

Temptation in Eden

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Date: 28 May 2017

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[0:00] Now this third chapter in Genesis is concerned with arguably the most tragic event in the history of mankind, namely the fall.

We're not told and we have no way of knowing how long had elapsed between the completed work of creation and the fall of mankind.

For all we know it might have been a considerable length of time and it might be comforting to think that our first parents held out against temptation for a bit longer than is traditionally supposed.

The main reason, not perhaps the only reason, but the main reason I would suggest for thinking that the fall happened sooner rather than later, is that we have no scriptural record of any previous temptations that were successfully resisted.

Now of course one might take a journalist's attitude to such resistance and say that well if they didn't give in then there's no story, there's nothing to tell. So no event to record, you can't record a non-event, you can't make a big deal of something that hasn't happened yet.

[1:19] So it's just unending bliss and innocence. So that's not really much of a story until the serpent ruins it all. The only problem with that is of course that the Bible is not written by journalists.

But rather as Peter tells us in 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 21, Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Or as our version here has it, men of God spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

It's not men's direction that is causing the Holy Scripture to be transcribed. It's the direct inspiration of God who does not make mistakes. And if a temptation successfully resisted was not a story worth telling, then we would have to ask why the Lord inspired Matthew, Mark and Luke all to make a point of telling us about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, who of course did not give in to sin.

But this is the first recorded instance of any temptation within the garden. And the heartbreakingly embarrassing conclusion seems to be that our first parents, sinless as they were, fell at pretty much the first hurdle.

So although we cannot know exactly how long had elapsed since the first creation week, it's unlikely to be all that long. Probably only a matter of days.

[2:54] Now right away at verse 1 we have a question which perplexes some people. Although it shouldn't because the answer is very simple. But we'll take this evening to look at that question and its implication.

Now we're not dealing with the whole of chapter 3. Some of you might be relieved to know. But there's so much in chapter 3 you would need. At least two or three servants to deal with it. But we will deal with this one problem at the beginning.

And seek to look at its implications. The question which perplexes people is usually in two parts. Where did the serpent come from?

And how did something so evil get into God's perfect paradise? But these things are only perplexing if we try to go beyond scripture for our answers.

But if we stick to the safety and clarity of what God reveals in his word, then it is not at all complicated. Where did the serpent come from?

[3:54] God made the serpent. God made everything. We have it there on day 6 in chapter 1 at verse 24.

God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds. Livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds. And it was so.

We think, Well, why would God make something so evil then? And of course the answer is he didn't. Verse 25 of chapter 1. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds.

And the livestock according to their kinds. And everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Good. He didn't make anything evil. God made everything. And God made everything good.

[4:54] That's what the Bible tells us. Therefore God made the serpent. And God made the serpent good. Chapter 1 verse 31.

God saw everything that he had made. And behold, it was very good. And there was evening. And there was morning.

The sixth day. The Bible does not say that the serpent was evil. I'll say that again.

The Bible does not say that the serpent was evil. Simply that it was more crafty than any other beast of the field. Or as the authorised version has it, More subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.

Cunning. Yes. Clever. Yes. But not evil by definition. Jesus himself tells his disciples in St. Matthew chapter 10 at verse 16.

[5:53] That they must be as wise as serpents. And as harmless as doves. So clearly serpents had a reputation even in Jesus' day for being wily, cunning, wise and clever.

But wait a minute. If the serpent isn't evil, why does it put temptation in the way of the woman? It is permitted to do so.

Because temptation is not sin. Temptation is not sin. Jesus was sinless.

And yet we read in scripture, But was in all points tempted like as we are. Yet without sin. Hebrews 4 verse 15. And even if we allow that an angel called Satan or Lucifer or whoever we may describe him, Use the serpent and spoke through it to the woman, That does not make the serpent or even the angel at this stage.

I'll say again. At this stage to be evil. To tempt, To test, To place obstacles in the way of those who are, To all intents and purposes, Simply following God's instructions, Is not of itself Evidence of evil.

[7:26] God may have any number of reasons Why he might allow such testing to take place. One of which might well be to examine, And to test the faithfulness, Of those engaged in work, That he had himself approved.

We have the strange case, If you remember, In Exodus chapter 4, Verses 24 to 26, Where the Lord himself appears to threaten the life of Moses, And to test his obedience, In the sacrament of circumcision, Even though Moses was embarked on the journey to Egypt, In obedience to God's call.

Why would God do that? Well it is certainly perplexing. But we do not assume thereby, That God or his angel is evil in the doing so. In Numbers 22, The angel of the Lord, With his sword drawn in his hand, Blocks the way of Balaam, As he journeys to meet Balak, The son of Zippor, The king of Moab, Even though God had said to him, In Numbers 22 at verse 20, If the men come to call thee, Rise up and go with them.

But yet the word which I shall say unto thee, That shalt thou do. So Balaam was just doing what God told him to do, And yet, God meets him with an angel, With a sword drawn in his hand, To withstand him, And possibly to attack him for his life.

So even if an angel spoke through the serpent here, In neither case in Exodus with Moses, Or in Numbers with Balaam and his donkey, In neither case do we assume evil on the Lord's part, Or that of his angel.

[9:13] So as we say, Even if an angel spoke through the serpent here, In chapter 3, Whoever that angel might have been, To do so does not make the angel either fallen, Or evil, Or at least, Not yet.

To tempt, To test, To place obstacles in the way of those who are, To all intents and purposes, Following God's instructions, Is not of itself evidence of evil, Because temptation is not sin.

Now the traditional view of Satan in relation to God, Is that he was created as an angel, Lucifer meaning light bearer, One of the most glorious angels in God's creation, Who subsequently rebelled against God, Desiring for himself, The worship and glory which belonged to God alone.

And that for this, He was cast out of heaven, Into hell, And determined thereafter, To ruin as many human beings, And drag down to hell with him, As many human beings, Made in God's image, As he could possibly do.

Those precious souls, That God had made, He wants to drag them down to hell. For example, We read in Isaiah 14, Verses 12 to 15, How are you fallen from heaven, O day star, Son of dawn, Or is it translated elsewhere, O Lucifer, Son of the morning, How you are cut down to the ground, You who laid the nations low, You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven, Above the stars of God, I will set my throne on high, I will sit on the mount of assembly, In the far reaches of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the most high, But you are brought down to Sheol, To the far reaches of the pit.

[11:13] Again, we read in Luke's account of the gospel, In chapter 10, In verses 17 to 19, After Jesus has sent out the 72 other disciples, As the 72 returned with joy, Saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name, And he said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven, Behold, I have given you authority, To tread on serpents and scorpions, And over all the power of the enemy, And nothing shall hurt you, And again, We read in Revelation, In chapter 12, And we read from verse 7, Now war arose in heaven, That means in the heavenly realms, The spiritual realm, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon, And the dragon and his angels fought back, But he was defeated, And there was no longer any place for them in heaven, And the great dragon was thrown down, That ancient serpent, Who was called the devil and Satan, The deceiver of the whole world, He was thrown down to the earth,

And his angels were thrown down with him. So far, So scriptural. Where the traditional view deviates from scripture, Is that this conflict between God and Lucifer, Is presumed, To have occurred, In some kind of pre-creation eternity, Which would mean that heaven and hell already existed, Before creation proper, By which means the devil was already in place, Poised and ready to strike, Via the serpent, At the woman, That is supposedly the explanation, For what happened in the garden.

The only problem with that, Traditional viewpoint, Is that the time scale, The idea of some, Pre-creation eternity, Has not one shred, Of scriptural support.

It is, A theory, Perhaps a respectable theory, But that's all it is, And as such, It is pure, Speculation. What is definitely scriptural, Is that God created, Everything.

In the beginning, God created the heavens, And the earth. The earth was without form, And void, And darkness was over the face of the deep, And the spirit of God, Was hovering over the face of the waters.

[13:37] God created the heavens, And the earth. There was no heaven, Before God created it, There was no earth, Before God created it. Exodus 20, Verse 11, For in six days, The Lord made heaven, And earth.

Earth, And the sea, And all that in them is. That doesn't just mean, Everything that's in the sea. It means everything in the heavens, Everything in the earth, Everything on the land, Everything in the sea, Everything in the physical realm, Everything in the spiritual realm.

If it was created, And it was created, In those six days. For in six days, God made the heavens, And the earth, The sea, And all that in them is.

In other words, Everything that God made, Heaven, Earth, The sea, The land, He made in that six day period. There is no, Pre-creation warfare, In eternity, With good angels, And bad angels, Before, The work, Of creation.

Because angels, Are themselves, Created, Beings. Now in the ESV, We read in Psalm 104, Verse 4, That he makes his messengers, Winds, His ministers, A flaming fire.

[14:49] But, The word messenger, As some of you will know, Is of course, Exactly the same word, As the word angel. Angel means, Messenger. And in the old Hebrew, Of course, As well as in the Greek, Of the New Testament, The word for wind, Or winds, Is the same as the word for spirit.

It's the word ruach. What a great name to use in point. That it means spirit, Or it means wind, And it's interchangeable in that. It's the same with the word pneuma, In Greek, Which is why you've got this lovely play on words, In John chapter 3, Where Jesus says to Nicodemus, The wind bloweth where it listeth, And thou hearest the sound, That all but canst not tell, Once it cometh, Or whither it goeth, So is every one that is born, Of the spirit.

And that's a play on words, Because it's the same word, Being used to describe the wind, And to describe the spirit. And so it is in Hebrew as well, Wind and spirit, It's the same word, It just depends on the context, In which it's used.

And in one translation of the Bible, It's been translated to winds, In another it's been translated as spirits, In one translation it's been translated, As messengers, In another it's as angels, But it's the same words in each case.

So what it says in Psalm 104, Verse 4 in the Old Bible, Is who maketh his angels spirits, Or his messengers winds, Same words, His angels spirits, His ministers of flaming fire.

[16:11] So in other words, Whether we call them messengers, Or whether we call them angels, These spiritual beings, Ministering spirits to wait upon God's people, As Hebrews describes them, Are themselves by definition, Created beings.

If they are created beings, They were created, In that six day period. When God created the heaven and the earth, He made everything in it, Every angel, Every spirit, Those who would be true to him, Those who would ultimately turn against him.

But what about all those verses you read about, Satan falling from heaven? Surely that proves it. Well, let's look again at what it says. Isaiah 14 at verse 12, How are you are fallen from heaven?

O day, star, son of dawn, O Lucifer, son of the morning. How you are cut down to the ground, You who laid the nations low. The ground, The earth, Already exists by then.

By the time Lucifer falls from heaven to the earth, By definition, The heaven already exists. The earth already exists. Ergo, God has created them. It is post-creation.

- [17:23] It is after the six day period. Likewise, Again, In Revelation 12, We read these verses, Seven to nine, That we read before. Warfare in heaven. Heaven is created by then.

Michael and his angels, Already created. Fighting against the dragon, And the dragon and his angels fought back, But he was defeated. And there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down.

That ancient serpent, Oh, that proves it. Well, actually it doesn't. Just means that the serpent is subsequently used to describe the way that the devil has worked. Who is called the devil and Satan, The deceiver of the whole world.

He was thrown down to the earth. The earth exists by the time this happens. And his angels were thrown down with him. Heaven exists. Earth exists. Creation has happened.

This is a post-creation scenario. Not a pre-creation eternity. Creation has already happened. The earth is already formed.

- [18:22] So people might say, Okay, so Satan must have rebelled against God. Sinned against God. Some point between creation and the fall of man. It must have happened in those few days you were talking about.

Before man actually sinned. Satan must have already rebelled. And so he's ready to work against the woman. And to put this temptation in her way. But when? We have no record of it anywhere.

Before the fall of man. It may have happened. But if it did, we don't have any record. Any evidence whatsoever anywhere in the Bible.

It is pure speculation. The timing of it. On the scriptural evidence, therefore, I would suggest to you. That Satan had still not fallen.

Satan indeed was not able to fall. Until after mankind himself fell.

- [19:27] How is he able to use the serpent then if that's the case? How can he possibly do that? How is he able to use the serpent and tempt the woman if he's not fallen?

If he's still a good angel, how can he do that? He was able because temptation is not sin. Sin is defined in the larger catechism. At question 24.

What is sin? Sin is any want of conformity unto. Or transgression of. Any law of God given as a rule to the reasonable creature.

And we have no scriptural record. Of any such laws of God being given to the angels. Only to man. The angels might eat whatever they liked.

From any tree they wanted. May do as they pleased. Because they could not sin. As yet for the simple reason that sin did not exist.

- [20:28] Sin did not exist until God's law was broken. And the law can only be broken. By one to whom the law is first given.

Whatever may have been the thoughts or desires or ambitions of Satan. You could say well that's sin working away in his heart. Well you could perhaps argue that. He had no opportunity for sin.

You know as Paul wrote to the Romans with regard to the law. And by that he means the giving of the commandments on Mount Sinai. They said sin indeed was in the world before the law was given. But sin is not counted where there is no law.

Now you could say oh well that means that Satan was sinful beforehand. But Satan has been given no law. The angels have been given no law to break. Some of you may be old enough.

As I'm old enough just. To remember the days before seatbelts were compulsory. Sensible people always put on their seatbelts. But you didn't have to.

[21 : 32] It wasn't the law. When I passed my driving test. If you want to be a responsible driver. You always put on your seatbelt. But then about a month. A month and a half after I passed my driving test.

And this gives away something of my age here. They were going to introduce this law. That meant seatbelts would be compulsory. Dugged person that I was.

As soon as I knew it was going to be compulsory. I stopped wearing mine. I stopped wearing mine. Just so I could jolly well have the freedom of not having to do it. As long as it wasn't commanded.

And until the cut off date. Which was the 31st of January. 1983. Until that point. Any policeman who stopped me on the road.

Could not have said. You're not wearing your seatbelt. I could have said. That's not the law. So I don't have to. They didn't. But they could have done. But on the 1st of February. They could have stopped me and said. You're not wearing your seatbelt.

[22 : 28] Now you're in trouble. Because until the law comes into force. I'm not doing anything wrong. But I am doing exactly the same thing. On one day.

As I'm doing on the next day. But on the next day. The law has been given. The law has come into force. I am by definition. A law breaker.

Which I wasn't the day before. And if I'm convicted. I become a criminal. For doing something. Which was perfectly free. And open to me to do before. Because the law had not been given.

And here the law has been given to man. But it has not been given to the angels. Therefore they are not in a position. To be able to break it. It's rather like.

If you think of a lecherous. Or adulterous man. Washed up on a desert island. With only his wife. He may be desperate. To commit adultery. But he physically cannot. Because there is no one to commit adultery with.

[23 : 23] There is only his wife. And so it won't be a sin. No matter what he does. His circumstances compel fidelity. Even against his will. And so Satan's will.

May have been rebelliously ambitious. But he has no outlet. For that darkness. Until and unless. And so. And so. And so. And so. Such a thing as.

Sin. Enters the universe. Which can only do. By means. Of man. Which means that at the outset of this chapter.

The serpent. Is still good. And the angel who may or may not. Have used the serpent to speak to the woman. Is as yet. A good angel. A holy angel.

Whatever he may be. Whoever he may be. For sin does not yet exist. Not yet. Until. Man. Sins.

[24 : 23] Here then. Is the terrifying truth. It is man. Who unleashes. Satan. All the evil that follows throughout the history of the world.

All the cruelties. And oppression. All the sadism. And brutality. The paganism. And suffering. And killing. All the works of evil from the prince of this world.

That is down to us. We gave him that power. But now that he has it. We are helpless to take it back.

You can give somebody the keys to yourself. And you can say. I am going to walk inside you. Shut the door. And turn the key. But once they have done it. You can't say. Okay. Give me the keys back now.

Because I want out. That is tough. You have had it now. You gave them that power. They have used it. And you are stuck. You are a prisoner now. They have the power. And you don't. You had the power.

[25 : 22] But you gave it away. And now all the power that Satan has. He has because we gave it to him. Or rather our first parents gave it to him.

It is down to us. We gave him that power. But now that he has it. We are helpless to take it back. If we are to be free from Satan's power now.

Then it can only be by a power greater than us. And greater than him. It will need God.

Nothing and no one has the power to overcome the prince of this world. The prince of the power of the air as Ephesians calls him. Except nobody is strong enough except God.

Which is why those like for example Jehovah's Witnesses. And the Latter Day Saints. Devout and sincere and good living people. As they undoubtedly are.

[26 : 24] Cannot offer a gospel of deliverance from sin. Of forgiveness and peace with God. Because he is to them a perfect man.

A perfect sacrifice. The son of God even. But not God the son. It is not God for them upon the cross.

Giving of himself for sinners. Nor is he God for the Muslim. Who sees him only as a prophet. Who was too holy. To have been really crucified.

What they teach is that Judas. Well it swapped over with him. And Judas was the one who was put to death. Jesus was too holy. For God to allow that to happen to him. The consistent hallmark of all.

False religion. Including that which might call itself Christian. Or a church. Is to diminish Christ. Is to diminish Christ. From his Godhead.

[27 : 20] And to encourage people to trust in something. Or someone else. Might be a prophet. Might be their own attempts to keep the law.

Or to be righteous. Or to do their best. Or to be moral. Or upright. But whatever it is. The devil doesn't mind. As long as he takes you off of Christ. As long as he takes you away from God the son.

And his once and for all perfect sacrifice upon the cross. He doesn't really mind. Whether you're a devil worshipper. Or a secularist. Or indifferent. Or just a worldling. Whether you follow a different religion.

Or whether you're in church every week. Thinking that you are clocking up righteousness for yourself. He doesn't mind. He's quite happy to leave you at that. Because. As long as you are not redeemed by God the son upon the cross.

If your faith and your focus. And your salvation is not pinned upon him. And on him alone. You are as lost as lost can be. It is God the son alone.

[28 : 20] Who has the power to deliver. And all false religion. Whatsoever form it may take. Will seek. It will be united in this. It will seek to diminish Christ from his Godhead.

And to encourage people to trust in something. Or someone else. But except Christ be God. We have no victory.

There is no sacrifice sufficient for all his people. There is no one stronger than the prince of this world. Except the power of God himself.

We. We. Mankind. Have unleashed Satan. By our sin. And our old self.

However moral or upright we may strive to be. Is utterly powerless. To bind him again. But. If any man be in Christ.

[29 : 18] He is a new creature. All things. Are passed away. Behold. All things. Are become new.

Christ. Alone. Has power. To bind Satan again. To keep him back. From your heart. To give you the tools. The weapons. The armor.

To resist him. And his lies. And false hopes. And counterfeit promises. It is not that the Christian. Will never be attacked by Satan. He or she.

Will be. One can guarantee it. These battles with Apollyon. Leave us wounded. Scarred. Weakened. But they are evidence.

That we live. For a corpse. Cannot fight. And a dead man. Feels no pain. Satan. Had no power.

[30:15] Until our first parents. Gave him it. And now. If we are in Christ. Satan has none still. But what we give him.

James 4. Verse 7. Puts it this way. Submit yourselves. Therefore. To God. Resist. The devil. And he will flee from you.

But notice the order. In which it is put. It is not just. You are a good guy. You go to church a lot. You are an upright. Model. Upstanding. Pillar of the community. You resist the devil. And he will flee from you.

No. No. No. Submit to God first. Put God on the throne. Of your life. Of your heart. Make him your king. Your redeemer. Your savior.

Put him. As the head of your life. And your heart. Submit yourselves. Therefore. To God. Then. Resist the devil. Not in your power. But in his. And he will flee.

[31:13] From you. First Corinthians. Chapter 10. We read it. Verse 13. No temptation. Has overtaken you. That is not common. To man.

That is quite a thought. Isn't it? Whatever we may be assailed by. We may think. Well it is just me. I am the only one. Who is really so sinful. And so bad. And wicked. That the devil attacks me. This way.

Nobody else. Has this problem. Nobody else. Struggles with this difficulty. I must be a real deviant. I must be so dark. So sinful. If only people knew. They would never look at me again.

No temptation. Has overtaken you. That is not common. To man. God. Is faithful. And he will not.

Let you be tempted. Beyond your ability. But with. The temptation. He will also provide. The way of escape. That you may be able.

[32:08] To endure it. In other words. You don't have to give in. To him. You don't have to. Let the devil.

Win. In Christ Jesus. But only in him. You do. Have the power. To fight back. To overcome. To gain.

The victory. But only in Christ. Not in your own strength. However good. Or godly. Or upright. You may be. However faithful. And diligent. In the outward means. Of grace. It is not enough.

We wrestle not against. Flesh and blood. But against the spiritual. Wickedness. In high places. Against principalities. And powers. Against the demons. Of the spiritual realm.

Against the prince. Of the power. Of this. Of the air. We can't beat him. We are grounded. Earthlings. Flesh and blood. He can move. Whatever he wants. He has the power. To do. Whatever he wants.

[33:02] But in Christ. You do have the power. To fight back. To overcome. To gain. The victory. Once. It was an easy victory.

For Satan. That easy. Lazy. Act of self-indulgence. In the garden. Now. It is a battle. Now.

We have the victory. Despite. Many a wound. The victory of Christ. Upon the cross. Somebody once. Asked. Many years ago. What would one consider.

To be the darkest. Moment. In the history. Of mankind. My own. Suggested answer. To that. Would be. The moment. Just before.

Jesus. Expired. On the cross. Because. Up to that point. Satan. Seems. To be winning. He has. The prince of life. Exactly. Where he wants him.

[34 : 00] He has him. Dying. Suffering. In agony. Upon the cross. He must be gloating. And exultant. At what he has achieved. Through treachery. And betrayal. And scourging.

And crucifixion. And the humiliation. Of the son of God. And then. The moment. When Jesus. Breathes his last. Father. Into thy hands. I commit my spirit.

The awful truth. Must have dawned. On the evil one. Oh no. Now. He's got it. Now. They're free.

Now. The price is paid. If only. I had realized. I'd have kept him alive. I'd have given him a blood transfusion. I'd have given him water. I'd have brought him down from the cross. I'd have done anything. Oh no.

It's too late. At that. Moment. Of Christ's death. The veil of the temple. Is rent in twain. From the top. To bottom.

[34 : 56] Access. To the holy of holies. Is made free. For all. Who would come. The price. Is paid. And the sin. Is washed away.

Of all. The Lord's people. Who will embrace. The truth. As it is. In Christ Jesus. Sin. Is. Paid for. Now.

It is a battle. Yes. But we have the victory. Despite. Many a wound. Many a scar. The victory of Christ. Upon the cross.

Sin is paid for. Blood has been shed. Redemption. Has been secured. For all. Who will trust. And believe. And follow. You. Are. Not. Dead.

That is. Why. It still. Hurts. And wounds. And damages. You. Because. Yet. You live. And you live.

[35 : 51] For a purpose. Not to be. Fuel. And faggots. For the fires. Of hell. But to be saints. In glory. Man's chief. End. Is to glorify.

God. And to enjoy. Him. Forever. Follow. Then. Where the prince. Of glory. Leads. Even if it be.

To a cross. And an open grave. Hebrews 10. Tells us. At verse 23. Let us hold fast. Our profession. Without wavering.

For he. Is faithful. That promised. It is. A battle. It is. A warfare.

We are. Going to suffer. In it. But nothing. Like. What Christ. Suffered. Upon the cross. Because. Nothing. Like. His victory. Will ever be achieved.

[36 : 48] Ever again. So strap. On. The armor. Of God. Lift. Up. The shield. Of faith. Wet. And sharpen.

The sword. Of the spirit. Which is the word. Of God. Look up. Go. Forward. Fight. Back. Let us pray.

Let us pray.