

# GENESIS—WEEK 4

## THE FALL



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is The Creation by Michael van der Borch (~1300 – 1370)  
On display at the Museum Meermanno in The Hague, Netherlands*

The talking serpent cleverly focuses Eve on the one restriction that God has given—which she seems to have learned from Adam.

Adam is standing right there with Eve when she eats the fruit. So, he gets the blame.

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T. M. Moore, Principal  
[tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org)

Thank you.

Genesis 3:1–11 — The Fall  
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1 Genesis 3:1

*Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?”*

A boy captures a frog and, as he’s holding it in his hands, it begins to speak.

“I’m an enchanted princess, and if you kiss me, I’ll turn into a beautiful woman who will love you with all her heart.”

“Cool,” the boy says—and puts the frog in his pocket.

A little while later, the boy takes the frog out of his pocket. The frog exclaims, “Why didn’t you kiss me? It’ll be awesome!”

“Not as awesome as a talking frog.”

We tend to read today’s passage without noticing how absurd it is that the serpent speaks. This isn’t portrayed as a natural part of its craftiness. Something strange is going on here.

There’s no way this level of craftiness is possessed by an animal. I don’t understand how my dog thinks (if she “thinks” at all). It’s silly to imagine that my dog understands how I think better than I do—even if she did start talking. Someone (or something) else is putting words in the serpent’s mouth.

Also, it’s curious that the talking serpent doesn’t scare Eve off. That would send most folks running. What he says is scary too—but this is still the age of innocence, and Eve has no concept of evil.

But she’s about to learn.

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There’s a word in this passage that reveals the serpent’s cunning—“indeed” (אֲנִי, “key” in Hebrew). It’s a multi-purpose conjunction that can mean “if,” “then,” “really,” or “indeed” among other things. Here, it’s an expression of skepticism. The ESV has it as, “Did God really say ...?”

The serpent is incredulous that God would be so mean. This is deeply deceptive. The serpent is planting the thought in Eve’s head that God is not good.

Recall that at this point, the man and the woman are totally innocent (that is, naive). They have no concept of deception. They’d fall for every trick in the book. The scammers on the internet would eat them alive.

So, as we’ll soon see, Eve just corrects the serpent on the detail that God has banned eating from *every* tree. But the serpent has moved the needle. Eve is now thinking about God as the source of restrictions.

This creature is far more cunning than any internet scammer that has ever lived. He understands how Eve thinks better than she understands herself. He is guiding her down a path that she has no ideas she’s on.

Even though this is before the fall of man, something is already fallen. That something is controlling the serpent. That something is incredibly smart—and dangerous. The rest of scripture makes it clear who that something is—the devil himself. (See, for example, Revelation 12:1–9 and 20:1–2.)

Ignore this *something* at your peril.

2 Genesis 3:1b–3 (ESV)

*He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”*

God didn’t say anything about not touching the tree.

*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 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 surely die.”* — Genesis 2:16–17 (ESV)

Eve misquotes the command. That’s understandable, since she was created after the command was given. Still, it’s interesting that she got it wrong. How?

The Bible doesn’t say, so it can’t be very important. If this was something we had to know, God would have told us. Still, it’s interesting. Why did Eve misquote the command?

Of course, it’s possible that God repeated the command to Eve—and added the do not touch bit—but leaving that out would be a disturbing omission in an inspired document. Also, revising a command in that way would be unlike anything else that scripture records God doing.

So, it looks like Eve got this second-hand from Adam. That’s a problem. Before the fall, Adam must not have lied. One way or another, this has to be a miscommunication.

It would make sense for Adam to tell Eve not to even touch the tree; safety warnings get inflated all the time. If we want a child to avoid something we often tell them to not even go near it. But Eve thought this was part of God’s command, not Adam’s embellishment. How can that happen without Adam lying?

One possibility is that Adam said to her, “God said, ‘*You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden,*’ so don’t even touch it.” In English, there’s no verbal sound for the close quote after the word “garden.” The transition from the quote of God’s words to Adam’s own words would be silent in English.

If the language Adam and Eve were speaking was similar in this way, then there would be no way for Eve to know that the part about not touching the tree was Adam’s words not God’s.

Eve would have thought it was all part of what God said.

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Meanwhile, Eve is now chatting with the serpent about God’s restrictions on her and Adam. Quantitatively, the tree they cannot eat of is insignificant compared to all the trees they can eat of.

But that one tree is now the focus. The serpent has maneuvered the conversation to the subject of God’s restrictions.

For the rest of this encounter, the trees they can eat of will not be mentioned.

Only the restrictions will be an issue.

3 Genesis 3:1b–6 (ESV)

*He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For 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 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.*

Adam was standing there the whole time! That explains a lot. If Eve got the command second-hand from Adam, then he’s her reference. She’s counting on him to know what’s going on.

And he just stands there and lets her get snookered. That’s just dripping with evil. One could even accuse Adam of using her as a taster.

Sure enough, even though they both ate the fruit, scripture consistently blames the fall on Adam.

*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.* — 1 Corinthians 15:22 (ESV)

*Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived.* — 1 Timothy 2:14a (ESV)

Adam’s actions here are so outrageous that one could wonder if Adam and the serpent had set this up beforehand. That’s not the case—Adam and the serpent did not conspire—but Adam’s failure of leadership is so total that it’s traitorous. His silence “aided and abetted” the serpent.

In addition to rebelling against God, Adam betrayed Eve.

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This is puzzling. Adam’s response to seeing Eve for the first time was exceedingly positive. There’s no way he views her as expendable. When he lets her eat the fruit, he’s intending to eat it too. But why?

Greed. Remember, God’s command to Adam was that *of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat* (Genesis 2:17a, ESV). Knowledge is desirable. *The tree was to be desired to make one wise.*

But God had commanded Adam to not eat of this tree, which keeps him from having the knowledge of good and evil.

Adam wasn’t hungry; he wanted that knowledge (even though he had no idea what that means). He wanted more than the life God had given him. That’s greed—with a minor in pride.

Also, since the serpent said that when they ate the fruit they would, “*be like God, knowing good and evil,*” envy may be involved. Granted, envying God is a bit of a stretch, but the serpent thought it worth mentioning. Given that he’s “mister crafty,” and given that his trickery worked, envy seems to fit.

This is a great illustration of the stupidity and wickedness of sin.

Adam wanted something (something he knew nothing about) simply because he couldn’t have it.

4 Genesis 3:4–7 (ESV)

*But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For 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 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. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.*

So, after *the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes*, they eat the fruit and *then the eyes of both were opened*. So, how was the tree *a delight to the eyes* while their eyes were closed? Obviously, “*the eyes of both were opened*,” means something other than simply the movement of eyelids.

And it changed mankind forever. We can understand a lot about who we are if we can figure out what that change was.

Unfortunately, the Bible doesn’t specifically explain this transformation—other than to say that we fell into sin (and then to illustrate sin for the whole rest of the book). However, we do have two great clues.

First, the text doesn’t say, “*they saw that they were naked*,” it says, “*they knew that they were naked*.” Since it’s *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, the fact that they now “know” something makes sense. There are other cases where “eyes opening” has this sense.

*Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. — Numbers 22:31a (ESV)*

*So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. — 2 Kings 6:17b (ESV)*

The other big clue is an assumption in some schools of theology—this “disaster” is actually part of God’s plan. The idea that this took God by surprise is ruled out by the fact that God is outside of time. Thus, many theologians assume that the transformation made by their eating the fruit of this tree must have a purpose. We may not be able to figure out what that purpose is, but there is one.

This is one of the toughest and most important subjects in all of theology. We’ll get back to it.

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Because they ate of the tree, sin and death are an ever-present factor in everything.

But because they ate of the tree, we also have an aptitude to study those sins.

So, in a wondrous way, the problem and the solution are inextricably linked. It’s the greatest tragedy of all time; it’s the source of all other tragedies.

But it’s also the source of our ability to understand the gospel. The stage is set for God’s glorious plot twists. We’ll see this in greater detail when He passes sentence on Adam, Eve and the serpent.

Praise Him for His magnificent ways.

5 Genesis 3:7–11

*Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.*

*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*

*Then the LORD God called to Adam man and said to him, “Where are you?”*

*So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.”*

*And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?”*

What’s wrong with being naked?

Nothing; the Bible doesn’t say that their fear was rational. Remember, before the fall they weren’t afraid of anything—even a talking snake.

Now, all of a sudden, they see good and evil all around them. That creates a kind of sensory overload and they’re overwhelmed by it all. Before, they weren’t afraid of anything; now everything is scary.

So they’re afraid of being naked, even though they already had covered themselves. Then again, if there are no-see-ums in the garden, maybe their fear isn’t so crazy after all.

Of course, there’s one key evil that they’re suddenly aware of—their own. They now have a good reason to hide from God.

Adam’s explanation as to why they were hiding isn’t the whole truth.

And his “explanations” are about to get worse.

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Being able to see our own evil is essential. Our fallen nature is a tragedy, but without our ability to see and comprehend it, we’d be a lot worse off.

As an example, consider the Constitution of the United States. The founders understood our fallen human nature and realized that power corrupts (or, more likely, makes corruption manifest). They realized that too much power concentrated in a single person (or even a single branch of government) would lead to no end of problems.

So they wrote protections against that into the structure of the nation they were inventing. They set up a balance of powers between three separate branches of the government (legislative, executive, and judicial).

They wrote in checks and balances between those branches. Each branch, if need be, can be held to account by the other two.

The result is the longest lasting constitution in the history of man.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Have you ever sensed that something was from the devil?
2. Do you have trouble letting someone else control something of yours, even for a moment? (For example, are you comfortable with checking luggage at an airport?)
3. Have you ever wanted something solely because you couldn't have it?
4. Have you ever “learned” to see something—developed the ability to perceive something without any change in eyesight? There are actually countless examples, such as learning a magician's trick or how to interpret body-language. This can be a great discussion question, once the ice gets broken.
5. How does our understanding of evil inform our laws?