



Genesis 2:4b - 3:13

ADAM & EVE

“How do you like them apples?”

“Eve was framed!” • Bumper sticker •

By The Reverend Bill Keane ©2009

As indicated in the first study in Genesis, I do not believe we are dealing with any attempt at literal history in this account. Why can't the inspired Word of God be poetic, or metaphoric, or symbolic? To take this story in a hyper-literal fashion is to believe that God put the fate of the whole Universe, all life included, in the lap of two people who could not possibly handle the responsibility or comprehend any of the ramifications of their choice. They do not know sin, death, alienation, guilt. Is this the way we believe God actually operates, or is there another message and meaning in this account?

Taken as an ancient parable, a powerful truth emerges when we realize that in fact we are ALL Adam and Eve, (as the apostle Paul indicates)... So in reading this story with the a more poetic lens we may be able to perceive much more profound truths regarding what it means to be human in relationship with God and one another... Of all the accounts in scripture, this one is perhaps my favorite!

Now let's look at the actual text!

Vss. 4b-9 Note the use of the phrase “Lord God” instead of “God” used in the previous chapter. Also, it is said that the Lord God “made” (not “created”). Later it is said the Lord God

Note that Man (ADAM is Hebrew for MAN) is made first in this account, before the animals. By leaving people last in the order of events, the writer of the previous account means to communicate the sense that people are the crowning achievement of creation. Here, by placing Man first, the writer is doing precisely the same thing in another way. This account of creation is more intended to talk about the state of humanity in relation to God rather than get into the sequential details of where all life came from. We are being prepared in this story to talk about Free Will, Sin and the Fall. (Special note: In Hebrew ADAM = MAN, ADAMA = EARTH)

God forms MAN from the ground. We have an intimate connection with the elements. In fact the same carbon that is the basis of the universe is at the core of our own bodies. In essence, we are made of star-dust.

EDEN means ENCHANTMENT or DESIRE. The Israelites felt the most ancient parts of the world were somewhere in the “east” (where the oldest cultures they knew about existed). (Vs. 8)

Note God breathes into ADAM thus making him a living being. This is a most profoundly intimate act of Divine essence animating human flesh. It is unique in the relationship between God and people.

Without the “breath” of Christ in us, the Church cannot be a living Body.

“formed” the man. This section of Genesis has an entirely different style and vocabulary than the opening chapter. This is because it most likely comes from a different source in the Israelite community (though its inspiration is still Divine!). The name for God is now YAHWEH, not ELOHIM. This account is far more anthropomorphic. In other words, God, who is said to “make” and “form” and “breathe” and “plant” acts more human-like than in the first chapter where the elements are just called into being out of nothing.

The word for breath is RUACH. It is the same word for SPIRIT and the root of this word RUA is feminine. The Greek equivalent of RUACH (“breath” and “spirit”) is PNEUMA. Remember in John 20, Jesus “breathes” life into the apostles as God breathed life into ADAM. There is a deliberate connection between these two passages. Without the “breath” of Christ in us the Church cannot be a living Body. We might be a religious organization, but without the indwelling Spirit of Christ we cannot be a living body of faith.

Note two very special trees... The tree of Life (symbolizing immortality) and the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (symbolizing the conscience, the awareness of Right and Wrong). Not an apple tree in sight! The author is presenting us with something much deeper and more profound. Like in any good story, these key elements which play out so prominently later are temporarily put aside... The reader knows they will come up again.

Vss. 9-14 Eden symbolizes fertility, thus the water flows from this region. The references to Onyx, gold etc. are expressions of the belief that these precious elements were remnants, left-overs of this "Paradise Lost." (see also Rev. 21)

Vss. 15-17 Note the MAN is put in the Garden to till it and keep it. The notion that Paradise means having no work to do is a false one. Work is NOT a consequence of sin. Work gives us a role to play! It gives us the opportunity to

Vss. 18-24 MAN should not be alone. Why? Are we not made for community? Does getting a hole-in-one feel as great if no one else is around to share it with? Notice that we all owe our own lives to a prior relationship of two people, however imperfect their union...

"Helper" implies a "complementary" relationship, NOT one of subservience and subjugation. A "helper" who will "complete" the MAN. One way to evaluate a relationship is to ask, "Am I a better person because of my partner? Is my partner a better person because of me? Do we bring out the best in each other?"

Notice none of the "animals" are fit for MAN! The WOMAN is then made from the rib. The MAN'S OWN ESSENCE – of the SAME MATERIAL, his EQUAL, not his inferior. The rib comes from the side, symbolizing that WOMAN stands at MAN'S side, not behind or below him as in other cultures. The two become

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have a meaningful impact in the world. Hence a society which keeps able-bodied people from working runs counter to God's intention. Handing out money to able-bodied people without the expectation of some worthy endeavor is a humiliating, crippling dynamic, not healthy Judeo-Christian charity. In addition, the notion that winning the Lottery and ceasing all work is a misguided fantasy, not the blessing it is commonly portrayed as being.

Why might eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil cause one to die? How powerful is the dynamic of "guilt"? What happens to a person with a profound sense of guilt, but no awareness of grace? Can they really live? Would we be able to live in full communion with God while carrying an acute awareness of personal guilt?

Notice it is NEVER said that MAN is perfect. The fact that MAN needs to be warned about what not to eat implies that indeed MAN is NOT perfect! MAN does not know everything (though he will want to!)

ONE. Oneness means equality, or there is no oneness! Oneness doesn't mean SAMENESS. It means finding unity amidst diversity. Do we find this UNITY amidst DIVERSITY easy to achieve in a relationship, in marriage, in life, in church? Keep in mind the great chasms that have existed between people based solely in things like skin tone or denominational particularities!

Note that the MAN and WOMAN are "naked" and not ashamed! Total comfort with who they are! This relates somewhat to sexuality, BUT IT IS IN NO WAY LIMITED THERE! Like newborns or toddlers, the MAN and WOMAN are INNOCENT! Not PERFECT!

At this point they are at complete peace and ease with themselves, each other and God. (Call to mind a 2 year old who doesn't mind running outside without clothing! Totally free from the burden of guilt and shame!) ALL people are once as ADAM and EVE were! All people are in this story! Children can be manifestly imperfect, yet totally at peace! We are not born with an active conscience (thank God!), but sooner or later the conscience awakens.

Chapter 3 Vss. 1-7 *A talking serpent most assuredly shows we are reading a parable, not an attempt at literal history. The writer is about to communicate the most profound truth without describing an actual event.*

peace with themselves, each other and God. Hence, the fig leaves to “cover” themselves! Think of the myriad ways our culture profits off personal discomfort! Anorexia in essence is a fatal loathing or lack of acceptance of the self.

“Innocence is the ONE thing you don’t know you have, until it is gone...”

As humans we are not creatures content with instinctual drive, with what we already have, with what we already know. In fact, very often, the thing we are told we can’t have is what we sometimes want the most!

“Did God say...?” Note the temptation arrives in the form of a question that invites rationalization, and a misuse of the human intellect!. It is a rationalization that will blur or weaken the original and simple command not to eat!

***“Did Mom say you could take the car?”
“No, but she didn’t say I couldn’t.”***

Note the serpent is never called “satan” or “the devil” (even later on by God). The serpent simply personifies temptation that is part and parcel of being human. Later Christian readers will liken the serpent to satan, which is fine, but in the original we simply have a talking snake.

“...and you will be like God...” The essence of all sin is the need or desire to be our own god, to put our own will ahead of all else. In order to break any other commandment, one must always break the first!

“So when the when the woman saw the tree was good for food...” Again, one of the most pre-eminent tendencies in the human psyche is to rationalize an evil into being a good, then doing it! The Nazi’s first portrayed mentally challenged people as suffering and pitiable, thus making extermination seem humane, a good thing to do! The Jews were portrayed as dirty and aberrant... People who shoplift or bilk insurance companies by over reporting losses rarely say, “It’s wrong and I’m a thief!” Often they say (regarding the shop owner or establishment), “They rip you off! Their prices (premiums) are ridiculous!” As if shop-lifting is a good thing we should all be doing!

“Then the eyes of both were opened and they knew they were naked...” Their essence hasn’t changed one iota, but their AWARENESS sure has!!!! With the awakening of the conscience comes the disquieting dis-ease of not being at

Please note these verses have NOTHING TO DO WITH APPLES OR SEX!!! We are dealing at a much more profound understanding of the nature of innocence, sin and guilt. As a friend of mine once said, with a certain sadness, “Innocence is the ONE thing you don’t know you have, until it is gone...”

And once it’s gone, it never comes back. For Adam and Eve, everything has changed – the perception of themselves, their God, and their world, is forever altered, and cannot be reversed to its prior state.

Here we see the human inability to just be human, not God! Perhaps Man’s worst sins are committed when Man sees himself as God and becomes inhuman. This is the nature of things like the holocaust. Consider, Jesus didn’t come to Earth showing us how to be God, but how to be ourselves!

The essence of Grace is to say, “God loves you as you are. You are not innocent, but you are saved and you are loved!”

Note, nothing is said or implied that all babies are born with a sin (“Original Sin”) on their souls! Yes, we are born with a tendency, a predilection to sin, but not with a pre-existing condition of sin. A baby who cries for no real reason at 2am demanding attention from parents who are exhausted is a personality already showing a tendency to put the self first, regardless of the cost to others. This tendency, given mature expression is the essence of sin. ME FIRST, ahead of all others! So, humans are never perfect, though for a while we are all innocent and guiltless...

Vss. 8-13 God’s own children now run and hide... Very sad, but very true. Innately we come to know that God is Good and we are Not (at least not always).

***THE FIRST QUESTION FROM GOD TO HUMANITY IS “WHERE ARE YOU?”
Sad, but true.***

God is always calling to us, "Where are you?" Perhaps the tendency to hide is one we never quite leave behind... "Depart from me Oh Lord, for I am a sinful man..." (Peter) Whether it is with our Divine Parent or our earthly parents, the relationship is almost always imperfect or "broken". The fact that parents and their own kids have a gap between them is both illogical, yet almost invariably true. Closeness is not a given. Often it is the elusive exception...

The alienation of the Human species in a way totally unseen in the rest of the creation. The writer is communicating the depth of this alienation, not it's actual origin.

"The woman thou gavest..." "The serpent (that God made and allowed to beguile!)..." Where is Harry Truman when you need him?"

Ah yes, the eternal tendency to pass the buck!!! The knee-jerk response implying lack of responsibility, lack of free intellect. The Humans who so desperately longed to be like God are now trying to make themselves little better than the animals!!!! "It was my parents fault..." "It was society..."



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Questions to ponder...

Is being innocent a condition we'd like to return to?

Why does God allow sin? (Obviously people could have been made without this capacity)

Is there a good side to sin?

Does the dynamic of sin prove the existence of another reality pertaining to what it means to be human?

Which would be preferable (in the long run), being parents to the Stepford Children, or ones who sometimes disobey and drive us batty?

To me, disobedience of Adam and Eve was a foregone conclusion. Their rebellion is ours. Sin brings a terrible dynamic into the world, yet it is the ONE thing that proves conclusively that we are NOT God's house-pets. We are free beings – morally independent entities who's decision to choose Right is validated by our ability to choose Wrong. Goodness means nothing where Evil is impossible. In addition, with the reality of Sin comes the ability to know God's forgiveness, redemption, grace and love – dynamics our children need to see in us!

In addition, the ability to act beyond rote instinct can get us into trouble. Yet it also gives occasion for the most incredible acts of self-sacrificial love and heroism that manifest the best of who we are.

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