

Temptation and Sin

<i>Text</i>	Genesis 3:1-6
<i>Readings</i>	1 Timothy 2, Romans 5:12-19
<i>Theme</i>	Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan and disobeyed God's command
<i>Purpose</i>	To explain the origin and nature of sin and to warn against temptation

The word "Genesis" means beginning or origin. This first book of the Bible describes the beginning of the world and of time, the origins of men and women, of marriage, of work, and of the Sabbath. All of these either came from God or were instituted by God.

In chapter 3 we read about the origin of sin. Sin, however, did not come from God. God is not the author or the originator of evil.

Genesis 1 and 2 tells us that the original world was perfect; "God saw all that he had made and it was very good" (Gen 1:31).

Into this perfect world God placed two human beings, Adam and Eve. They too were perfect. But God gave them a free will. He wanted them to obey Him and serve Him, and to test their obedience he commanded them not to eat of the tree in the centre of the garden, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

They were free to choose:

free to obey God or disobey;

free to follow him or turn away;

free to remain perfect or to sin.

God allowed Satan to come into this Garden and tempt Eve. Satan's presence there was not the cause of sin because Adam and Eve were free to choose. Satan only came with the temptation, and temptation is not sin. But it was a very subtle temptation, as we will see.

Let's examine the first character in this story - **The Serpent**

We are told that "the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made."

This does not mean that it was evil. God made everything perfect, including the snakes. It means that the serpent was clever, shrewd, subtle. And the cleverness and subtlety of this animal fitted with Satan's purpose.

Satan came to speak to Eve and he put doubts in her mind about **God and his goodness.**

Verse 1: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

The tone of his question is probably one of amazement; Satan is incredulous: “Did God really say that?! Incredible!” You see, what he is suggesting is that God was restrictive, that God was keeping things from them. He questioned God’s goodness; God was not letting them enjoy themselves properly.

Eve corrected Satan: read verses 2-3...

Unfortunately she misquoted God; she added the words, “and you must not touch it.” God did not say that in his original command. This was the way Eve perceived it - that they must stay well away from that tree.

Sometimes we are tempted in a similar way: We are tempted to think that God’s laws are too demanding and exacting. That they are stifling us, cramping our style, making life too boring, taking the fun and the joy out of life. Let’s recognise that thoughts like that are temptations from the Evil One. Everything God created is good and is to be received with thanksgiving from the hand of a great and good Creator.

Satan also questioned **God’s truth**. Verse 4: “You will not surely die”, the serpent said to the woman.

Again, the tone of his voice could well be mocking; “You must be kidding! Fancy believing that! You simpleton! How naive!”

If his tone was one of mockery his statement was a flat contradiction of God’s word. God had said: You will surely die.
Satan said: You will *not* surely die.

This says something about Satan.

It shows us his pride, his impudence, his gall. It shows that he is working in direct opposition to God.

But it also shows us that there is no truth in him. Jesus said that about him: “When he lies he speaks his native language because he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44).

Satan will also come to us and he will tempt us to question God’s truth. God has promised blessing for obedience and threatened cursing for disobedience. But Satan speaks to us and says; “Nothing will happen to you. You’ll be okay. It will work out all right. You’ll get away with it.”

One of the most common errors in times of temptation is to fail to think about the consequences of our actions.

“Just another drink; I’ll be okay.”

“Sex just this once; I won’t get found out.”

“It’s only a small lie; nothing will come of it.” We kid ourselves that we can escape the consequences of our sins. But that is impossible. Satan is lying.

He questioned God's goodness and God's truth and, thirdly, he questioned **God's motives**. Verse 5: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Satan suggested that God was keeping something from them; that he was not giving them all that he could; that he was preventing them from experiencing what was best - that is, to be God-like.

He implied that God was being selfish, that he was acting out of self-interest; that he was jealously guarding something for himself.

He put it to Eve that she could out-smart God; "If you eat of the tree you will be as clever as God himself."

His words reveal a lot about his own motives and ideas, because this is exactly what he had wanted for *himself* - he had wanted to be like God! This is what led to his fall from his high position in heaven.

Now, in this temptation, he encouraged Eve to aspire to the same goal. He wanted to bring her down with him - he wants to do that to you too; to drag you down with him into the pit.

There was a sense in which Satan's words were true. It is true that if they ate of the tree they would know good and evil. But they would know evil by *experiencing* it; they came to know sin by *becoming* sinful. They would not know it in the same way that God knows good and evil in all his holiness.

Someone has said that when a half truth is presented as the whole truth it becomes an untruth. This is what we have here. Satan presented Eve with a terrible half-truth.

And tragically she believed him and fell for his lies.

This temptation presents a clear warning for us because there are times when we want to be like God, when we want to know what he knows, when we are dissatisfied with our position on earth, or our small knowledge, or our limited perspective. We want to know more, we want to be like God.

But we need to be content with God's word. Moses said to Israel; "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." (Deuteronomy 29:29) We need to be content with our position and let God be God.

Satan questioned God's goodness, his truth and his motives. **How did Eve respond?** She is the second main character in this story. Eve made three fundamental errors.

She was guided by her reason.

Satan drew her into a discussion about whether or not God was right. She allowed herself to get into a debate with him; she reasoned with him. That was a fatal mistake.

You may have had the experience of getting into an argument with someone who is much more clever than you are. In this discussion you soon found yourself out-gunned. Every argument you put forward was shot down in flames. But when they put forward an argument you could not offer an intelligent or convincing response. You may well have been right but you could not win against that person.

That's how it is when you get into an argument with Satan; because he is clever, powerful, intelligent, smart, and subtle. You cannot win by using your own reason.

So what is the answer? You must do what Jesus did when tempted by the devil: you must go back to the word of God. In those temptations in the wilderness Jesus went back again and again and said; "It is written". He quoted the Scriptures. You must do the same. That is why it is necessary to memorise the Scriptures.

You need to be able to quote the Bible; you need to say, "I'm not going to do that because it is written..."

We need to rely on God and on his word. James said this when he wrote; "Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7).

Eve's first serious error was that she didn't do this. She stopped to discuss the matter; she argued the point; she considered what he had to say instead of submitting herself to God's word.

Her second error was that she was guided by **her senses**.

She "saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye." (vs 6a).

That should not surprise us, and it should not have surprised Eve, because that was said of all the trees of God's creation - they were all "pleasing to the eye and good for food" (2:9), and this tree was no different.

But that wasn't the point. The point was that God had said they were not allowed to eat from this one. That was his command.

But Eve was taken in by her senses. One writer notes that she followed her impressions rather than her instructions.

Again she should have recalled God's word, remembered his instruction, heeded his command, gone back to what he had said.

Today too we are warned against being taken in by the attractions of the world. The Apostle John wrote; "For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world." (1 John 2:16).

"All that glitters is not gold." Don't be taken in by appearances. Don't be tempted by your senses. Remember God's word and hold on to that.

Eve was guided by her reason, and by her senses, and thirdly, **by her pride**. Verse 6: She saw that the fruit was “also desirable for gaining wisdom.”

She thought about the words of Satan: That she could be like God, having a knowledge of good and evil. She wanted to be like him, to make her own decisions, to be ‘in the know’, to be ‘enlightened’.

In the early centuries of the Christian church there was a heresy called Gnosticism, based on the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning knowledge. The Gnostics promised people a secret knowledge; they could be part of the inner circle; they could know what others did not know; they could be like God.

This same temptation comes to us today. We too are tempted by pride; we want to be in the know; we want to be like God; we want to make our own decisions rather than be guided by God’s word.

Eve was taken in by Satan’s words: “**she took some and ate it.**” She made her choice. She exercised her free will and disobeyed God. She broke his command. She decided to make up her own mind.

This is the essence of sin: it is disobedience. It is choosing to follow your will rather than God’s will.

And the Lord held Eve responsible for her sin, as our reading in 1 Timothy 2 made clear; “it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner” (vs 14).

But you might ask; “Where was **Adam** in all this? What was he doing while all this was going on?”

Where was he? He was with Eve. We are told that in verse 6: “She also gave some to her husband, *who was with her*, and he ate it.”

And what was he doing? Someone has suggested that he was sucking his thumb! That is not a serious suggestion, but it makes a point - he wasn’t doing anything! He didn’t say anything! He did not take any responsibility or show any leadership. He was led instead of leading. The Lord makes that point in his rebuke of Adam in verse 17; that he listened to his wife, with the implication is that he should have listened to God’s words and acted on them.

Just as Eve was held responsible for her sin, so too was Adam. He, after all, was the head of his wife; he was supposed to lead; and the Lord held him ultimately accountable for what happened.

Paul makes that clear in Romans 5 where he described Adam as the representative head of humanity. “...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men...” (v 12). “...the many died by the trespass of the one man...” (v 15).

Sin and death came into the world because of the disobedience of Adam.

This is the origin of evil. This is where all the trouble began. This is the cause of all the evil we see around us. This is why we have lies, stealing, jealousy, bitterness, anger, hatred, rape, murder, war, famine. This is why the world is in the mess it is.

Adam and Eve knew immediately that they had done what was wrong. They immediately felt the consequences of their sin.

They realised they were naked.

They knew the difference between good and evil because they had done what was evil.

Instead of being like God they felt shame and guilt.

The original order of things had changed. The perfection had been shattered.

The original harmony and peace was broken by the discord of sin. They hid from God and they began to blame each other.

These are the all too familiar consequences of sin, all of which are passed on to us.

Thankfully the story does not end there.

The *first* Adam had failed, but God promised a *second* Adam, one who would crush the head of the serpent.

The first Adam was tempted, but *failed*;
the second Adam was tempted, but *held firm*.

The first Adam *disobeyed* God and carried humanity into sin; the second Adam *obeyed* God the Father and carries His people into the new life of a relationship with God.

Paul explained this in Romans 5: "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:19).

Today we need insight into the nature of temptation.

We need a clear understanding of the origin of sin.

And we need a clear view of Jesus as Saviour.

Amen