

Old Testament Literature

Genesis 3 Curses and the Flood

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt explores the transition of humanity from objective to subjective knowledge of evil in Genesis 3 and the resulting relational fracture between God and creation. It analyzes the specific curses on the serpent, the woman, and the man, framing them not as passive fates but as conflicts to be actively resisted through redemptive living and divine hope. The narrative moves through the tragedy of Cain and Abel, illustrating the destructive force of sibling rivalry and human isolation, before introducing the systemic corruption preceding the Flood. Throughout the discussion, the biblical canon is presented as a unified redemptive movement working to restore the lost Edenic intimacy of God dwelling with humanity ("Immanuel").

Outline

I. Review and Preview (0:00-1:46)

- A. Upcoming assignments and reading in Leviticus and Dr. Wilson's Our Father Abraham
- B. Memory work: Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd")
- C. Transitioning out of the Garden of Eden narrative

II. Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: God, Us, and Evil (1:47-5:25)

- A. Distinction between objective and subjective knowledge
 - 1. Objective knowledge: External awareness of good/evil outside oneself
 - 2. Subjective knowledge: Internal participation in or experience of good/evil
- B. Knowledge structure of God
 - 1. Objective knowledge of good in creation (tov / tov me'od)
 - 2. Perfect subjective knowledge of good (holy, righteous)
 - 3. Objective knowledge of evil without internal subjective experience
- C. Human knowledge before and after the Fall
 - 1. Pre-Fall: Objective and subjective knowledge of good; no knowledge of evil
 - 2. Temptation point: Objective knowledge of evil introduced via the serpent

3. Post-Fall: Participation in evil grants subjective knowledge, going beyond God's intended boundaries

III. Process of Temptation (5:26-8:19)

- A. Satan's strategy in Genesis 3:6 compared with 1 John 2:16
 1. "Good for food" corresponds to the lust of the flesh
 2. "Pleasing to the eye" corresponds to the lust of the eyes
 3. "Desirable for gaining wisdom" corresponds to the pride of life
- B. Contrast between Eve's and Adam's temptation
 1. Eve dialogues directly with the serpent
 2. Adam faces the dilemma of returning to aloneness ("not good") after Eve partakes

IV. Results of the Fall (8:20-18:10)

- A. The principle of act and consequence
 1. Maturation from perceived immortality to understanding consequences and mortality
 2. Connection of actions and character to consequences in Wisdom Literature (Proverbs)
- B. Relational breakdown with God
 1. Transition from Immanuel ("God with us") to God absconditus ("hidden God")
 2. Fear, shame, hiding, and mutual blame shifting
- C. Broad scope of redemptive history
 1. Restoration through Tabernacle, Temple, Incarnation, and the Holy Spirit
 2. Ultimate return to Edenic presence in Revelation
- D. Cosmic and physical impact
 1. All creation groans waiting for redemption (Romans 8:22)
 2. Physical mortality: Returning from dust to dust

V. Curses of Genesis 3: The Serpent (18:11-23:30)

- A. Cursing of the serpent to crawl and eat dust
 1. Linguistic wordplay on Adam (human) and adamah (dust)
 2. Name changes and translation across languages
- B. The Proto-evangelium (Genesis 3:15)
 1. "First Gospel" predicting enmity between offspring of the woman and the serpent
 2. Promise that the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head
 3. Foundation of messianic hope overcoming death and chaos

VI. Curse on the Woman (23:31-45:56)

- A. Increased pain in childbearing
 1. Active resistance against the curse (e.g., medical anesthesia)
 2. Importance of presence and support during childbirth
- B. Interpretation of "desire for husband" and "rule over you" (Genesis 3:16)

1. Rejection of sexual or subservient interpretation models
 2. Parallel phrasing in Genesis 4:7 (sin desiring to master Cain)
 3. Power struggle and conflict in marriage as part of the curse
- C. Countering the marital power struggle
1. Linguistic analysis of ezer ("helper") as divine deliverer, not subordinate
 2. Adam naming Eve Havah ("life") as recognition of destiny rather than dominance
 3. Biblical model of mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21) and Christ's servant leadership

VII. Curse on the Man (45:57-52:59)

- A. Cursing of the ground and futility of labor
1. Work established as good prior to the Fall
 2. The curse consists of frustration, thorns, and futility in work
 3. Finding convergence between vocation and passion
- B. The reality of death and the victory of Christ
1. The sting of human mortality and bodily decay
 2. Christ overcoming death through resurrection, restoring bodily hope and Immanuel

VIII. Cain and Abel Narrative (53:00-61:29)

- A. First murder in biblical narrative
- B. Evaluation of offerings
1. Rejection of the "blood sacrifice vs. grain sacrifice" explanation (Leviticus 2 permits cereal offerings)
 2. Focus on the condition of the heart, mercy, and righteousness over external material
- C. "Am I my brother's keeper?"
1. Cain's rhetorical deflection and moral responsibility
 2. Recurring theme of sibling rivalry throughout Genesis (Jacob/Esau, Joseph/brothers)

IX. Curse on Cain (61:18-64:41)

- A. Condemnation to wander the earth
1. Pain of rootlessness, isolation, and loss of home
 2. Departure from the presence of the Lord
- B. Moral accountability and divine law written on the heart (Romans 2)

X. Flood: Sons of God and Daughters of Men (64:42-68:25)

- A. The "Sons of God" and "Daughters of Men" (Genesis 6)
1. Interpretive possibilities regarding identity and offspring (Nephilim)
- B. Systemic corruption and violence
1. Context of Hamas (violence) corrupting the earth
 2. God's grief and decision to bring redemptive judgment via the Flood