

Dr. Kenneth A. Mathews, Genesis, Session 3B, The Garden Story Part 1 (Gen. 2:4-3:24) NotebookLM's 20-min. Podcast Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to our deep dive into one of the most well-known and maybe misunderstood stories ever told. Misunderstood is right. Garden of Eden.

Yeah. We're going to be unpacking some really fascinating excerpts from Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture series on Genesis, and get ready for some aha moments because this isn't Sunday school anymore. No, it's not.

We're going to go beyond talking snakes and that forbidden fruit to uncover what this ancient narrative can reveal about humanity and, you know, about our relationship with God and the consequences of the choices that we make. Yeah. It's a story that has captivated people, you know, for millennia.

For good reason, right? Yeah. I mean, it really touches on those big questions that I think we all grapple with, you know, good and evil, temptation, you know, the nature of knowledge. Yeah.

So let's start with something that might actually surprise you. Okay. Dr. Mathews, he talks about this idea of living and cleaving from Genesis 2.24. Okay.

And he emphasizes that when a man leaves his family of origin to unite with his wife, it's actually establishing a new covenant, a new kind of prioritization of that spousal bond. That's a really fascinating concept when you think about it because it's something that, you know, resonates across cultures and history. I mean, anthropologists have observed, you know, similar patterns of kinship and marriage formation where that creation of a new family unit, you know, involves that shift of primary loyalty to the spouse.

Yeah. It makes you wonder, how did those early societies navigate those shifting family dynamics? And how does this idea of leaving and cleaving play out in our own lives and relationships today? It's a big question. Yeah.

It is a question definitely worth pondering. For sure. For sure.

So let's move on to... Right. The text takes us to this really intriguing shift from innocence to shame after the fall in Genesis 3:7. Right. Remember back in Genesis 2.25, Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed.

But then after they disobey God, that changes completely. It does. Yeah.

It's like this veil of self-awareness suddenly descends upon them. Right. And it's not the nakedness itself that becomes the issue, right? No.

It's the shame that's associated with it. It reflects a broken relationship, not just with each other, but with God. Their perception of themselves, their bodies, has changed.

It has. Yeah. And this theme of clothing and covering as symbolic of, you know, our relationship with the divine pops up in so many different religions and cultures.

It does. Yeah. Yeah.

Absolutely. I mean, think about, you know, the veiling practices in some traditions or even the vestments worn by religious leaders. You know, it seems like, you know, this story has resonated through all of human history in terms of shaping our understanding of what's sacred and what's, you know, profane.

For sure. Okay. So now for the character that everybody wants to talk about.

Okay. The serpent. Genesis 3.1 calls him crafty or more crafty than any other animal that the Lord God had made.

And Dr. Mathews points out that there is several different interpretations of, you know, who or what this serpent represents. Some see him as a literal talking animal, maybe even possessed by a demon. Others view him as a symbol of Satan himself.

And then there's the idea that the serpent just embodies that principle of evil. Yeah. Dr. Mathews, though, you know, he leans toward the serpent representing an actual evil being, and he bases that on Genesis 3:14 and 17, where the serpent's lifespan is mentioned right alongside Adam's.

Oh, wow. So it suggests, you know, it's not just a symbol, but an actual entity. And what's interesting to me is that, you know, the seemingly simple story is diving into this cosmic battle between good and evil.

Right. Which has fascinated theologians and philosophers for centuries. So how does this crafty serpent actually tempt Eve? What's his strategy? He's very good at manipulation.

Yeah. You know, he starts by kind of subtly questioning God's command. Oh, yeah.

You know, did God really say... Like a classic, right? Yeah. He's sowing seeds of doubt right from the start. That twisting of the words and making people kind of question what they believe.

Absolutely. And then he portrays God as restrictive and even, you know, cruel, holding Eve back from true knowledge and power. And then, you know, he promises her this forbidden knowledge, this godlike status, which appeals to that deep-seated human desire, you know, to become like God.

And it works so well because it plays on that natural curiosity and the desire for more, you know? Yeah. But what about Eve? Yeah. What about Eve? What drives her to take the fruit? I mean, Genesis 3:6, it says, it was good for food and pleasing to the eye.

You know, so there's that appeal to the senses. Right. But it also mentions, you know, desirable for gaining wisdom.

It seems like it was this combination of different factors that drew her in. I think it was. Yeah.

And it's interesting, you know, that she adds that detail about not even touching the tree. Right. Which God didn't explicitly say.

Yeah. So is she amplifying the prohibition, or is there some kind of cultural understanding there where maybe there was an unspoken rule about avoiding even proximity to these forbidden things? Yeah. You know, like creating this buffer zone between themselves and temptation.

Right. Exactly. But then we have Adam.

Right. He just takes the fruit, no questions asked. And compared to Eve's internal struggle, he seems so passive.

Yeah. And that's what makes his choice so significant. Yeah.

You know, even without the serpent, you know, whispering in his ear. He willingly participates. Yeah.

And it raises all kinds of questions about accountability and responsibility, you know, especially in shared experiences. Right. So we have the disobedience and then boom, these huge consequences.

Exactly. Genesis 3:22-24 describes this massive cosmic disruption. They're expelled from Eden.

They lose access to the tree of life. There's pain in childbirth. Relationships are strained.

It's this ripple effect of brokenness that seems to just spread outward. And if we connect that to the bigger picture, you know, you see parallels to these fall narratives across mythology and literature, you know, that idea of this lost paradise, a golden age that's gone forever. It's a very universal theme.

It really is. It's a theme that speaks to this deep human longing for something that's been lost. You know, that primal connection to something greater than ourselves.

Right. Okay. So now for a concept that can be a little bit tricky, original sin, Dr. Mathews, he explains that it's not just about that first sin in the garden, you know.

It's about inheriting a sinful nature. And he uses Romans 5.1221 to explain how sin entered the world through Adam and spread to all humanity. And he's really careful to point out that it's not about blaming us for what Adam and Eve did.

Right. It's about recognizing that we're all born into a world that's fundamentally altered by sin. Yeah.

Yeah. A world where, you know, we're predisposed to this selfishness and rebellion against God. It's like we're all playing on a tilted playing field and making it harder to choose the right path.

That's a really good way to put it. So while we're all affected by this, Dr. Mathews emphasizes that God's grace is even more powerful, so it's not hopeless. There's a way out of this cycle of sin and brokenness.

There is. Yeah. So we'll dive into that a little bit more later.

But first, let's unpack the judgments that God pronounces on the serpent. Okay. The woman and the man in Genesis 3:14-19, each judgment seems to reflect that specific nature of their transgression.

Yeah. There's a very clear connection between the sin and the consequence, you know. Yeah.

The serpent, you know, is known for his cunning and his deceptive words. He's humiliated and cursed to crawl on his belly, you know. The woman experiences pain in childbirth, and then there's a shift in her relationship with her husband.

Okay. And, you know, Dr. Mathews is very careful to point out that this doesn't mean that women are inherently subservient. Right.

But that sin has disrupted that harmony of their original relationship. Right. It's almost like, you know, a consequence of their shared disobedience impacting their connection with each other.

Exactly. And then, you know, there's the man who's supposed to be God's representative on earth, caring for the garden and all creation. But because of his disobedience, he faces, you know, a life of toil and struggle.

Yeah. You know, the ground, which once yielded, you know, its bounty freely, now requires sweat and effort to produce food. It's almost as if the natural world itself is reflecting that brokenness that has entered the human heart.

That's a good way to put it. And ultimately, all of humanity faces death. A return to the dust from which we were created.

And that finality, you know, underscores the weight of their disobedience. It's this stark reminder that our choices have real consequences, not just for ourselves, but for generations to come. This is just the beginning, folks.

We've only scratched the surface of this fascinating story, so stay with us as we continue to uncover those deeper meanings and the enduring relevance of the Garden of Eden. Welcome back to our deep dive into the Garden of Eden. You know, it's amazing how this story continues to spark so much discussion and debate, even after all these centuries.

Yeah, it really does speak to the enduring power of these, you know, foundational narratives. I think they shape our understanding of ourselves, our world, and, you know, our

relationship with the divine. Last time we left off talking about the judgments that God pronounced on the serpent, the woman, and the man.

But there's this fascinating pattern that Dr. Mathews points out, and it's a reversal of order that happens after the fall. That's right. Yeah.

In Genesis 2, you know, there's this clear hierarchy. God creates man. Man is given dominion over the animals, and woman is created from man.

But after the sin, that order is completely disrupted. You know, the serpent, who was created to be under man's authority, now he deceives the woman. The woman, who was created as, you know, a helper and companion to man, now experiences tension and a shift in her relationship with him.

And man, who was created to live in harmony with God, now finds himself alienated and, you know, subject to death. So it's like this domino effect of disobedience, right? One act of rebellion just triggers this chain reaction, throwing everything out of balance. Exactly.

And what's even more fascinating is how this reversal of order connects to those judgment oracles that we talked about earlier. You know, the serpent, who used his cunning to kind of elevate himself above humanity, is now brought low, forced to crawl on the dust. You know? Yeah.

It's almost as if he's being put back in his rightful place. It's a powerful image. And what about the woman? Her punishment seems to reflect the nature of her transgression as well.

Yeah. She was deceived by the serpent's promises, you know, of equality with God, tempted by that idea of possessing forbidden knowledge. Now she faces this increased pain in childbirth, a consequence that directly relates to her role in bringing life into the world.

And Dr. Mathews is careful to point out that this doesn't mean that, you know, women are inherently subservient. But that sin has disrupted the harmony of that original relationship. Yeah.

It's almost like it's this consequence of their shared disobedience that's impacting their connection with each other. Precisely. And then there's the man, you know, he was supposed to be God's representative on earth, caring for the garden and, you know, all of creation.

But now, because of his disobedience, he faces this life of toil and struggle. The ground, which once yielded its bounty freely, now requires sweat and effort to produce food. It's almost as if the natural world itself is reflecting that brokenness, you know, that's entered the human heart.

That's a really powerful way to put it. And ultimately all humanity faces death, a return to the dust for which we were created. And that finality, you know, underscores the weight of their disobedience.

It's this stark reminder that, you know, our choices have these real consequences, not just for ourselves, but for generations to come. This brings us to this complex concept of original sin. We touched on it earlier, but Dr. Mathews really dives deep into what this means.

He emphasizes that original sin isn't just about that one act of disobedience in the garden. No, it's not. It's about inheriting a sinful nature, a predisposition towards selfishness and rebellion against God.

And he draws on Romans 5:12-21 to explain how sin entered the world through Adam and spread to all humanity. That's right. And to really understand this passage, I think it's important to remember that Paul, you know, the author of Romans, he's drawing a parallel between Adam and Christ.

He's explaining how Adam's sin brought death into the world while Christ's obedience brings life. But to really grasp that concept of original sin, you kind of have to go back to those early chapters of Genesis. Before the fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed this perfect fellowship with God.

They were created in his image, reflecting his goodness and holiness. But when they chose to disobey, they fractured that image. They introduced sin and death into the world.

And that brokenness has been passed down through every generation since. So it's not like we're being punished for Adam and Eve's sin directly. It's more like we inherit this broken human nature.

Right. This tendency to choose our own desires over God's will. Exactly.

And, you know, this idea has been debated for centuries, with different Christian denominations interpreting it in various ways. Some emphasize the guilt that we inherit from Adam, while others focus on the corruption of our human nature. But that core concept remains the same.

We are all born into a world that's been fundamentally altered by sin, and this isn't meant to make us feel hopeless or condemned, but rather to help us understand our need for a savior. So it's not like we're puppets being controlled by some external force of sin. We still have free will.

Right? Absolutely. We still have choices to make. Yeah.

But we make those choices within a context that's been shaped by sin's influence. It's like we're all given a set of tools, but those tools have been dulled and damaged by sin. We can still use them, but it takes more effort, more intentionality to create something beautiful and lasting.

It's interesting how this idea of that tilted playing field comes up again. So how do we even begin to level the playing field? Is there a way out of this cycle of sin and brokenness? That's where the concept of grace becomes so important. You know, Dr. Mathews emphasizes that while we're all affected by original sin, God's grace is even more powerful, and he points to Jesus Christ as the ultimate answer to the problem of sin.

Right. He calls Jesus the new Adam. The one who, through his perfect obedience and sacrifice on the cross, offers us forgiveness and a new life.

So it's like that reset button, a chance to start over with a clean slate. In a way, yes, but it's not just about wiping away the past. It's about receiving a new nature, a new heart that's aligned with God's will.

Remember that image of God that was fractured by sin. Right. Well, through Christ, that image is restored.

We become new creations empowered by the Holy Spirit to live lives that reflect God's love and grace. It's not just about going to heaven when we die. It's about experiencing transformation here and now, becoming more like Christ each day.

Yeah. It's like the Garden of Eden story isn't just about a lost paradise. It's about the hope of a restored paradise, you know, a future where sin's power is broken and we can once again walk in fellowship with God.

That's a beautiful way to put it. Yeah. The Garden story, with all its complexity and its challenges, ultimately points us toward hope and redemption.

For sure. And that's a theme we'll continue to explore as we move into the final part of our deep dive. Right.

Welcome back to the deep dive. I'm telling you, we are wrapping up our exploration of the Garden of Eden story. And I don't know about you, but I'm still processing everything.

Me too. Me too. It's a lot to take in, you know? Yeah.

It really is. It's such a profound look at, you know, human nature and divine justice. And I think Dr. Mathews' insights have really given us a new lens through which to view this familiar story.

You have. Yeah. Yeah.

So last time we were talking about that fascinating reversal of order that happens after the fall and how that played out in those judgment oracles. And we were talking about how each punishment really mirrors the nature of that transgression. Right.

But it raises some tough questions, doesn't it? It does. Yeah. I mean, how do we reconcile this idea of a just God with all the suffering that we see in the world, especially, you know, when we consider that concept of original sin? That is a question that has challenged theologians and philosophers for centuries.

Right. And there's really no easy answer, you know. But I think if you look closely at the Garden story, you see that even in the midst of judgment, God doesn't abandon humanity.

So even when he's pronouncing these curses, there's still like this little glimmer of hope woven in. Exactly. Yeah.

Like, take the judgment on the woman. You know, yes, she experiences this increased pain in childbirth. Yeah.

But she's still given the ability to bear children, you know. Right. So it's like God is acknowledging the consequence of sin while still affirming the goodness of creation.

Right. Life goes on, and God is continuing to bless and sustain his creation even in the midst of, you know, brokenness. Yeah.

What about the judgment on the man? Yeah. What message of hope is kind of hidden there? Well, he's forced to toil and labor for his food. Right.

Right. But even in that toil, there's this sense of purpose and provision, you know. Okay.

It's almost as if work becomes this way of participating in God's ongoing work of creation and redemption. Right. It's not just about punishment.

It's about participating in this larger story, even when it's difficult. Exactly. And remember, even death, you know, that ultimate consequence of sin.

Right. It's not the end of the story. No.

The garden narrative, for all its darkness and brokenness, ultimately points us towards hope. It does. Yeah.

Because of that promise of resurrection and new life through Jesus Christ, or like that reset button that we were talking about earlier. Precisely. God is always working to restore what has been lost, you know, to heal what's been broken.

Yeah. That reminds me of something that Dr. Mathews pointed out earlier, that idea that the serpent represents an actual evil being. And it suggests that this story is really about this cosmic battle between good and evil.

And within that framework, you know, the serpent's defeat, even though it's not immediate, is ultimately assured. Because of that prophecy in Genesis 3:15, right? Exactly. About the woman's offspring crushing the serpent's head.

It foreshadows, you know, Jesus Christ's victory over sin and death, and reminds us that even when the odds seem stacked against us, you know, God's plan will prevail. So this isn't just some ancient tale. It's a story that's still unfolding.

It is. And we're all part of it, living out the consequences. But also offered a chance to participate in the redemption of the world.

Right, we grapple with those same temptations, those same desires, you know, for knowledge and power. And we're offered that same choice. Yeah.

To follow our own will or to surrender to God's grace. This deep dive has given me so much to think about. And I want to leave our listeners with a final thought-provoking question.

And Dr. Mathews didn't specifically address this, but it's something I've been wrestling with. If you were in Adam and Eve's place, standing before that tree, knowing the consequences, would you have eaten the fruit? What would you have done differently? And what does your answer reveal about you? Wow. That's a powerful question.

It is. Yeah. I want to ponder as we kind of navigate, you know, the choices and the temptations in our own lives.

Thank you for joining us on this deep dive into the Garden of Eden. Until next time, keep exploring, keep questioning, and keep diving deep.