

August 28, 2005 AM

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

GENESIS 3:1-7

Text is not a tale with a moral. Application is secondary. The text is primarily about what is happening in the history of the world which God has created. This scene in history reverberates throughout the rest of time. And while we can certainly learn lessons from these historical incidents, we are also connected to this scene through a long line of people.

Temptation, distortion and sin (3:1-7)

1. THE DANGEROUS DIALOGUE (1-5)

A. THE CHARACTER OF THE SERPENT (1A)

“the serpent” - associated with great sea creature (Leviathan) in chap 1 (cf. also Isa 14:29; 27:1) and dragon (Rev 12:9)

“more crafty” - “subtle,” “cunning;” used positively and negatively in OT. Positive cf. Prov 12:16, 23; 13:16; Negative: Job 15:5

The serpent is a cunning animal. He can manipulate words and a situation to get what he wants out of them both.

In the Hebrew text there is an interesting word-play between the word “naked”(2:25; 3:7) and “crafty” (3:1). They each have the same root and sound much the same in Hebrew. The “craftiness” of the serpent will eventually strip the couple of their innocent nakedness and cause them to be ashamed of their nakedness.

“of the beasts of the field” - distinguished from the “livestock” or “cattle” (cf. 2:20). The beasts of the field were more along the lines of what we would call “wild animals” (e.g., tigers, lions, etc.).

Designation might imply that he had no place within the Garden. He was a creature that still needed to be “tamed.”

“which YHWH God had made” - the serpent is a creature. (1) part of the *created* order. He is not a mythological creature.

(2) Serpent as a creature was created *good*.

(3) Not equal in power to the Creator. There are not two ultimate powers (“good” and “evil”) in the universe.

B. THE DISTORTION OF GOD’S WORD (1B-5)

The serpent’s speaking is not explained or explained away. The man and woman don’t seem shocked. This could have been a part of his original creation. Speaking might go with “craftiness.”

Questions God’s goodness (1b) - First question that should have arisen: Why was he not speaking directly to the man?

“Did God actually say?..” - Why was the serpent worried about it? God had not commanded him to do anything or not do anything in relation to this tree.

“You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?” - “You” = plural

But see Genesis 2:17 - The command is given singularly to the man. It was ultimately his responsibility to ensure that the tree is not eaten from. The serpent is by-passing the man’s authority, speaking directly to his wife, and “creating” a society in which the man and the woman are viewed as equals in authority.

The man is right there to be sure (cf. “with her” in 3:6). Plural is used throughout the conversation.

Serpent calls into question God’s goodness. God’s liberality in his original command is seen in the fact that the prohibition is preceded by the statement of God’s provision; cf. Gen 2:16

The woman speaks for the man (2a) - Why did the woman not at this time defer to her husband? Why did *she* not recognize the God-ordained structure of authority and say, “These questions need to be addressed to my husband”? She disregarded her authority.

This does not mean that the woman was stupid and should never speak. It means that there is a structure of authority that is to be acknowledged because this is the way God set it all up. To disregard this structure is a lack of *faith*. It is the refusal to believe and

heed God's word.

The obscuring of God's word by the woman (2b-3) - God's graciousness is not emphasized in her response. She leaves out "every" and the strong "you may surely eat" (sometimes "freely eat").

Misquotes God: "... neither shall you touch it lest you die." She has just portrayed God more stringent than he actually is.

While the woman has ratcheted up God's command to prohibit something he did not prohibit, she also tones down his strong oath about the consequence of disobedience; i.e., "lest you die" instead of "you shall surely die."

The refutation of God's word by the serpent (4) - "You shall not surely die." The serpent obviously has them right where he wants them, doubting God's word. Now he can flatly contradict it.

The serpent questions God's motives (5) - "God is holding something back from you because he is frightened that you will become too powerful. God wants to keep you under thumb."

On the other hand, what the serpent is offering to the couple is "freedom" from this tyranny. They themselves can decide for their own selves what to do with their lives. They will be their own judges of what is good and evil. Autonomy is promised.

Mixes the deception with the truth. When the man and the woman ate the fruit they did not immediately "die" physically (i.e., stop breathing). But looking at death from this perspective is only a half-truth. Certainly this would be the ultimate result of the sin, but there would a death before the physical act of death; i.e., cut off from the sanctuary

Being cut off from the presence of God is death. For instance, to be unclean because of leprosy was to be considered "dead" in Israel (cf. e.g., Lev 13:45). Why? Because you are cut off from the sanctuary of God, which is death. "Living" is to be in God's presence, to be in his sanctuary. The original sanctuary: the Garden. Death = expulsion from the Garden.

Promises: (1) their eyes will be opened. Eyes are the instruments of judgment/discernment (cf. 1.4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; also 6.8; 11.5; 16.6; Jdg 21.25).

(2) they shall be as gods/like God, knowing good and evil (cf. 3.22). The subtle deception of the serpent is based upon what I believe is the future that God had for the man and the woman. Satan was saying, "You will become gods," as the Mormons believe (i.e., you will become divine as God is divine).

'elohim - cf. Psa 82:1, 6 - "gods" are judges; those who render judgments concerning good and evil. Ultimate judgment belongs to God himself (Deut 1:17). Those who represent God take on his title. To stand before the judge in Israel was to be brought before God himself (cf. Ex 21:6; 22:9; Deut 19:17)

This was a legitimate aspiration. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil would have eventually been given to the man when he matured to the point that he could handle the responsibility. But that position comes with maturity (cf. Dt 1:39; Hb 5:14). They were tempted to obtain a legitimate goal *illegitimately*.

2. THE DESTRUCTIVE DECISION (6-7)

Limitations, being finite and/or being immature are not in themselves evil. What is evil is having an unrighteous discontentment which leads you to listen to the words of the tempter.

A. THE UNBRIDLED DESIRE (6)

Reasoning apart from God's word - She removes the fruit from the context of God's complete word and tries to find "life" in the fruit itself. If the fruit is to give what is promised it will do it only in accordance with the way God intended it.

Eating in opposition to God's word - The woman is deceived (cf. 2Cor 11:6). The man is not deceived (cf. 1Tim 2:14)

B. THE UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCE (7)

They received their "knowledge" - brought shame instead "fulfillment."

They cover themselves - Seek to "vest" themselves in their new position.