

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 3B, The Garden Story, Part 2

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This is Dr. Kenneth Mathews in his teaching on the book of Genesis. This is session 3B, The Garden Story, Genesis 2:4-3:24. Session 3, part 2.

We begin in the end of chapter 2, verses 24 and 25. The garden story in chapter 2 has depicted a fruitful, beautiful, and beneficial environment for the man and the woman as God has placed them in this garden to reproduce and to cultivate the garden.

So, when we come to verse 24, we have a depiction of the coming back together of the man and the woman. We might say that the man and the woman were created of the same stuff, and now we are told that they are united through their sexual relations as a figure, as a symbol of the coming back together as though they were one entity. Now, that doesn't mean, and I hasten to say, that they surrender their personhood and surrender their uniqueness as man and woman, but rather that what they do is they come together for the greater purpose of receiving the blessing of God as we found it in chapter 1, where in verse 28, God has blessed humanity with the capacity to procreate and to exercise in His name, rule over the terrestrial world.

Verse 24 reads, for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. So, you'll notice that there is a leaving and then the translation united. This is a language that could be translated of attaching.

I like the word cleaving. Leaving and cleaving. Leaving and cleaving.

The Hebrew words leaving and cleaving are terms that are found in the context of covenant. Covenant we understand as a relationship. It's not a transaction as it is a relationship, and that's what we have with the man and the woman.

They form a unique covenant relationship of commitment, mutual surrender, and mutual love in order to achieve God's blessing for that union by becoming one flesh. And so there has to be a separation from the covenant family of origin from father and mother to form a new cleaving, a new union, a new covenant commitment. And in doing so, they will, in turn, we will discover, become a father and a mother who will reproduce themselves in their children.

And so, by this means then that there will be a network of family support. Now in leaving, as we know from Hebrew culture and customs, leaving father and mother does not mean a suspension of honoring father and mother, but rather that there is a greater loyalty given to the spouse. The spouse comes first in loyalty, and then the

kinsmen of family and clan and tribe loyalty to each of those spheres grows out of the commitment to the spouse.

And then they become one flesh. Now, verse 25 is setting us up for what will follow. And that is that the man and his wife, the man and his woman in the Hebrew text, were both naked.

And yet, there was no shame. Now this is obviously reading it from the perspective of after the time of the sin that is committed by the man and the woman. Because obviously Adam and Eve didn't know what is a father and a mother.

Adam and Eve have never birthed a child. Eve has never been pregnant. And so this is told from that perspective of after the fact.

And what is remarkable to the readers of later times when the Pentateuch comes together, as we had dated it before in the time of Moses and when Moses was in the wilderness with that first generation of Hebrew people, what is remarkable is that they were naked. And there is no shame attached to their nakedness. Well, this is going to be contrasted by what we discover with the man and the woman who, after their sinfulness, we are told in verse 7, that the eyes of both of them were open, and they realized they were naked.

And they took steps to try to reverse the shame attached to their nakedness. I think that they were ashamed of their nakedness with their spouse and also certainly ashamed in the presence of God. So, they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

So, this will be reversed. They will experience shame. And to this day, in the Western civilization impacted by, of course, the tradition of Jews and then Christians, that nakedness as we find it elsewhere in the Bible, is used to express the waywardness of humanity.

And again, I want to reiterate and say that nakedness in and of itself, you see, is God created man and woman naked. Nakedness in and of itself is not sinful. It's when nakedness is out of bounds, and the clothing that is required to cover the nakedness becomes the way that God has intended for men and women who have sinned against God to, of course, dress.

Well, chapter 3 then brings us to a new and unexpected participant in the garden. That's why in chapter 3, verse 1, we read Now the Serpent, and we see that this is introducing a new episode. Now, the serpent was more crafty and more shrewd than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made.

And he said to the woman, did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden? So, let's start then with what the serpent is. We might even say who is the serpent? What is meant by crafty, had made, and then the fact that the serpent speaks and deceives the woman. So, this verse in chapter 3 introduces us to a change in the created order that is cosmic in its catastrophe.

So, what I have in mind here is it seems like in every generation, there is a catastrophic, cataclysmic event that marks that generation. For example, my mother and dad were part of the greatest American generation, which it has sometimes been called, because they lived through the Great Second War. What marked that generation was what occurred at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese, and World War II erupted with the war, the second world war.

Now, when it comes to my generation, I think that what is one of the most traumatic events that occurred would have been in 1963, the assassination of the presidency, President John Kennedy. Perhaps 1968 with the assassination of Martin Luther King and the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the brother of John Kennedy. The major disruption in the war in Vietnam called the Tet Offensive of 1968 could well be one that is pointed to.

Or, getting closer to many of our listener's generation is what occurred in 2001, the 9-11 event, when we have the terrorists who destroyed the two towers, the Pentagon, and then attempted destruction that resulted in a fourth plane going down in Pennsylvania. So, what I'm leading to is that each generation, in no doubt, this present young generation will always remember the pandemic, the pre-pandemic, and the post-pandemic that has occurred. And this will mark the present generation unless there is even greater disruption and trauma that occurs in the future.

Well, when it comes to Chapter 3 of Genesis, this is the most momentous marking of human life in human history. And that's why you will hear theologians speak of the pre-fall and the post-fall worlds, just like one could speak of the pre-flood and the post-flood worlds. This is what I mean by a cosmic trauma that occurred because of the dramatic and traumatic differences that occurred in the relationships that God had established.

In chapter 2 of Harmony and the Beauty, now we will have that reversed. So, we must focus then and give attention to what occurs in this garden. Now, the serpent.

Notice the serpent has been created by God, the Lord God had made. The serpent then is not an independent, equal rival to God, but rather is subject ultimately to the sovereignty of God, just like what we found in Genesis Chapter 1, where the chaos of

verse 2 that's described is under the hovering presence of the Spirit of God. Here, this serpent is still subject ultimately to God's sovereign will and purposes.

The serpent has been variously interpreted. And so, let's take a look at who and what the serpent is. Remember now, in this narrative, it describes this enmity against the woman and this enemy against God as an animal serpent.

It does not say specifically Satan. But when you take the behavior and character of the serpent and compare that to the evil being Satan, then you see enough correspondence that will suggest that the serpent is representative of Satan. The apostle Paul interpreted the serpent as Satan, as did all Jewish and Christian interpreters have.

Romans 16, verse 20, Romans 16, verse 20, the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. Now, that clearly refers to chapter 3, verse 15. Well, you remember it speaks of the battle between the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring.

And we read in verse 15, be the latter part of the verse. He, that is the woman's offspring, will crush your head. But, or yet, the serpent's offspring will strike the deliverer's heel.

That's what the apostle Paul has in mind. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you, he says. This is how all Jewish and Christian interpreters have understood the serpent to represent Satan.

There is an understanding that Satan here, the serpent, the serpent, I should say, is representative in the ancient world and the Bible with the ambiguity of wisdom or evil. That's what the New International Version sets up: the reader was more crafty, say, skillful than any of the world's wild animals. So that's the positive side of a serpent, which was greatly valued in the ancient Near East.

You remember that Jesus spoke of being wise as serpents. But there is, of course, the overriding negative perspective that the serpent was evil and an opponent of God and would then bring about evil consequences. In Israel, anything that would crawl along the ground like a serpent was deemed unclean and could not be eaten.

So, I think without any reservation that the people who would be the first readers of the Genesis account would understand that the serpent is introduced into the narrative as a great enemy of God and also of humanity and the enemy of Israel itself. And I might mention to you, as a reader, in chapter 3, verse 1, this is a narrative that you read. This is not a description that the woman reads.

So, we have an advantage over the woman, because as we read it, we're going to very carefully judge what the serpent has to say, and that we are going to be, as

readers, very suspicious of an evil agenda that the serpent has. Now, a question is often asked about how is it that a serpent can speak? He said to the woman, well, serpents, of course, do not speak. And I don't think there's any reason to believe that the serpent is required to have had a speaking role.

Now, there are differences of opinion about this serpent. One would be that the serpent did actually speak because the serpent was possessed by a demon. Another understanding, one which I feel is all the more powerful, that is indicating the presence of Satan, is a symbolic use of a serpent, which has been seen as the arch enemy of humanity, an arch enemy of good and prosperity.

So, the serpent then, as a symbol, would be very effective to the reader. Now, this doesn't mean that the serpent is solely a symbol, but rather that it is a representative language or word or image, I should say, of a reality, a historical reality, and that is the presence of an evil being. So, as you know, there are some interpreters who think here that the serpent is representative of the principle of evil, and that is an abstract idea.

An abstract idea would be like a concept that is not specific in particular in an actual thing. So, some aspects of, or in abstractions, would be honesty, goodness, and poetry, those are abstractions. But what is concrete? What is specific? What is actual? If you were to take abstraction poetry, the concrete would be a poem by a poet.

So, the question is, do we have an abstraction, or do we have a concrete, actual being? And I think the resolution to this is what we find in chapter 3, verse 14, where it uses the language of a being's lifespan. It says at the end of verse 14, all the days of your life, with reference to the history and lifespan of the serpent. And then it's the same language that you'll find used in verse 17 in the oracle of judgment against the man, where it also says at the end of verse 17, all the days of your life.

And, of course, that is concrete. The man, Adam, is a concrete, living, personal being. And that's what we have with the serpent, who is representative of an actual evil being.

Now, there is also a discussion about the mystery of the origin of evil. And I use the word mystery because the Bible does not specifically say the origin of evil. It does say here that it falls within the sovereign control of God, that it is not on the same all-powerful plane as God, that we don't have a true dualism between good and evil.

But when it comes to explaining the source of evil, the Bible is silent. As I said on our last occasion, God does reveal many things, and we can know many things about God, evil, and the way in which reality operates because God unveils that. But he does not tell us about the origin of evil, and he does not take responsibility.

He never takes on the responsibility of evil. Now, he does take on responsibility of the consequences of evil. For example, he is responsible for bringing about a judgment, say, of death or plague or some other cataclysmic kind of event, say, the flood in Genesis chapters 6 through 8. But he is not taking on the responsibility of evil as a principle.

When we look at what the serpent specifically says to the woman in verse 1, does God really say that you must not eat from any tree in the garden? Now, let's compare that carefully. Remember that he's crafty. He was shrewd, the serpent.

What we find in chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, are the command, specific prohibition, that the serpent has in mind. And the Lord God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden. I want you to notice how generous and liberal God is in this command.

First, on the positive. A more specific, literal rendering of verse 16 would be, you are, you may, because it is permission, you may surely eat from any, any tree in the garden. Verse 17 gives one restriction but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.

So, this is turned upside down. The serpent entices the woman and, through trickery, allures her. Now, did God really say, tree in the garden?

He did not say you must not eat from any tree in the garden. So there, He is tempting the woman by placing an idea before her. Notice that He uses the negative. You must not eat.

In the Hebrew construction, the negative occurs first at the head of the clause. And then it says, from any tree in the garden. There again, there's a reversal from the generosity to the stinginess on the part of God.

The woman responds, and there has been some criticism of the woman in verse 3, where she adds to this tree in the middle of the garden the language, you must not touch it. When you compare to verse 17 of chapter 2, you don't actually have that. So, is she adding to what God is saying in the command? Well, we have to remember now that when it came to understanding what is clean and unclean, from the perspective of the first readers of the Genesis account, they will have concluded that this was commendable because there is a prohibition against even touching those things that were unsightly or inappropriate for life with God.

That here she says, you must not touch it, may not be seen so much as a negative criticism of the woman that she's going the extra step in order to say, we can't even touch it. We can't even get around it. We had to be very careful.

And that's what God is saying. Well, the serpent then is quite bold. He moves from being his trickery self to bold rejection.

Not, you will surely not die. And that is a clear contradiction to what God had forewarned in chapter 2, verse 17. Then he gives an explanation for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil.

And, of course, in the ancient world, there was a great interest in pursuing the eternal life that the gods enjoyed. So, the implication of this is that God is selfish. God is self-interested.

He's not doing what is good for you. But also, he's saying on the opposite side, if you will eat, you will benefit and you will have God's wisdom, knowing good and evil. And you will have that life that's implied.

Well, in some way, the serpent is right. But he doesn't tell the whole story. He only tells the positive side of the story.

But yes, they will gain a measure of wisdom and experience in knowing good and evil. They will be able to make judgments and decisions that are for either good or evil.

And they will lose their innocence because, as we see, they recognize their nakedness. That's what they will lose—their innocence.

This is the negative side. But also, importantly, they will die. The opposite of the goal to have eternal life.

They will die. And so that's what's in mind when it comes to chapter 3, verse 22. This is after the fall.

This is after the judgment oracles. And then in verse 22. And the Lord God said the man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.

So, in some way, it's not clearly specified. The serpent was right. He says to the man and woman, you eat of this fruit, and you will know good and evil.

And so, to that degree, the consequences of this wisdom that is gained unlawfully illicitly result in death. The book of Proverbs tells us that God bestows wisdom. He owns and possesses wisdom.

And he distributes wisdom for those who seek wisdom from him. And that this wisdom is seen as a part of the fear of the Lord, language used for worship, a submissive spirit. And God bestows wisdom generously.

Just like we find in James chapter 1, where if we will ask God for wisdom in living in the context of trial and difficulty, he will bestow it upon us generously. So, as a consequence, in verse 22, it says humanity, the man must not be allowed to reach out his hand and also take from the tree of life and eat and live forever. So, in order for the man and the woman to suffer the just consequences of their act of disobedience, they are going to be expelled.

Verse 23. So, the Lord God banished the man and, of course, the woman with him from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. That's an echo, isn't it? He said that he had been taken from the dust and would now be expelled.

From access to the Tree of Life. He and the woman have been forever outside the garden. You were born outside the garden.

I was born outside the garden. Something dramatically has changed. The cosmic disruption, the trauma, so much so that God would not have men and women live forever in this broken relationship.

The best thing for the man and woman was what God had in mind from the outside: to bless the man and woman with this fruitful life and this personal relationship with him and to enjoy their creator. So, by banishing the man and his wife, it set in motion a means whereby God, yes, would judge them to death, but also would step in and reverse that judgment by a deliverer who comes from the offspring of the woman. So in verse 24, after he drove the man out, he placed heavenly beings, cherubim, and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the Tree of Life on the east side of the Garden of Eden.

So forever men and women have been impacted by the fall of our first parents. Now when we look at verses 6 through 7, here we have the allurement described when the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom. She took some and ate it.

And notice that she gives it to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Well, there's a lot of room for speculation, but that's all it is, is speculation. We might speculate: Did the woman know about the prohibition? After all, the prohibition was set in chapter 2 to be given to the man.

And then here's another speculative thought. To what degree was the husband present with the woman during this dialogue between the serpent and the man? I

think that what we can say with some confidence is that the man did not show any reservations about eating the fruit, whereas at least we can say the woman was deceived. But the man, it says, very tersely, he just simply ate it out of willful rebellion against the Lord's command.

Now, there has been in Christian theology the idea of original sin. And original sin has been misunderstood by many people because some may think that original sin is simply referring to the first sin, and indeed it does. But more importantly, it's talking about the source of sin, and that is men and women became sinners, and as sinners they produce sins.

And that's what we mean: the character and nature of all men and women who have been born outside the garden have taken on the nature of the sin of their parents. And so we see this played out within Genesis itself, where there is a cause and effect between chapters 3 and 4, where there is the murder that is committed by Cain against his brother Abel. This would have been one of the most horrific sins that could have been committed in the eyes of the readers of Genesis, the first readers, because of their community loyalty.

Fratricide, killing one's kinsmen, would have been a horrific disloyalty that deserved the most severe treatment response on the part of the community. And that's why you will find when it comes to premeditated murder, such as we find here with Cain against Abel, that there is the capital punishment of death by the community against the guilty party. When we continue to read the subsequent chapters, we will find that there is an increase in sinfulness, wickedness, and severity to the point that God must bring about this flood that brings an end to such wickedness.

It had become so pandemic, so universal. So, within Genesis itself, within the narrative of the sinfulness of man and woman as becoming sinners, in other words, the source of sin, born into sin, committing sins and sinfulness, we find this teaching. It is not simply a matter of later Christian theologians who wrongly interpret this narrative and draw from this wrong interpretation the concept of original sin.

Take a look then at the narrative texture of the story in chapters two and three. When we look at chapter two, we have an order that begins with God, who created the man, and from whom the man comes the woman. Then, the man and woman, in concert, are to rule over and subjugate the animal world, which would include the serpent.

That's the progression. God, man, then woman, and last serpent. This, however, is reversed in chapter three.

So, we have the serpent who rules over the woman. And in the judgment articles, we will see that the woman is rebellious against her husband, the man. But finally, and ultimately, and most critically, the man, you see, is disobedient to God.

This is spelled out in the narrative texture and in the judgment oracles. If you look at them in verses 14 through 19, the serpent is now made subject to the woman's offspring. And we are told that the woman will be subject to the husband in verse 16, where it says, your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.

And then, in verse 17 and following, there it describes how now the man is put in his proper subjection to God because he will return to dust from which he was taken. In each case, we will find that the judgment oracle takes some feature of the person, or in the case of the serpent, and brings judgment against that figure. So the serpent, just as the serpent was the craftiest of all beasts, is now considered the lowest of all beasts because he is crawling on his belly, a sign clearly of humiliation, eating dust.

Eating dust will remind us now of how he is responsible for reversing man's creation out of the dust, and for dusting, he will return. And then there is the battle with the woman. What is instructive, of course, about the judgment against the woman in verse 16 is that even though she will have pain in childbirth and will become subject to her husband, in verse 16, she is going to bear children.

This is part of the blessing of God that will be ongoing. Then the man who was to work the ground, you will see he will now have to labor painfully, just like the woman has pain in childbirth. The man will produce food, sustenance, as God would have him survive, but now it's going to be by the sweat of your brow.

And then, ultimately, after his death, he will be subject again. So, God, in his judgment oracles, reorders what was disrupted as a result of the sin of the man and the woman. Now, one question we need to pursue is how Christian theology understood original sin.

The best passage to turn to in this case would be Romans chapter 5, verses 12 through 21. Romans chapter 5, 12 through 21. Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people because all sinned.

To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. So, let's pause right here and see that the Apostle Paul is describing the universality of sinfulness that came into the world through the one man, Adam. This is clearly what he has in mind, but yet he wants to clarify that sin did not enter into the world when Moses gave the Ten Commandments.

That sin was already in the world, hence sin had its origin in humanity in the garden. Because, well, because men and women died. Adam and Eve died.

In chapter 5, we have a listing of the creation of Adam and then his son Seth. It says in this listing of the progeny of Adam and Seth that the person died in each case. So, in verse 5, it says altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died, and then he died, and then he died, all the way through the genealogy of chapter 5. And I think that's what the Apostle Paul surely had in mind when he says in verse 14, although there was not a Mosaic law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam.

Well, what Paul has in mind there is one of the Ten Commandments. He's talking about a specific law, a code, and I do not think that he was in any way saying that there is no prohibition, such as we find in not eating from the tree of good and evil. So now we are to understand in verse 14 who is a type or a pattern of one to come.

So now he's going to compare and contrast Adam, the first human, and then the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the one to come. And he clarifies and specifies this, verse 15, but the gift is not like the trespass, for if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, here it is, Jesus Christ. He's the new Adam, the last Adam.

So, if so much was impacted by the trespass of Adam, how much more blessed is the gracious act on the part of Jesus Christ to provide the gift of life beyond death? So, we pick up in verse 8, consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification in life for all people. 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.

So here we have the idea of corporate solidarity, which we find in the Bible, which was a part of the psyche and custom of peoples in the ancient world, and that as a person can represent the whole community. Adam represents the whole human family, for from him will come all of the human family. And Jesus Christ is the one who represents all of the human family who receive the grace of God because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who then provides a substitutionary atonement or reconciliation between God and all those who are in Christ.

I'm not saying just every human being, but rather all the human beings who are in Christ, and that's the contrast. Those all in Adam, including every one of us, would be born sinners, and the evidence of that would be our sinfulness, our sins. And then in Christ Jesus, we are born anew, as we find in John chapter 3, the whole idea of the new life that we enjoy in Christ Jesus.

So, what we find is those who are in Christ will be made or declared righteous on the basis of the complete total obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Father. Verse 20, the law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. In other words, that the law did make a person a sinner.

The law exposed human sinfulness and gave opportunity or occasion for humanity to sin. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more. So that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

This is how original sin and concomitant original guilt are to be understood. When we return for the next session, we will continue with chapter 3 and its theological implications, as well as understanding what occurred outside the garden as we look at the consequences of the sin that occurred in the garden.

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