

## Prayers

### To God

*Weekly theme: Pray for the Lord's protection*

*Pray carefully about everything you are doing today, and seek the Lord's protection from the evils and sinfulness that exist all around you. If you do not know what these may be, then wait on the Lord for this revelation because it is important*

### For myself

*Imagine yourself as you grow older. It may not be a welcome thought, but unless the Lord comes sooner, you will grow older. Pray therefore that you will have the dignity and faith to deal with the problems that come with age; health issues, the changing of culture (even in church), and difficult issue like death itself. You may think me hard to ask this of you today, but if you consider these things then you will be blessed indeed.*

### For others

**Gracious Lord, the news we see reports crimes committed by people who have been drawn into all manner of evil and deviance. We pray for the souls of those who are at risk of such temptation, and ask that we may always be ready to do what we can to bring redemption, love and compassion to those places where people are easily drawn the other way. May we truly be a 'light' on a hill, shining for our Lord and God where this light is so desperately needed; AMEN**

## Meditation

All the colours of the rainbow  
belong to Him who made the light:

All species and varieties of creature  
belong to Him who conceived true life:

All the peoples throughout the world  
belong to Him who made us 'like' Himself:

All exploration and all discoveries  
belong to Him who spoke and it was done:

All paintings, books and objects of art  
belong to Him who fashioned creativity:

All the notes of a symphony or song  
belong to Him who gave meaning to sound:

All the praises of the past, present and future  
belong to Him who has done all things well!

## Bible Passage

### Genesis 3:1-7

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more shrewd than any of the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman,

*'Did God really say, "**You must not eat from any tree in the garden**"?'*

<sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent,

*'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup> but the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said "**You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.**"'*

<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman,

*'You will not die, surely! <sup>5</sup> for God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil.'*

<sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, delightful to look at, and that the tree was desirable for wisdom, she took some of its fruit and ate.

She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate; <sup>7</sup> their eyes were then opened and they realised they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made simple clothes to cover themselves.

## Review

This very well known Biblical story brings to a sudden end the wonderful stories of Creation found in the first two chapters of Genesis, and tells a sorry tale. The wonderful and perfect creation of God is about to be shattered by the fall from grace of the man and the woman He has created in His own image. Quite simply, Genesis 3 tells the story of why the world we experience is not the perfect creation of God revealed in Genesis 1 and 2. While the glories of the world in which we live are forever illuminated by the Godly insights of the story of Creation, the story of the 'Fall' in chapter 3 tells us why we cannot ever grasp or hold on to this perfection even though it is within our hearts to understand it, appreciate it, and believe it. Mysteriously and unexplainably here in the Bible, some part of God's created order is in rebellion against its Maker and relentlessly pulls men and women away from the destiny God has prepared for them. Real life becomes something different from God's created perfection.

There is no timescale given to this story, and we are left with the impression that what happened merely follows on from the creation of man and woman in their separate male and female identities before God ('ish' and 'ishah' - see 2:23). Historically we call this story 'the Fall', because it describes the observable fact that the world and the people who live in it are far less than perfect. Indeed, they have a natural tendency not just to accept temptation to do what is wrong, but to enjoy it as well. Towards the end of the chapter we discover that this rebellion against God has eternal consequences that affect men and women not just individually, but in their relationships with each other. Even the world in which they have been set suffers as a consequence of their sin.

What happened in the Garden of Eden is generally called the story of Adam and Eve. It is surprising therefore to discover that in the Bible text, the names 'Adam' and 'Eve' do not appear at all! Read the story again and you will find that the two are simply referred to as '*the man*' and '*the woman*'! Adam was last mentioned by name before he was put to sleep by God in the previous chapter (2:21), and the woman has yet to be given a name (she receives the name 'Eve' at the end of chapter three - 3:20). So, although we can justly say that the story is about Adam and Eve, we should accept that as it stands, it is fundamentally about 'people'. The story is deeply rooted in the ancient history of the people of Israel and it reveals a spiritual truth about why everyone, from ancient times until now, falls short of the image and likeness of God (1:27,28).

The next big question to ask is this; where does evil come from? It is relatively obvious to us that there is evil in the world, and Genesis 3 assumes that it is found in the form of temptation that comes from a serpent. But the question remains, where does this evil come from? Also, 'how powerful and extensive is evil?' Genesis 3 does not answer the first question, though later Scriptures assume the pre-existence of evil in the world before creation, and the 'fall' of this evil prior to its invasion of earth and God's created domains (e.g. ). Nevertheless, the answer given here to the second question is conclusive, for sin and evil are everywhere and no-one can escape its grip.

Commentaries on this text say wildly different things, but most of them point us to the obvious fact that the story focuses on the temptation of Eve (3:1-6). One traditional explanation of this suggests that Genesis 3 follows on from Genesis 2 to explain that sexual temptation and lust are the root of all evil, and this is highlighted by Eve's great sin in tempting her husband to eat of the forbidden fruit and so contravene God's laws (3:6,7). I do not believe this is helpful, but it has been highly influential, and great church leaders such as Augustine have unfortunately linked sex with the evils that lie at the heart of the fallen human condition. Such beliefs have in my opinion had a damaging effect on Christian witness and morality for centuries.

Surely, the whole of Genesis 3 is about human failing in general, and this is how Scripture in the New Testament deals with the text (for example, Rom. 5:14ff, 1 Cor. 15:22, 1 Tim. 2:13,14). Genesis 3 certainly follows on from Genesis 2, but it tells us that although we are all gloriously made by the breath of God (Gen 2:7), male and female, still all of us, in one way or another, have succumbed to the lures of evil and the temptations first felt by the woman and readily accepted by the man. Helpful for us today, Genesis 3 describes how temptation works to draw people away from God into the sinful realm of rebellion against the Creator. And this is the root of the evil that affects all humanity and all society even to this day.

Here in this passage, Eve is tempted by the shrewd serpent with devious words; she is eventually made completely uncertain about what God has told her and does not know who to believe. That is the power of temptation, for anyone, male or female. We should note one thing here, however, which is that although the serpent clearly represents evil in a personalised form, Satan is not mentioned in the story! So is this Satan at work or is it not? Later generations of God's people were quite clear about this and Jewish writings between the Old and New Testaments show that people certainly believed the serpent to represent Satan in this story. It is more important though for us to look at what the serpent does than try to argue about who the serpent is.

The serpent questions Eve about God's instructions given to Adam about eating the fruit of the trees in the middle of the garden (3:1), and this one action arouses the woman's desire both to eat the fruit and also rebel against God's instructions. Once she has expressed interest in the serpent's suggestions (3:3), she submits to further insinuations about God's truthfulness (3:4,5) and to the temptation to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge (3:5,6). After this, she gives the fruit to her husband, and he responds to his wife with no comment,

lately eating what is offered to him. As a consequence, everything that the serpent has said seems to become true; the man and woman do not die, their eyes are opened, and they immediately possess the ability to discern the sexual difference which divides them. The whole sequence is a parable of how temptation and sin work in human life, and we will learn most from this passage if we study this sequence of events with the greatest of care. Evil afflicts us in the same ways today, and Satan tempts God's people with the same techniques.

But this is not the end of Genesis 3; there is much more. These temptations and their results are not God's will for His people, and in tomorrow's passage the story continues to agonise over the catastrophic division created between not only God and people, but between God and the rest of His creation. What we have read today is just the start of the story of humanity that leads eventually to the Cross of Christ. This is highly important Scripture.

## **Discipleship**

### ***Application***

#### ***Did 'the Fall' really happen?***

It is not easy to write about 'the Fall', for any comment we make on it is tainted by the sinfulness of humanity. Personally, I have no difficulty in believing that an event of this nature happened, for I have come to accept the distinct possibility of a real figure of one called Adam, from whom together with Eve, 'god-breathed' humanity as we know it has descended. You will have to follow me through a few more studies yet to discover my full reasons for saying this!

#### ***The power of sin and temptation***

What seems to me to be beyond doubt is that this story is the most powerful description of the origins of human sin. It tells of the power of temptation coming first from outside a person, through the figure of the serpent, representing Satan, as understood in the New Testament. The text then describes the personal journey by which evil fomented within the human soul to become full blown sin against God. The manner in which this works for each of us is different because of our cultures and our personalities, but the common elements are identified here so that we can recognise them; temptation, the power of suggestion, inappropriate questioning, and devious untruths built on fear. However much we try to understand the human psyche through science, psychology and psychoanalysis, the elements of human sin and rebellion as described in Genesis 3 remain fundamental.

#### ***Struggling with evil today***

Furthermore, the value of Genesis 3 is little if it is merely a description of a past event from which we purport to be liberated just because we go to church. We who know the saving power of Christ also know that whilst we live in the world we must grapple with the temptations of the enemy just as Jesus did, and a good look at Genesis 3 will help us if we will only apply its truths to ourselves rather than either the past or others. The Gospel is that in Christ, the consequences of 'the Fall' are overcome; what is needed is for us to know both the truths of scripture and the truth about ourselves so that we may fully apply that Gospel in our own lives. It is then that God can use us as He wishes in His Kingdom.

## ***Ideas for what to do***

- Take time to spend with the Lord and ask Him to show you whether you are easily led by temptations of one sort or another. If you find that there is some aspect of your life which needs to be changed, do not hesitate to let the Holy Spirit help you change.
- Pray for the many people in our world today who do not fully understand the nature of temptation and sin around them, or indeed how they fall into it themselves. Pray for the light of Jesus to shine into the world.

## ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. Which forms of temptation are suggested to you by this story, and how are they experienced today?
2. Is there any reason why the woman is tempted before the man? What does this suggest to us today?
3. Is it possible to call the serpent's words 'prophetic' because they do in fact come true? To what extent are they still true today?

## **Final Prayer**

We pray, 'forgive us our sin'; yet You know, Lord Jesus, whether we have repented. You know, Holy Spirit, whether we have yielded in spirit, and You know, Almighty Father, whether we are sincere in our words and actions. Lead us into true penitence, Lord Jesus, so that our prayers for forgiveness may indeed reflect the reality of our lives. AMEN