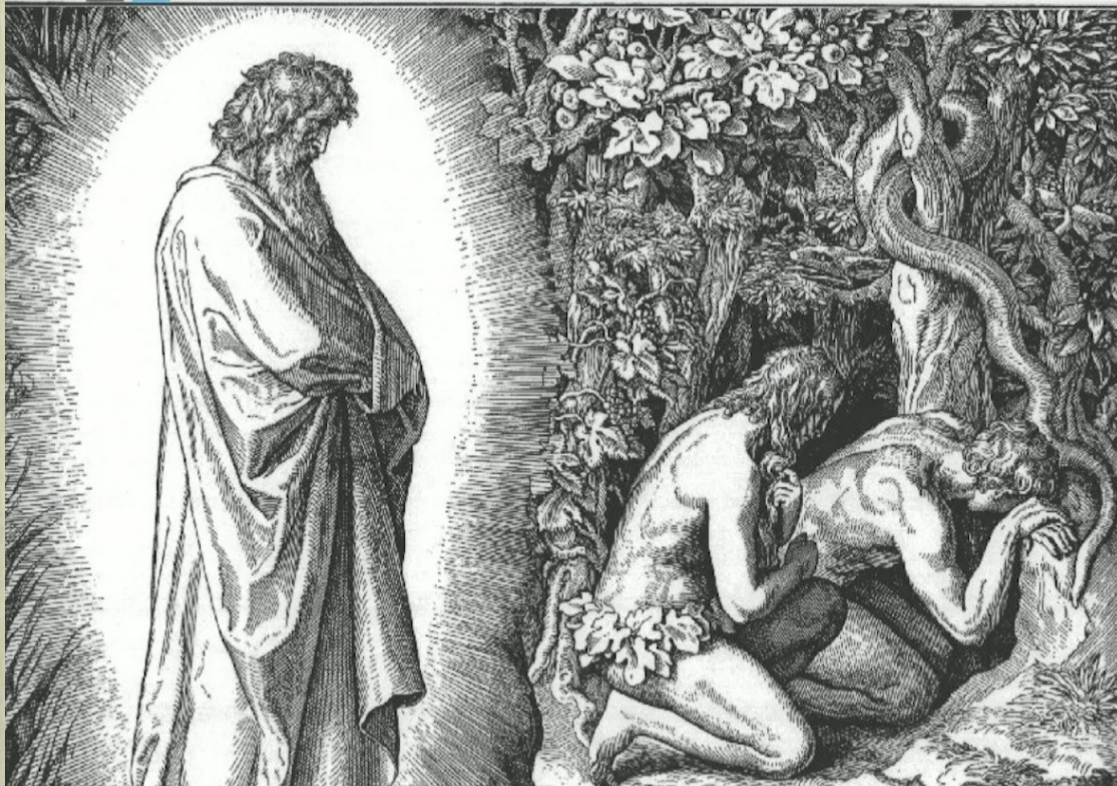
## Philippians 2:5-7

‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but poured himself out, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.’



## 2. Exposure and trial (Genesis 3:8-13)

- They heard the sound of YHWH God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid from the presence of YHWH God among the trees of the garden.





## 2. Exposure and trial (Genesis 3:8-13)

- YHWH God called to the man and said to him: 'Where are you?' He replied: 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid'. He said: 'Who told you that you were naked. Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?



- The man said: ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree and I ate’.
- YHWH God said to the woman: ‘What is it you have done?’ The woman said: ‘The serpent deceived me [hâ ’ishshah hannâhâsh hishshîanî] and I ate’.
- To listen to the serpent is to listen to that part of us that comes from the dust, without listening to the spirit which we have from God. It is to follow our appetite without discernment.



## Psalm 139

<sup>1</sup>O GOD, you search me and you know me.

<sup>2</sup>It is you who knows when I sit and when I stand.  
You discern my inmost thoughts.

<sup>3</sup>You know if I am journeying or resting.  
You know everything I do.

<sup>4</sup>Even before a word is on my tongue,  
you know, O GOD, what I am about to say.

<sup>5</sup>You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup>I find this overwhelming,  
beyond my understanding.



<sup>7</sup>Where can I go from your spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup>If I scale the heavens, you are there;  
if I lie in the grave, you are there.

<sup>9</sup>If I were to take the wings of the dawn  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

<sup>10</sup>even there you would lead me,  
your right hand would hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup>If I think night will hide me,  
and darkness give me cover,

<sup>12</sup>to you darkness is not dark;  
the night is as bright as the day.



<sup>13</sup>It was you who formed every part of me,  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I thank you for the wonder of my being,  
for the wonders of all your creation.

<sup>14</sup>You watched my body taking shape,  
when I was being formed in secret,

<sup>15</sup>You saw my body grow according to your design,  
intricately woven, hidden from sight.

<sup>16</sup>All of my life was written in your book;  
all the days that were prepared for me,  
before any of them existed.



<sup>17</sup>How precious are your thoughts.

They are like countless grains of sand.

<sup>18</sup>To finish counting them

I would have to be, like you, eternal.

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<sup>23</sup>Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.

<sup>24</sup>See if I follow crooked paths.

Lead me along your ancient way.



### 3. The Verdict (Genesis 3:14-16)

- YHWH God said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures. On your belly you will go. You will eat dust all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and woman, between your offspring and her offspring who will strike at your head. You will strike at the heel.
- To the woman he said: ‘I will give you great pain in childbearing. In pain you shall give birth to children. Your longing shall be for your husband, but he shall rule over you.



## Genesis 3:17-19

- To the man [’âdâm] he said: ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree concerning which I commanded you: «you shall not eat from it», cursed is the ground [’adâmah] because of you. In toil you shall eat from it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bear you and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread until you return to the ground [’adâmah], for from it you were taken. For dust you are [see 2:7] and to dust you will return.



- Observation 1 – The blessing is not lost (Genesis 3:20)
- The man named his wife [dominance = consequence of sin] Eve [*hawwah*], because she was the mother of all the living [*hây*].
- Observation 2 – God has compassion on them (Genesis 3:21)
- YHWH God made for the man and his wife coats of skins and clothed them.







## 6. The punishment and its execution (Genesis 3:22-25)

- YHWH God said: 'Look! Human beings are like one of us, knowing good and evil. And now, lest they reach out and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever \_ YHWH God sent them out of the garden of Eden to till the soil from which they were taken.
- He drove out the human beings. and at the east of the garden of Eden he stationed Cherubim, and a sword, flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.





S. Dore

H. PISAN.











## A Reflection on Genesis 2-3

- human beings die. They lose the divine spirit and go back to dust.
- there is a struggle between the animal and human world.
- there is a struggle in caring for the soil and gaining a living from it.
- we do not directly experience God and our relationship with God is ambivalent.



- all is not right between the sexes.
- we do not live our life in a garden of delight.

The Yahwist affirms that the root cause of this is disobedience: human failure to listen to and follow God's word.



The idea of a 'Fall' assumes that there was a time before sin when human experience was different from what it now is.

The Genesis story, however, is not a description of two different historical conditions. It is a theological narrative. It is viewing reality from an inspired perspective: as we would say 'once upon a time'. It is meta-historical, affirming the way things should be and would be without disobedience.

- For this reason the Genesis story has no tradition in the Old Testament.



- in fact we all do sin, and so things are the way they are.
- The idea of the 'Fall' stems from late Jewish speculation



- ‘It was the devil’s envy that brought death into the world’ (Wisdom [1st century BC] 1:12-15).
- ‘As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive’ (1 Corinthians 15:22).
- ‘As sin came into the world through one person, and death through sin, and so death spread to all because all sinned ... much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one person Jesus Christ overflowed beyond measure for the many’ (Romans 5:12, 15).



- Eve declares: ‘All sin has come into creation through me’ (Apocalypse of Moses (70AD), 32).
- ‘O Adam what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone but ours also who are your descendants.’(The Fourth Book of Ezra [NRSV 2 Esdras, c.100AD] 7:118).
- ‘Each of us has been the Adam to his own soul’ (2 Baruch [Syriac Apocalypse, early second century AD] 54:19)



- Man-woman experience two forces in tension
- The pull of the divine inviting them into Dialogue, into possibility, freedom, responsibility, community and transcendence.
- The pull of the 'adâmah, which they share with other living creatures (including the serpent). It is experienced as an attraction to a world without discretion, without choice, without freedom, without dialogue, without community.



## Man-woman experience two forces in tension

- ‘All is clouded by desire: as fire by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as an unborn babe by its covering. Wisdom is clouded by desire, the ever-present enemy of the wise, desire in its innumerable forms which like a fire cannot find satisfaction’ (The Bhagavad Gita 3.38-39)

- ‘Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.’(Galatians 5:24).



The dogma of 'Original Sin' is one of the most complex teachings of our faith. Without excusing personal sin, it is essentially a reminder of the limits placed on human freedom by what we inherit and by the environment within which we happen to live.

I offer eleven propositions for further reflection. They attempt to tease out the key implications of this teaching.



- 1. We experience discord in our feelings, impulses, desires and actions. Some of this is because of the sins we ourselves have committed. Basically, however, as the dogma of 'Original Sin' states, this is because of our 'origins'. The human nature that we inherit has been harmed by the sins of our forebears, as has the environment within which we have to live our lives.
- 2. This is not because God wills our situation to be like this. The cause of this dimension of the human condition is not God.



- 3. The experience of discord varies in kind and degree from one person to another.
- 4. I can affect the environment, but the 'I' that can affect it is affected by it, is dependent upon it, is weakened by it, is unable to control it.
- 5. The whole weight of personal sin, therefore, cannot be attributed to the person who sins.
- 6. Healing demands more than information, and more than personal determination.



- 7. Healing ('salvation') requires grace from God. We are involved in a drama, not only of discovery, but of redemption.
- 8. Obviously, this saving grace does not remove us from our environment, but it does open us to the possibility of healing and growing into innocence – not 'naturally' by our own efforts, but because of the love of Jesus who gives us his Spirit.



- 9. It is our graced nature that can achieve concord, but not without a struggle. Saint Augustine likens us to the wounded man in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Baptised, we are convalescing in the inn of the Church.
- 10. Freedom, therefore, does not mean independence. Rather, it means the graced ability to open ourselves with our whole mind and heart to God's healing love, upon which we are utterly dependent, and which, thanks to Jesus, we know is surely being offered.



- 11. We must accept real, though limited, responsibility for the way we have chosen to respond to the opportunities offered to us, and we must welcome our dependence on grace. Augustine suggests that the first enemy we face is denial of guilt; the last is self-reliance.
- 12. From the perspective of evolution, the breakthrough to being human meant that we brought much of our pre-human condition with us. It's like converting an old school into a hospital.