

Session #2, Part 1: Genesis and Original Sin

The Story of Original Sin in the Book of Genesis: Genesis 3:1-24

We need four volunteers to read this story Genesis 3:1-7, :8-15, :16-20, :21-24

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

There is much debate over what exactly is meant by the discussion of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. (Genesis 2:16-17, 3:1-7) Getting into a detailed discussion of that would take as far beyond the scope of this class, but there is a general consensus among biblical scholars that this refers to the first human beings being given the freedom to choose between good and evil, and that there were consequences to face if they disobeyed.

The Serpent

Of course the serpent mentioned in Genesis (3:1-3, :13-14) should not be understood as referring to an ordinary snake. but as pointing to an appearance or manifestation of the devil. But it is probably also important to note that the Hebrew word for snake, which can be roughly transliterated as *nahash*, could also refer to a dragon or monster. (See Isaiah 27:1 and Hahn p. 66) This would mean that when Satan appeared that very likely the text points to him doing this in an intimidating form. So probably we should not read this story as just saying that the first human beings were tricked and tempted, they were also at least implicitly threatened.

Consequences

So let's look more closely at what this story tells us:

1. Genesis 2:16-17, What happens if they eat the fruit?
Genesis 3:6, This means they faced spiritual death not immediate physical death
2. Genesis 3:8, What was their new attitude towards God (who created and loved them, see Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:7)?
They were afraid, ashamed, and distrusting.
3. Genesis 3:12, What was their new attitude towards each other? (Compare to Genesis 2:20-25)
They were opposed to and divided against each other.
4. Genesis 3:16-19, there is now suffering in the world
What parts of their lives were going to involve suffering?
Marriage, child birth, and work
These things are still good, and good things still come from them, but now there was going to be evil and suffering mixed in with the good.

Whose Fault is Original Sin?

Whose fault is original sin? Adam's or Eve's?

What is your first response to this question? Why?

Let's read Romans 5:12, :14-:19:

Therefore, just as through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned....Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come. But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by that one person's transgression the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one person Jesus Christ overflow for the many. And the gift is not like the result of the one person's sinning. For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation; but the gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal. For if, by the transgression of one person, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one person Jesus Christ. In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all. For just as through the disobedience of one person the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of one the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:12, :14-19)

Now whose fault do you think original sin is? Why?

Some Comic Relief

According to the video whose fault is original sin?

The Real Answer

Whose fault is it really?

Genesis 3:6 shows that because Adam was right there it was both their faults

This shows the equality of men and women for better (both are made in God's image) and worse (both fell into sin and disobeyed God)

St. Paul's Explanation of Original Sin

We're going to take a deeper look at what St. Paul has to tell us about original sin. This is what my homily that you need to read is about, so when you read that it will help you to understand the material in this section.

Reread Romans 5:12, :14-:19

Does anything about this passage seem unfair?

We suffer because of what someone else did.

“By that one person’s transgression the many died” (Rom 5:15)

“After one sin there was judgment that brought condemnation” (Rom 5:16)

“By the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one” (Rom 5:17)

“Through one transgression condemnation came upon all” (Rom 5:18)

“Through the disobedience of the one the many were made sinners” (Rom 5:19)

Is there any sort of good news that balances out what might seem to be unfair?

We benefit because of what Jesus Christ did.

“The gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflows for the many” (Rom 5:15)

“The gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal” (Rom 5:16)

“Those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17)

“Through one righteous act, acquittal and life came to all” (Rom 5:18)

“Through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous” (Rom 5:19)

When our first ancestors failed a test, we all failed a test. But when Jesus died and rose, all of humanity was given the chance to die and rise with him. Here we see the reality of original sin, and the reality of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

We are born separated from God, and with a tendency towards sin because of Adam. And our salvation doesn’t come from within us or from our own efforts, but from Jesus Christ.

So, can we fully understand or explain this?

No.

But this is how it works. Our typical understanding of individual responsibility doesn’t quite take into account everything the bible has to tell us about original sin and about the redemption that comes from Jesus Christ. There is a much greater unity possessed by all men and women than we might realize at first.

When we study science there are some basic things we need to understand; like fire burns things and gravity causes things to fall. If you don’t know this you can’t study science. When we study theology we need to know that, the actions of the *first* human beings somehow have a lasting impact on all of humanity, and the actions of the *one* man Jesus Christ make salvation available to us all. If we don’t know this we can’t study theology.

What this means can be summarized this way.

1. The first human beings were born free of sin.
2. They chose to sin.
3. As a result we inherited a tendency towards sin, which is called original sin.
4. We share in the negative consequences of these actions, but we can also share in the consequences of the actions of Jesus Christ.

It is important to understand original sin and its consequences. But it is so much more important that that we understand that this problem does have a solution, that Jesus Christ has died and risen from the dead to save us from our sins. This salvation is something that we will be studying in much, much greater depth over the course of the coming weeks and months so that we can have a deeper understanding of the entire bible, including the story of original sin.

Session #2, Part 2: Abraham, Our Father in the Faith

Genesis 12-24

The Strengths and the Failures of Abraham

STRENGTHS

1. He had the guts to leave, Genesis 12:1-:4

<http://www.biblestudy.org/maps/abrajrfl.html>

He moved an incredible distance, leaving behind everything he had ever known, in order to follow God's instructions. The sacrifice this required, and the difficulty of a journey like this, would have been incredible.

2. He fought a war to rescue Lot (his nephew), Genesis 14:12-:16
3. He believed God's promise that he would be the Father of many nations, Genesis 15:1-:6

This meant that he would have physical descendents, the people and nation of Israel were to be descended from him, but also that as the leader of those with whom God made his covenant he would be the spiritual father of all those who believed in God. In Matthew 3:9 Jesus said "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones." What this means is that those who don't follow God are not really Abraham's children, no matter who they are descended from, and that all those who truly follow God are Abraham's children no matter what their ancestry is.

4. He obeyed God by being circumcised as an adult, Genesis 17:9-:12, :23-:25

Circumcision was one sign that set the Jewish people apart from many of their neighbors. There were other laws and rules, about such things as what the Jewish people could eat and what they could wear, that served the same purpose. By doing these things, which aren't good or bad in and of themselves, it made it easier to cut themselves off from the sinful practices, like child sacrifice and prostitution as a religious ritual, that were part of the cultures that surrounded them.

Nowadays nearly all boys are circumcised as infants and have no memory of going through this. Obviously having to do this at an age when you are aware of what is going on and would be able to remember it would not have been a pleasant experience. His willingness to do so was an incredible display of trust in God.

WEAKNESSES

1. He put his wife in a very bad situation by lying about who she was, Genesis 12:10-20 and 20:1-13

Abraham and Sarah lived in a time and a culture very different from ours. When they traveled to foreign lands Abraham was worried that the rulers would kill him to take his wife. So he had her lie and say she was his sister so that the kings wouldn't feel the need to kill him to get to her. Somehow he made this same mistake multiple times years apart.

2. He failed to trust God's promise that he would be the Father of many nations, Genesis 16:1-6

God had promised the childless Abraham and Sarah that their descendents would be blessed. But so far they didn't have any. So Sarah comes up with a plan to change this, which involves Abraham having a child with their servant Hagar and then raising him as their own. Abraham and Sarah got themselves into a very bad situation, because they were not willing to wait for God to get the job done in his own time.

These examples show that even people who at times show great faithfulness and holiness are not free of sin. Even the greatest figures in the bible, those who are held up as role models, did some very stupid and evil things. This doesn't mean these are the actions that we should imitate, it means that even our best examples are imperfect.

Abraham and Isaac, Genesis 22:1-19

THINGS TO NOTICE ABOUT THIS STORY

1. Isaac accepted this

He never tried to escape or fight back. Whatever he thought was going on he trusted that what God was leading Abraham to do was the right thing. This is just like Jesus who was afraid and struggled when he was crucified, but did not stop it from happening.

And behold, one of those who accompanied Jesus put his hand to his sword, drew it, and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels? But then how would the scriptures be fulfilled which say that it must come to pass in this way?" Matthew 26:51-54

2. Abraham said that he would return with Isaac

In Genesis 22:5 Abraham says that he and Isaac will return together. He seems to have sensed that he had to do what God was asking of him, but that somehow he would not lose his son.

3. Abraham and Isaac did not have to go through with this, God the Father and God the Son did

Genesis 22:10-:11 shows us that ultimately Isaac was saved, after he and Abraham were tested. To save us from our sins God the Father and God the Son had to go through with their sacrifice. God tested Abraham and Isaac to see if they were capable of accepting this, but then didn't make them go through with it. This was not the case when Jesus faced his cross. There are many parts of the Old Testament that point towards what Jesus Christ would do for us on the cross. This is one of the most important of those passages. God was giving us a hint of what he himself would do when the time had come to defeat sin and the Devil.

Abraham, His Family, and the New Testament

We need four volunteers to read some New Testament passages that talk about Abraham and his family

Hebrews 11:8-:12, Hebrews 11:17-:22, James 2:20-:24, Romans 4:16-:22

In these verses we hear about Abraham, his wife Sarah, their son Isaac, his son Jacob, and his son Joseph (the Technicolor Dream Coat guy).

The New Testament uses them as examples of what Christians should be like. These people are examples of what it means to have faith in God, and those who want to live like Christians should see them as models. This shows us that the New Testament wasn't something separate or cut off from the Old Testament, but that both Testaments are connected and the New rests on the foundation of the old. It's interesting to note that the gap between the lifetime of Abraham and the writing of the New Testament is about the same as that between the writing of the New Testament and our own time. So if the New Testament Christians followed the example of those who lived so long before them, we should do the same by looking to God's faithful followers in the Old and New Testaments as our examples.

James 2 and Romans 4, Our Salvation, and Abraham's Salvation

1. Some times a tension is seen between James and Romans when it come to Christian teaching on salvation. When James speaks about works, and Romans speaks about faith, disagreement is seen. This sometimes leads to the idea that Romans is a Protestant letter, while James is a Catholic one.
2. This is an unhelpful way of looking at things. Both books use Abraham as an example, so the point in both books is that the life of a Christian is meant to look like the life of Abraham (the trusting in God part of his life, not the committing adultery part).
3. The way in which we are saved is meant to look like the way in which Abraham was saved. Which I think leads to some interesting questions we should ask ourselves.

Who does our salvation come from? Jesus

If the way in which we receive our salvation follows the same pattern as the way in which Abraham received his, then who did his salvation come from? Jesus

This would seem to mean that the grace offered through Christ's death on the cross could be received before he died on the cross. Somehow the benefits of that historic event, which occurred within time, are not bound by time. How does that work? That's a tough one to explain. But I don't see how a proper understanding of what the bible teaches us about Abraham's salvation can lead us to any other conclusion.

Interesting Passages to Notice

1. Future slavery and suffering of God's people predicted, Genesis 15:13

This is a prediction of the slavery that the Israelites would suffer through in Egypt, until God used Moses to set them free. It points to the incredible hardship and suffering that was consistently faced by God's people throughout the Old Testament. This hardship will be something that we will learn much more about as we continue to make our way through the Old Testament.

2. The incredible degree of failure and sin shown by those God protects, Genesis 19:30-:38

This horrible story shows us another regular theme of the Old Testament. Even those people who knew about God and claimed to follow him fell into horrible sin, over and over again. This shows us the reality of human sinfulness and the incredible extent of this sinfulness, God's incredible patience in putting up with people who behaved so badly, and the desperate need that we have for God's forgiveness. All of these things point towards the forgiveness that only comes from Jesus Christ's work on the cross.

This passage also shows us how frequently the rejection of God involved a fall into sexual sin. Those who reject God's will for their lives reject his will for their bodies. Sexual sin is far from being the only type of sin taken seriously in the Old Testament, but there are so many passages (this one, as well as Genesis 9:20-:25, 12:10-:20, 16:1-:6, 20:1-:13 and other passages) that show how strong of a link there is between the improper use of the human body and the refusal to accept the Lordship of God.