

In the Beginning

Paradise Lost

Genesis 2:4-3:24

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Paradise Lost

Scripture

We are currently in a series of sermons on Genesis 1-11 that I am calling, “In the Beginning.” I plan to preach only six sermons on these 11 chapters. It is just an overview of redemptive history.

Last week I preached a sermon on Genesis 1:1-2:3 about God creating the heavens and the earth. Moses wrote the book of Genesis (as well as the rest of the Pentateuch) during the forty years that the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness after they had left Egypt on their way to the Promised Land. By this time, the people knew a great deal about suffering in their lives. The narrative we are going to look at today, Genesis 2:4-3:24, is an explanation of how the world came to be the way it was.

Today, we are going to learn about Paradise lost in Genesis 2:4-3:24. I am not going to read the entire narrative, since we will be examining it in today’s sermon. I encourage you to follow along in your Bible. Let’s read just the opening verse, Genesis 2:4:

**⁴These are the generations
of the heavens and the earth
when they were created,
in the day that the Lord God made
the earth and the heavens. (Genesis 2:4-3:24)**

Introduction

A May 2013 article in *The New York Times* notes that “suicide rates among middle-aged Americans have risen sharply in the past decade.” Here are the stats behind this trend:

- From 1999 to 2010, the suicide rate among Americans ages 35 to 64 rose by nearly 30 percent.

- More Americans now die of suicide (38,364) than car accidents (33,687). That's 3,026 more people who die from suicide each year than in car crashes.
- The most pronounced increases were seen among men in their 50s, a group in which suicides jumped by nearly 50 percent.
- The suicide rate for middle-aged men was three times higher than for middle-aged women.

Researchers claim that the reasons for suicide are often complex, but this article focused on two factors – the stress of the economic downturn and the widespread availability of prescription painkillers. But it also hinted that deeper issues, like failed expectations and *a loss of hope*, might be a root cause for the increase in suicides. Dr. Julie Phillips, a researcher from Rutgers University, says, “The boomers had great expectations for what their life would look like, but... it hasn't turned out that way.” Dr. Phillips warns that future generations will be facing the same conditions that lead to this sense of despair.¹

The people of God in the time of Moses had this same loss of hope and sense of despair. They had spent 400 years in Egypt, and had given up hope of ever reaching the Promised Land again. Then, God led them out of Egypt through his servant Moses. However, even as they wandered through the wilderness with all its struggles and hardships, the people must have questioned how the world came to be as it is. So, Moses wrote today's narrative to give God's people hope.

Lesson

The analysis of the Fall in Genesis 2:4-3:24 teaches us that God banishes sinners from Paradise with a view to restoring his perfect Paradise on earth.

¹ Tara Parker-Pope, “Suicide Rates Rise Sharply in U.S.,” *The New York Times* (5-2-13).

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Let's use the following outline:

1. The Garden of God and the Creation of Man and Woman (2:4-25)
2. The Rebellion of Man and Woman, and Exile from the Garden of God (3:1-24)

I. The Garden of God and the Creation of Man and Woman (2:4-25)

First, let's look at the garden of God and the creation of man and woman.

A. God Creates the Man (2:4-7)

The narrative begins in Genesis 2:4a, **“These are the generations of....”** The English phrase **“These are the generations of...”** (*elleh toledot*) occurs ten times in the book of Genesis. This verse introduces the first of ten sets of generations that traces Israel's roots from creation to their enslavement in Egypt.

The second *toledot* is the *toledot* of Adam (Genesis 5:1-6:8). The third *toledot* is the *toledot* of Noah (Genesis 6:9-9:29). The fourth *toledot* is the *toledot* of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Genesis 10:1-11:9). The fifth *toledot* is the *toledot* of Shem (Genesis 11:10-26). The sixth *toledot* is the *toledot* of Terah (Genesis 11:27-25:11). The seventh *toledot* is the *toledot* of Ishmael (Genesis 25:12-18). The eighth *toledot* is the *toledot* of Isaac (Genesis 25:19-35:29). The ninth *toledot* is the *toledot* of Esau (Genesis 36:1-37:1). And the tenth *toledot* is the *toledot* of Jacob (Genesis 37:2-50:26).

So, Genesis 2:4a-b, **“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.”** The first *toledot* begins in Genesis 2:4 and shows what happened to the good kingdom that God created, which he declared to be “very good” (1:31). **“In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the**

heavens,” (2:4c) the earth was barren. At that time **“no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up – for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground”** (2:5).

Moses indicates the action of God in verse 7, **“Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”** Man is not a god, as some ancient people believed. Instead, Moses clearly states that God created **the man** (*ha adam*) from **the ground** (*ha adamah*). Man is of the earth. Man is an earthling, frail, made **of dust from the ground**.

Still, man is God’s special creature. God carefully, lovingly, formed the man and shaped him to be the pinnacle of his creation. And then, unlike any other creature, God **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature**.

B. God Plants the Garden (2:8-14)

Verses 8-9 inform us that God planted a garden and placed man in it, **“And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”** This garden was nothing like my parents’ prize garden of a few hundred square feet. It was an enormous, lush, secure, stunning, beautiful, large garden with every kind of **tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food**. The garden also contained **the tree of life**, which apparently was a tree whose fruit would keep man alive forever. Most importantly, however, this garden was the special dwelling place of God on earth. For it was in this garden that God used to meet with man and his wife in the

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cool of the day (3:8). The **garden in Eden** truly was Paradise on earth.

Moses said in verse 10, **“A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.”** We don’t know the locations of the Pishon or the Gihon rivers. However, we do know the location of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. So, the garden of Eden was located somewhere in modern Iraq, Syria, or Turkey, although its exact location is unknown.

C. Man Tends the Garden (2:15-18)

Verse 15 says, **“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”** Man was put to work prior to the Fall. Work, even in Paradise, gives meaning and purpose to life.

At this point, still on the sixth day of creation, the man enjoyed an incredible relationship with God and with what was already created. Now, God gave man one commandment. Verse 16, **“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.’”** God is so good to the man. He may **eat of every tree of the garden**, even of the tree of life. There is only tree that is off limits to him. And that is **the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**. Even this commandment is good, because as Sidney Greidanus said, “God treats the man, in contrast to the animals, as a moral agent who can decide to obey God willingly.”²

God places before the man a simple choice: continue in communion with God by obeying him, or break communion with God by disobeying him. The penalty for disobedience is not only loss

² Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 75.

of communion with God, it also includes death: **“you shall surely die.”** The choice is clear: an obedient life with God in Paradise or disobedience and death. The stakes are high. What will happen?

Moses, however, keeps us in suspense. Astonishingly, God notes that something in Paradise is not good. Verse 18, **“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’”**

D. Man Needs a Helper (2:18-22)

The man needs a helper. God will provide one for him.

1. God Forms the Animals (2:19-20)

God formed the animals and let all the animals pass by the man. But, we read in verse 20b, **“But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.”** Animals can be wonderful companions to humans, but they are inferior to humans. God designed man to exercise dominion over all the animals. **Adam** exercised his dominion over all the animals by naming them. And it was clear that no animal could function as a **helper fit for him**.

2. God Forms the Woman (2:21-22)

So, God went to work again. We read in verses 21-22, **“So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.”** By using part of the man to create the woman, there can be no doubt that the woman is created out of man. And there is an equality of essence of the man with the woman. No other creature was created like the woman. She is **“from the man.”**

E. *Man Receives the Woman (2:23-25)*

Although it is not as clear in the English, it is clearer in the Hebrew that when Adam saw the woman, he was ecstatic. Verse 23, **“Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’”**

Verse 24 is an interesting statement about marriage: **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”** What is interesting is that at this time there were no children, and so no parents. It is a hint of what is to come. And it is also a creational statement about the meaning and purpose of marriage.

Verse 25 tells us, **“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”** This statement was probably somewhat shocking to the people of God in Moses’ day because they now had a strong sense of shame, covering most of their bodies with long robes. But here were the man and his wife, **“both naked and were not ashamed.”** They were like little children at play. It was the perfect marriage in the perfect setting, in Paradise, the garden of God.

Up until this point, everything was bliss. God created the heavens and the earth. He made absolutely everything. He created the man, giving him life with his own divine breath. He placed him in an incredibly beautiful Paradise where he had plenty of food and meaningful work. And to top it off, God created the perfect partner for him. At the end of Genesis 2, God could have looked back, as he did at the end of Genesis 1, and said, “And behold, it was very good.” And certainly, the man and the woman could also have echoed, “And behold, it was very good.”

But everything was about to change.

II. The Rebellion of Man and Woman, and Exile from the Garden of God (3:1-24)

And second, let's look at the rebellion of man and woman, and their exile from the garden of God.

A new character enters the idyllic setting in the garden of Eden.

A. *Temptation (3:1-5)*

Genesis 3:1a says, **“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.”** We don't know exactly what kind of creature **the serpent** was. However, Moses clearly implies that **the serpent**, like all other creatures, had been created by God, and was originally good.

Moses also notes two other features about **the serpent**. First, he was **more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made**. And second, the serpent speaks! **He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”** (3:1b). A speaking serpent! No other creature in Paradise speaks. So, Moses wants us to understand that some other being has taken possession of the serpent and speaks through it.

Notice how the serpent twists God's words. God had said in Genesis 2:16, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,” except for that one tree. The serpent, who is Satan, ignores God's good and generous gifts of food and plenty, and makes God's commandment sound unreasonable. **“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”** (3:1b).

The woman engaged Satan in conversation, and she **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” (3:2-3). She overstated God’s prohibition. God never said, **“Neither shall you touch it,”** referring to the tree that is in the midst of the garden.

But the serpent saw an opening and 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”** (3:4-5). Satan was trying to get the woman to question God’s word and his authority. Satan implied that God could not be trusted, and that he wanted to keep humans ignorant and dependent.

That is the major struggle even today. Satan causes people all over the world to distrust God’s word and his authority.

B. Disobedience (3:6-8)

Apparently, at this point Satan left.

Verse 6 says, **“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.”**

Note that throughout the conversation between the woman and the serpent, the man was standing right there. And he said nothing! God made the covenant with Adam, and Adam did not stop the woman from speaking to the serpent, or correct her wrong view of God’s commandment. Adam stood by and watched his wife eat, and then he himself ate. The man and the woman rebelled against God! Sin entered Paradise! Paradise was lost!

The result of the Fall into sin show up immediately. Verse 7 says, **“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”** The first result of sin was the impact on their relationship to each other. No longer could they

stand naked before each other and feel no shame. They made coverings for themselves. A barrier was erected between them.

A second result of sin was their fear of God. Verse 8 says, **“And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”** Their wonderful, personal, direct communion with God was now broken. They were estranged from God.

C. Excuses (3:9-13)

But God did not give up on his rebellious creatures. God seeks the spiritually lost. We read about God’s interaction with the man in verses 9-12, **“But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.’ He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of 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 of the tree, and I ate.’”** This is a classic blame shift. Adam blames the woman for his own sin. And he even implies that God was responsible because God gave the woman to him! All marital bliss has gone out the window!

In verse 13 God turned to the woman, **“What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”** The woman also shifts the blame, to the serpent.

Notice that neither the man nor the woman take responsibility for their sin. We so often do not take responsibility for our own sin too, don’t we?

D. Judgment (3:14-19)

God immediately imposes his judgment against his creatures.

First, the Lord God said to the serpent in verses 14-15, **“Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”** This is the first time in the Bible that we read about God’s curse. God’s curse is the opposite of God’s blessing. God’s curse removes his creatures from his blessing.

Second, to the woman God said in verse 16, **“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”** The woman now found great pain in pregnancy and in delivery. And she also would find her relationship to her husband now to be a struggle for dominance.

Finally, to Adam God said in verses 17-19, **“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”** Instead of living in Paradise, with all its beauty and plenty, humans will now have to live on earth that has been cursed by God. Nothing will be easy for man’s work. Meaningful work will be a sweaty toil. And the ultimate judgment for sin is death.

And yet, even in this judgment, God gives a promise of good news. Theologians call it the *protoevangelion*. Literally, that means “first gospel.” It is the first time that God gives the good news of salvation for rebellious sinners. It is found in verse 15 where God says to the serpent, **“I will put enmity between you and the**

woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” This is the good news that sin will not rule forever. Even in his judgment against the serpent God implies that death is not immediate, for the woman will have offspring. And though the offspring of the serpent will bruise the offspring of the woman, the offspring of the woman will bruise the serpent’s head. That good news finds its fulfillment at Calvary in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

E. Punishment (3:20-24)

Another hint of God’s grace is found in verse 20, **“The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.”** She will not die, but will bear children. In fact, she will indeed be **the mother of all** children.

Finally, God’s grace is seen in a wonderful way in verse 21, **“And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”** Here is the first instance of the doctrine of substitution. Clearly, animals died instead of the man and the woman. The skins that clothed Adam and his wife came from animals that died in the place of Adam and his wife. It is a marvelous picture of a substitute paying the penalty for another.

Nevertheless, sin has consequences. And so God banished the rebellious couple from Paradise. Verses 23-24 say, **“Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.”**

Sin has very real consequences. No longer would humans be able to enjoy an intimate face-to-face communion with God. They were cut off from the presence of God.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of the Fall in Genesis 2:4-3:24, we should be strengthened in the certain hope that God in his grace will restore Paradise to earth.

We have seen some hints in the narrative that God in his grace will restore Paradise to earth. The rest of biblical history tells us that eventually Jesus came to earth. He lived and died, and Satan thought he had won the battle.

But God raised Jesus back to life again. And Satan's victory was turned into his defeat. And the book of Revelation tells us that the first one to be judged will be Satan in Revelation 20:10, "And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur."

And then notice what Revelation 22:1-3, 14 says:

Then the angel showed me *the river* of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, *the tree of life* with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. *No longer will there be anything accursed*, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.... *Blessed* are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to *the tree of life* and that they may enter the city by the gates.

Paradise is not lost after all! Because of Jesus Christ, Paradise will be restored on earth. That is the hope and comfort for all who live in a sin-cursed world. Paradise is the certain hope for all who put their trust in Jesus Christ.

I pray that your trust in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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