

THE ETERNAL FALL AND CURSE OF MAN
AN EXEGESIS OF GENESIS 3:1-19

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Thesis Statement: *Therefore, the eternal fall and curse of man is a result of selfish desire and willful disobedience to God and His commands.*

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INTRODUCTION

While there are many critics, few people dispute the fact that the fall of man was indicative of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the garden. Adam and Eve's catastrophic mistakes ultimately led to the eternal punishment of all mankind. Lest we blame them alone for the fall, it is only fair that we also consider humans' consistent failure to obey God's commands starting from the beginning of time. Biblical history is woven with stories of many men and women who disobeyed God. While Adam and Eve may have initiated the fall and curse of man, men and women throughout thousands of generations continued to disobey God after the fall. Though God initially celebrates His creation of man, eventually He regrets it. According to Genesis 6:6, "The Lord regretted that He had made human beings on the earth, and His heart was deeply troubled." God's concern for His creation of man came early, not long after He created them.

According to Collins, "The notion of the fall of Adam and Eve, our first parents, has played an important role in Christian theology."¹ As we delve into the fall and curse of man, we must not forget that man had a choice to be obedient. Man had a choice to do the right thing and follow God's commands. Man had a choice to honor God and abide by His commands. Nevertheless, man, just as man has done from the beginning of time, chose to disobey God and fulfill his own desires while incurring a debt and cost that he would eventually be indebted to forever. When examining the fall, we must also examine the curses that came along with it as one cannot examine an act of disobedience without also examining the consequences and ramifications of that action. In any instance, the act of disobedience costs and there is a penalty to pay when commands and rules are not followed. This is not only true in the Bible, but it is also

¹Collins, C John. 2019. "The Place of the 'Fall' in the Overall Vision of the Hebrew Bible." *Trinity Journal* 40 (2): 165. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=cba28013-80f9-3d75-9bf4-d6dc68627a8f>.

true in daily living. *Therefore, the eternal fall and curse of man is a result of selfish desire and willful disobedience to God and His commands.*

CONTEXT

Historical Context

To accurately explore the historical context of Genesis, it must be done through careful exploration of authorship and provenance. While many dispute Mosaic authorship of Genesis, there are many biblical clues that support the claims that Moses wrote not only the book of Genesis, but also the Pentateuch. Widely irrefutable, most believe that Moses was the author and the only author of Genesis. Perhaps, as it pertains to the fall, due to chronology Moses probably would not have been a firsthand witness, but rather a recipient of information given from history. Notwithstanding, Moses still captures the beginning in vivid details.

In order to determine the provenance of this passage, it is important to determine the geography of the setting. With help from the author, the reader is given a firsthand look at the garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden consisted of everything that was needed for man's survival, and perhaps was a place that embodied symbolism of the Creator as it was all-sufficient in provision for man. Genesis 3:1-19 presents a scene setting in the midst of the most perfect garden to ever have existence on earth. According to Letellier, the Garden of Eden "location (Genesis 2:10-14) was purportedly somewhere in the Tigris-Euphrates region, in the easternmost end of the Fertile Crescent (the moon-shaped rim of ancient civilization, with one point at Palestine/Syria and the other point in the lower Tigris-Euphrates Valley."² The garden, created

² Letellier, Robert Ignatius, Author. 2015. *Creation, Sin and Reconciliation: Reading Primordial and Patriarchal Narrative in the Book of Genesis*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Pg 44.
<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=6e139ab8-82c9-3f93-a0dd-f0af5c22bcb7>.

by God for the enjoyment of man, was plenteous in nature and according to Steinmann and Longman, “the garden created for the man included trees and a river.”³ As we take special thought toward the river, it is important to think about what rivers it connects to in order to better understand the area. Steinmann and Longman indicate that “the garden’s location is indicated by the four rivers whose mouths (literally, ‘heads’) converged to form Eden’s river. The descriptions of the places where the rivers flowed indicates that the garden was probably in lower Mesopotamia near the Persian Gulf, though this is not certain.”⁴ Furthermore, it is very likely that the garden and this scene may have been positioned in the Ancient Near East (ANE).

Literary Context

Situated in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 3:1-19 sets the conditions for the fall of man. One man, one woman and one serpent created the perfect conditions for man to be eternally cursed as they worked together to disobey God’s commands. Adam and Eve were given specific instructions by God as it pertained to the garden. God specifically tells them that they have access to everything in the garden except for the Tree of Life. In Genesis 2:17, God gives Adam a command and says, “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it. For in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” With full knowledge of the command, one would think Adam and Eve would only choose to obey it as they had everything they needed in what God had already provided. According to Stump and Meister, “God’s only stipulation to Adam and Eve was not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

³ Steinmann, Andrew E., Longman, Iii Tremper. 2019. *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 00001. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=8fd65643-0835-3c11-95f9-b1b73046f9c5>

⁴ Steinmann, Andrew E., Longman, Iii Tremper. 2019. *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 00001. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=8fd65643-0835-3c11-95f9-b1b73046f9c5>

(Gen 2:17). Alas, they disobeyed (Gen 3:1-6).”⁵ While there is no clarification about the purpose of the tree, what is known is that they were not to touch it. As Prince states, “the Bible does not say why this tree is off limits. It just is.”⁶

Nevertheless, Adam and Eve failed to follow God’s instruction to obey this command. Tempted by the serpent, Eve chose to listen and fell into temptation as she led her husband to do the same. This temptation would lead to the fall and eternal curse of man as their willful disobedience garnered the attention of God their Creator and moved His heart and hand against them. While many would like to blame the serpent or the woman, ultimately it was Adam’s responsibility to ensure that God’s command was followed. According to Parker, many “interpreters tend to blame only Eve for succumbing to temptation in the garden, even though Adam is present in Gen 3:1–6 and shares responsibility for disobedience.”⁷ As the man and the first one to receive God’s command, Adam was fully aware of what he was told. Adam, knowing what to do yet doing the opposite, brought death and an eternal curse upon all mankind that would come after him. As a result of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, Genesis 3:7 states that “the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” It was at this moment that Adam and Eve were filled with shame as they tried to cover and hide themselves from exposure to one another. However, they remained fully exposed before God as they quickly found out that they couldn’t hide from Him.

⁵ Stump, J. B., and Meister, Chad. 2020. *Original Sin and the Fall: Five Views*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=510c6384-d81b-3d9b-a07d-292ec6725776>.

⁶ Prince, Jennifer. “Adam, Eve and Family.” 2014. In *Handy Answer: The Handy Bible Answer Book*, 1st ed. Visible Ink Press. <https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGJjbGU6NDg3MDU1Mg==?aid=273914>.

⁷ Parker, Julie Faith. 2013. “Blaming Eve Alone: Translation, Omission, and Implications of ×”×ž×¢ in Genesis 3:6b.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132 (4): 729. doi:10.1353/jbl.2013.0050.

Adam and Eve's disobedience and sin was not without consequence. As a result of their disobedience, God cursed the man, the woman and the serpent in Genesis 3:14-19. God was utterly disappointed and left no one unpunished for their role played in the fall. Not only did God allow death as a consequence, but He also made specific curses as it pertained to the man, the woman and the serpent. Each was independently responsible for what they had done and God assigned curses to each one of them. According to Collins, what was good and perfect, suddenly became "God's good creation invaded by sin."⁸

CONTENT

Genesis 3:1 | Serpent's Dialogue

In this passage, the serpent is found operating in deception. Hence, it is to be expected as Genesis 3:1 states that "the serpent was more subtle than any other beast in the field." It is through deceit that the serpent is able to capture Eve's attention and make her question God's original command as it pertained to the trees in the garden. By making the woman question God's command, the serpent begins to slowly dismantle the woman's beliefs about what God's instructions were. The serpent's unique ability to hold a casual conversation with intent to deceive Eve was most certainly the beginning of the fall.

Genesis 3:2-3 | Eve's Answer

In the midst of satanic pressure, Eve finds herself recalling the words and instruction of God. What is remarkable is that she recalls correctly and makes no mistakes about what she was told. Thus, indicating that she knew what God's instructions and commands were. Eve was fully

⁸ Collins, C. John. 2010. "Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters." *Perspectives on Science & Christian Faith* 62 (3): 147. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=fafa3a71-5000-3f58-b99c-7f4e636c6133>.

aware of their limitations in the garden and she was fully aware of what was fully accessible to her as she answers the serpent and states in Genesis 3:2-3, “we may eat of the fruit of the tress of the garden; But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.” This, being an answer given in confidence, reminded her of what the consequences were if she or Adam chose to disobey God and His commands. Eve knew that one mistake could be fatal. However, what she did not know is that she would be deceived into thinking that perhaps disobedience would somehow reward her with life rather than death. With her husband silent, Eve continues to entertain the serpent.

Genesis 3:4-5 | Satan’s Deception

In all this, Satan uses Eve’s vulnerability against her and deceives her. After all, it was not that she didn’t know what she was supposed to do. Eve’s willingness to entertain the serpent led to an open door for Eve to be deceived. Adam’s silence creates an space for the serpent to speak. As Eve’s vulnerability gives way to the serpent, Adam remains passive with no interference in what would become the fall of mankind. Though Eve knew death was imminent in the face of disobedience, Satan presents a compelling pitch, assuring Eve that she “would not surely die” in Genesis 3:4. As Satan twists God’s words and causes Eve to believe a lie, Eve is left deceived.

Genesis 3:6 | Adam’s Disobedience

As a result of Eve’s deception, Eve then deceives her husband. As Pretorius eloquently states, “God gave Adam a choice.”⁹ Adam willingly disobeys God at the hand of his wife as she

⁹ Pretorius, Mark. 2011. “The Creation and the Fall of Adam and Eve: Literal, Symbolic, or Myth?” *Conspectus (South African Theological Seminary)* 12 (September): 169.
<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=9a2ff027-240b-3407-8fda-165eb7f4e7de>.

shares the fruit with him and he partakes of it. Though forbidden, Adam forbade it not and chooses to fulfill what would be a momentary desire that would change his life forever. The tragedy in all of this is that Adam and Eve had everything that they needed and their choice to disobey God was going to cost them all of it. They would soon lose what God had given them and be cursed for one single piece of fruit.

Genesis 3:7-8 | Sin's Effects

After partaking of the fruit, sin's consequences began take immediate effect. Adam and Eve are left changed just as God said that they would be. All of the sudden, they were no longer the same and never would be. According to Genesis 3:7, "the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." This new distinction from one another would be a distinction that would ultimately set man and woman apart forever, causing them to live in shame among one another and before God. Desperate to hide from their shame, Genesis 3:8 says that "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden."

Genesis 3:9-11 | God's Response

Desperate to connect to His creations, God seeks out His son Adam and desires to have a conversation with him about what's just been done. He immediately begins looking for Adam as Genesis 3:9 says, "And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto Him, Where art thou?" It is at this moment that God allows the reader a glimpse of His omniscience as He proves that He is all-knowing and all-seeing. Though Adam and Eve tried to find cover in the midst of their shame in hopes to hide from God, they knew they were exposed. What is perhaps most beautiful about this story is that God finds them in the midst of their disobedience. Though they left God,

God never leaves them and knows right where they are. Unknowingly, when found, Adam immediately acknowledges his nakedness before God in Genesis 3:10 as “He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” This pivotal moment reveals Adam’s disobedience to God as he would not have known he was naked had he not eaten of the tree. God then questions Adam’s integrity as He asks Adam if he had partaken of the forbidden tree.

Genesis 3:12-13 / The Blame

While one would think that every person would take responsibility for their actions, oftentimes it does not occur. At first glance, it might seem easier to blame someone else for a shortcoming rather than own the responsibility for it ourselves. Escaping the blame only seems fair when one realizes they’ve been caught and must pay a penalty for what they’ve done. However, escaping the blame only leads to the delay of punishment that will undoubtedly occur at some point in time or another. Here, in this passage, Adam blames Eve (Genesis 3:12) and Eve blames the serpent (Genesis 3:13). And while both of them blamed someone else other than themselves, each individual received consequences for their own actions. According to Urban, “Satan, Eve, and Adam clearly transgress God’s explicit commands.”¹⁰ As a result, Adam, Eve and the serpent are eventually cursed by God in what would become a pivotal moment in humanity and earth.

¹⁰ Urban, David V. 2017. “The Falls of Satan, Eve, and Adam in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: A Study in Insincerity.” *Christianity & Literature* 67 (1): 90. doi:10.1177/0148333117731098.

Genesis 3:14-15 | Serpent's Curse

While Adam and Eve await their curse, the first to take the fall was the serpent. As cunning and sly as he was, he still was unable to escape the curse of God for his role in Adam and Eve's disobedience. According to Genesis 3:14, God curses the serpent with no mercy and tells the serpent that "[he] will crawl on [his] belly and [he] will eat dust all the days of [his] life." Perhaps, this curse was one of humility as it left the serpent on the ground in a low place. The serpent, left defenseless, was ultimately put in his place, never to rise again.

Genesis 3:16 | Woman's Curse

After God curses the serpent, he then curses the woman. The woman's curse is anything but comfortable as God pronounces everlasting pain upon her during childbearing and birth in Genesis 3:16. In addition to this curse, Genesis 3:16 continues with God telling Eve that "[her] desire will be for [her] husband and he will rule over [her]." While this may not seem as a punishment or a curse, this is something that women still struggle with today. Today, many women want to have the authority of men and they want to be in charge. Although no woman should be the head of any man, countless women still try to usurp the authority of men. So, perhaps God was aware that this would be a constant struggle for the woman that she would inevitably never win, thus leaving her dissatisfied with an inability to be as her husband.

Genesis 3:17-19 | Man's Curse

Just in all His ways, God does not forget to curse the man just as He's cursed Eve and the serpent. With the curse of the serpent and the woman complete, God speaks a unique curse over the man. As a result of listening to his wife instead of listening to God, Adam is ultimately cursed for his disobedience. God gives Adam a curse that will cause him to labor for his food all

the days of his life. In addition to the curse of work, God also curses Adam with the ultimate sentence that is death. As Adam accepts his fate, there is no other dialogue that continues. God completes His curse of Adam and according to Bernardo, Adam and Eve's sin earned them complete "expulsion from the Garden of Eden"¹¹ as a consequence and result. What was once a blessing and gift quickly became a curse as a result of disobedience and selfish desires.

APPLICATION

Negligence of God's commands has proven time and time again to be disastrous from the beginning of time. Disobedience is an act that always leads to severe consequences. Some consequences experienced are immediate, other consequences are delayed. However, one thing is for sure, the consequence will come whether one is prepared for it or not. Adam and Eve may have been the first to take the fall, but unfortunately humankind has continued the trend of the fall throughout generations. Tempted by Satan and his demonic forces, humans continue to be challenged in their integrity and ability to walk uprightly before God. Perhaps, in the absence of the cross, humans would not have an opportunity of life, but only death. Nevertheless, because of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, humans have been given the liberty to choose righteousness and live eternal life. Though humans can choose righteousness, they are still confronted with sin and fulfilling their selfish desires because they are a part of the world.

 Tempted by the demonic forces of this world, humans will always face the challenge of choosing that which is unrighteous. Because humans have been given free will, their choice will always be a matter of the condition of their heart. According to de Beer, "since the human being

¹¹ Bernardo, Anthony. 2007. "Paradise Regained." *Masterplots II: Christian Literature*, September, 1–2. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=155fd191-bb99-3e98-be53-8444cd4e5617>.

is created in the image of God, he or she can choose freely for or against God.”¹² Therefore, it behooves each human to walk in alignment with God’s word so that their hearts may be willing to obey His commands and statutes. Only a person with a righteous heart will desire to please God and obey Him. Disobedience to God is an action that is a result of not having a right relationship with God. Furthermore, in the absence of relationship with God, there is every wicked and evil work. According to Lagasse, if humans are to be saved, there must be somewhat of a redemptive work by the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as he states “that the essentially graceless nature of humanity requires redemption to save it.”¹³ Just like Adam and Eve, humans are subject to making the same mistake of disobeying God if their desires are not in the right place. Any person who walks out of alignment with God and His word will willfully disobey God whether he or she is aware of it or not. *Therefore, the eternal fall and curse of man is a result of selfish desire and willful disobedience to God and His commands.*

¹² De Beer, Wynand Vladimir. 2014. “Being Human, Becoming like God: Patristic Perspectives on Humankind.” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 148 (March): 70.

<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=70b7773a-b91c-39cc-b419-a83a6d31cef3>.

¹³ Lagasse, Paul and Columbia University. “Original Sin.” 2018. In *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 8th ed. Columbia University Press. <https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6NjQzNjg0?aid=273914>.

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