



The Legacy of Adam

THIS CHAPTER CONSIDERS the biblical-theological themes in the story of Adam that directly impact the larger study of justification. The beginning, however, is read from the standpoint of the end. So while this chapter focuses on Adam, what follows is based on the whole scope of the Bible. We could wall off later revelation found in the Bible, but that is not, in my opinion, the typical way that Christians should read the Old Testament. We should read the Old Testament as those who are members of the new covenant established by the second Adam. We are bound to read the entire Bible in its specific canonical, historical, and redemptive contexts, including our own new covenant context.

Here are the focal points.

- Creator and Creature
- God and Man
- The End and the Beginning

Creator and Creature

Genesis 1:26–28 answers many of life’s ultimate questions. How did I get here? Who am I? What am I? What am I supposed to do? There may be more to the answers than what is in these verses, but not less. Most importantly, this text tells us what we need to know fundamentally about ourselves and our relationship

with God. It can be narrowed down to one word found in verse 27: “created.” That may not seem like a groundbreaking observation, but we have a long track record of forgetting, denying, and militating against this most basic thing about our being. Consider this: our collective habit of forgetting or ignoring this basic truth lies at the root of every problem from Adam on down. It is no exaggeration to say that *every* sin begins with a refusal to accept this truth about ourselves. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we are *creatures* and not the Creator. Contrary to what we so often seem to want to believe, we are not independent, autonomous beings. We are creatures, created in the image of God. In other words, our life is, from the beginning, not strictly our own.

Dependence and Purpose

Beginning with a solid grasp of the fact that we are creatures, not the Creator, brings our lives into focus. We are created beings made to be absolutely dependent on God. This is how we were designed. Our dependence on God is further evidenced when we consider that God also designed our purpose in life. All human creativity, gifts, and abilities were given to us to fulfill our appointed task. In other words, we received the gift of life *and* the gift of work (cf. Gen. 2:15). Typically, discussion of the commands in the garden is limited to the negative command (“you will not”) concerning the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (2:17), but this misses an important part of the picture. The responsibilities that God gives Adam in 1:28 are commands. In his created innocence, Adam has positive commands to fulfill, and even though the entire creation was “good,” it is not static. There is movement and purpose built into it. The creation, with humanity at the center, is going somewhere. God says to his creatures, “Have children, tame the earth, and rule over it.” There is work to be done in this good creation. It appears from the outset that there is a goal to reach. Presumably the earth could reach a state of being filled, tamed, and ruled. A divinely appointed goal is woven into creation.

A Goal from the Beginning. We tend to think of eschatology as only the “end times” that wind up when Christ returns, but that is not all there is to it. Geerhardus Vos was right to refer to “pre-redemptive Eschatology.”¹ Before the fall of Adam and the subsequent unfolding of redemption, there was an end for which God created the world. We need to be crystal clear on this—it is not the case that God had one plan before the fall and then a backup plan afterward. “God forbid,” as Paul would say. There is, and I am not the first person to say it, no “plan B” in the Bible. There was and continues to be one end goal woven into the fabric of creation. Of course, at this precise point in the biblical narrative we do not yet see that the planned end point of creation will be summed up in another Adam (see Eph. 1:10). The goal we see at this point in the narrative is life. This goal is symbolized in the Tree of Life (Gen. 2:9) and, together with the outward trajectory of subduing and reigning over the world, the narrative implies that life *eternal* is the ultimate goal. Later we will find that the goal and promise of life is attached to obedience in the Mosaic law, will be announced by the prophets, and will be attained finally in the second Adam.

God and Man

A special kind of history begins in Genesis 2. What I mean is that Genesis 2 refocuses the historical narrative on the creation of humanity, the particular place we have in the created order, and especially the special relationship that exists between us and God. Genesis 2:4 picks up and expands the story that began in 1:1 and then unfolds through the rest of Scripture and beyond. Unlike anything in the rest of creation, the text places special emphasis on God’s creation of mankind: “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his

1. As Vos says, “It is not biblical to hold that eschatology is a sort of appendix to soteriology. . . . The universe, as created, was only a beginning, the meaning of which was not perpetuation, but attainment.” Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 73.

nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (2:7). What jumps off the page of Scripture is the sovereignty of God the Creator and the dependence of man his creature upon him. The ways and means of the creation of man should get our attention. Adam is formed from the dirt and given life by God himself. God creates a special place for Adam to live, a garden from which he is to fulfill the creation mandate of 1:28 (2:8). This is also a place where Adam enjoys unique fellowship with God (see 3:8). Adam the creature dwells in the creation in fellowship with the Creator. This will not be the last time in Scripture when people, land, and God are linked together. God provides everything that Adam needs for life and happiness. Not only do the trees around him provide fruit, they are also “pleasant to the sight” (2:9). Then we are told of two special trees—the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. So God sculpts Adam into form, breathes him into existence, and sets him to work (v. 15).

The Covenant God

In chapter 2, a change takes place that has repercussions for how we read this narrative. In chapter 1 the Hebrew word “God” (*Elohim*) is typically used, but after the initial account of God’s creative work comes to an end in 2:3, his special covenant name “LORD” (*Yahweh*) is also used. Bearing in mind that the first hearers/readers of this text were Israelites under the Mosaic covenant, it is striking that when the text of Genesis turns to focus particularly on the creation of man and his relationship with God, the name of God is precisely that covenant name later revealed to Moses on Sinai (Ex. 34:6). Genesis 2 spells out God’s care for Adam in more detail, including the planting of Eden where Adam would enjoy special communion with God and the provision of food to sustain Adam’s life. All the good gifts come specifically from “the LORD God” (*Yahweh Elohim*). The God of creation, the God who created Adam, is the God with whom Israel has a covenantal relationship.

Setting the Boundaries

In the midst of paradise there is one thing forbidden, and it is mentioned along with a threat that seems out of place in the pastoral scene of Eden.² Adam may eat from any tree except one, and God warns Adam that if he eats of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he will die (2:17). The story is about creation, life, and abundance, but a foreign and future enemy appears, and with it a challenge confronts Adam. In paradise, in his created innocence, Adam is given a command, and a curse is attached to it in the case of disobedience. Death is God's condemnation for disobedience. Adam must obey perfectly or he will die.

Adam's "Probation." Sometimes Adam's situation in Eden is referred to as *probation*. That is, Adam was put in Eden for a period during which he needed to prove himself through obedience and maintain his innocence until he reached or was granted a perfected, glorified state of being. For nearly everyone living in the twenty-first century, the word *probation* has negative associations. Probation is typically something one is put on after committing a crime. Someone charged with a crime may be given probation, or a prisoner may be granted probation to see if he can make it on the outside. Innocent citizens are not on probation. About the only time we speak of a probationary period apart from the idea of guilt or offense is when we are offered a trial period to sample a product, although we do not call that probation. Theologians of earlier generations could use *probation* and expect readers to understand their meaning, but English usage has changed, and with it the word *probation* has a more narrow use. Someone might object that technical language in any field, not least in theology, must always be explained. However, the word *probation* itself was the explanation used to describe Adam's situation in Eden. This is simply not true today. Modern people might hear the word *probation* and easily think that Adam was somehow created guilty, or at

2. James Montgomery Boice's description of chapter 2's casting "shadows over Eden" is fitting. He points out that in the midst of all the good things—relationship with God, a garden in which to live and work, and a wife—"there are forebodings." *Genesis, Volume 1: Creation and Fall* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 113.

least think him suspect. But Adam was innocent, and that is a vital part of the story. Is there a word that better captures Adam's situation in the garden? There is, but to prove it we have to expand our biblical vision past Genesis and note a particular pattern that arises and helps us to understand Adam's circumstances in the garden.

Testing—a Biblical Pattern. The better alternative to *probation* is *test*. Granted, the word does not appear in the text, but there is a pattern here that can be seen throughout Scripture. In the Bible, obedience to God is not taken for granted. God gives commands and then tests the obedience of those who receive the commands. At pinnacle points in Scripture, obedience is tested because obedience, which means submitting to God and acting on his command (including not eating fruit), displays one's trust in and loyalty to God. Testing may also reveal distrust and disloyalty. In three crucial eras in the biblical revelation of God's salvation, he tests his servants. God tests Abraham, Israel, and finally his own Son, Jesus. Although the tests have varying results, they are all tests for obedience.

"Now I Know You Fear God." Abraham is associated with many things, but in the discussion of justification, he is best known for his faith: "And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). There is also a well-known time in Abraham's life when God tested him. In Genesis 22, God tells Abraham to take his only beloved son, the son of the promise, to Mount Moriah and to sacrifice him as a burnt offering (vv. 1–2). Far and away the emphasis in the text is on Abraham's obedience. We will return to this scene later, but for now it is enough to note that Abraham's inner struggle as he trudged up the mountain to sacrifice his son is not on display, but his obedience to God. We are told that Abraham woke up the next day, made preparations, and set out on his journey. Of course, his faith is on display too when he tells his servants that he and Isaac will return (v. 5) and when he tells Isaac that God will give them a lamb for the offering (v. 8). The interconnection of faith and obedience is clear. But again, it is obedience that is on display. As the knife is about to fall, Abraham hears the angel of the Lord telling him to stop: "Do not lay your

hand on the boy or do anything to him” (v. 12). Then we hear the reason for the intervention and, I believe, the reason for the entire episode: “for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” Abraham passed the test. Then the promises of chapters 12, 15, and 17 are repeated (vv. 16–18). The declaration of Abraham’s righteousness by faith was no empty proclamation (15:6). Abraham’s obedience on Moriah displays his faith and also proves that what God declared is true.

“*That I May Test Them.*” The story of Israel is marked by testing. In the wilderness and in the land, God tests them to see what is in their hearts. He tests them with the manna: “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not” (Ex. 16:4 ESV). Of course, this is again a test of faith—the Israelites must believe that God will daily provide for them. If they gather more than a day’s manna, they imply that God cannot be trusted. Disobedience flows from a lack of faith. However, the *explicit* emphasis in the text is on obedience, for it is by their actions that their hearts are revealed. Their whole experience in the wilderness is a test: “And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, *testing you*, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not” (Deut. 8:2 NASB). Later, after entering the Promised Land and continuing in the disobedience that marked their forty years of wandering, God becomes angry with them and says, “Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not listened to My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, *in order to test Israel* by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not” (Judg. 2:20–22 NASB). This pattern of testing is well documented in Israel’s history, as is the fact that they failed the majority of the time.³

3. Other texts with explicit references to testing are Ex. 20:20; Deut. 8:16; 13:3; 2 Chron. 32:31. There are also references to God’s testing people in general: Ps. 11:4; Jer. 20:12.

“If You Are the Son of God.” Outside paradise, in the wilderness, God tested the obedience of his Son, Jesus Christ. It is true that he was tempted by Satan, but Matthew and Luke make it clear that the Devil didn’t prompt the testing: “Then Jesus was *led* up by the Spirit into the wilderness *to be* tempted by the devil” (Matt. 4:1; cf. Luke 4:1–2). Like Israel, Christ’s test takes place in the wilderness. Unlike Adam and Israel, Christ is tested and passes.

The close connection of Jesus with the tests of Adam and Israel is evident in the New Testament. Luke draws the line from Christ back to Adam by ending his genealogy with “Adam, the son of God” (3:37). Then, immediately after the genealogy, with Adam fresh in the readers’ minds, the temptation narrative begins. Matthew begins his gospel by tracing Jesus’ lineage back to Abraham and spends three chapters showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises to Israel. After establishing that Jesus is the Messiah, the one to whom the prophets pointed, the narrative of Jesus’ adult life and ministry begins. He is baptized by John, affirmed by the Father (“this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”—3:17), and ushered out to be tested in the wilderness.⁴

Adam was put in the garden with a command placed upon him, and soon after the command was given, Adam’s obedience to that command was tested. This sets a pattern that extends through Scripture: God tests his children to see whether they will obey him. There are tests connected to every major chapter of the history of redemption, culminating with the accepted and beloved Son of God (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). So, the idea behind the concept of *probation* is affirmed, but better explained today with the simple word *test*, or if we want to be a little more exacting, *test period*.

There is a similar mention of testing obedience in the New Testament as well. Paul tells the Corinthians that he wrote to them so “that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything” (2 Cor. 2:9).

4. Luke bookends his genealogy with the affirmation from heaven (3:22) and the temptation narrative (4:1–13). In this way Jesus’ role as an obedient, acceptable son is emphasized, 3:22 ending with “you are my beloved son” and 3:38 ending with “Adam, the son of God.” As the new Adam, Jesus obeys when tested and thus affirms the acceptance proclaimed by the Father.

The Question of “What If?” Talk of a test period often raises a question about the length of time that Adam was to be tested before he officially passed. It is important to address this question before proceeding. The answer to the question “What if Adam had obeyed?” usually goes something like this: he would have been granted that state of perfection due his perfect performance of God’s standard. The idea is that Adam and his descendants would have reached that place of glorification that now will come to those who have faith in Christ.

The “if Adam had obeyed” question is driven by the recognition that a goal is built into creation. It is also a hypothetical question meant to help us think through and understand the implications of the larger biblical teaching in regard to what Christ, the second Adam, accomplished. But however much the inference is a fair one, it is important that we remember that the *real goal* was never for the human race to be perfected in Adam (no plan B!). The question may have some theological benefit, but we have to be careful of the unbiblical implication that if Adam had obeyed, he and his children would have been perfected in and through him—apart from Christ. As far as Scripture goes, the theological hypothetical does not play much of a role in the unfolding of redemption in Christ—except that Adam’s failure to obey sets the necessary scene for the obedience of the one for whom Adam serves as a type (Rom. 5:14). Perhaps the question of Adam’s obedience can be addressed in this way: “He didn’t obey, and that is precisely the point. God’s goal was not in Adam but in another through whom the people of God would truly be perfected and reach their appointed goal.”⁵

The Question of Covenant

There were two parties in the garden—God and man. Of course, the Serpent is there too, but he is not part of the particular relationship between God and Adam. It is not an equal partnership; God is superior and Adam is inferior. God is independent and

5. According to Paul, God’s plan was always Christ (Eph. 1:10).

Adam is dependent. God provides everything that Adam and Eve need for life and happiness, but this is not a relationship without specific stipulations. God, the Creator and provider, establishes rules for maintaining the relationship. Adam is ordered to carry out his work of subduing and ruling the creation over which God has placed him. There is, however, a condition—there is one tree, and one tree only, from which Adam may not eat. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is forbidden with a warning. God tells Adam that he can eat from all the other trees, but if he eats from the one forbidden tree, “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Implicit in the warning (and symbolized in the Tree of Life) is the promise that if Adam does not eat from the one tree, he will live. God sets life and death before Adam, as he will later with the Israelites in their covenant context: “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil” (Deut. 30:15). If Adam wants to live in his relationship with God, he must keep God’s command. These words apply to Adam: “Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live” (Deut. 30:19). Here in the garden, before the fall, yet another biblical pattern is established. Later on, this kind of relationship gets a specific name: covenant.

There is much debate over whether the relationship between God and Adam can properly be called a covenant; after all, the word *covenant* does not appear until Genesis 6. Given the number of times the word will appear later, what stopped Moses from using the word here? After all, God tells Noah that he is making a covenant (6:18) and likewise tells Abraham explicitly that he is establishing a covenant (17:7), so why not here? Although it is not much of a stretch to think that the first people to hear and read Genesis, themselves living in a covenant, would have recognized a covenant when they saw one, it is a fair question. Perhaps formal covenants, like the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and new covenants, are fitted for a redemptive context. That is, they are specific relationships between God and people, at times established on the basis of or formalized in blood, that aim at reestablishing the relationship broken in Eden. Perhaps it is enough

to say that the relationship between God and Adam foreshadowed what would later be called a covenant. John Murray, for instance, opted for “Adamic Administration,”⁶ which ties together the idea that there is indeed a special relationship between God and Adam with the fact that *covenant* does not explicitly appear. In spite of the difficulties, are there good reasons for thinking that God and Adam were in a covenantal relationship? There are at least four reasons that suggest a covenant in Eden.⁷

Covenants Are Not Just Redemptive. The absence of the word *covenant* is not necessarily as strong an argument as it appears. True, there is no sacrifice to establish or commemorate the relationship between God and Adam; on the other hand, nothing like that was needed. In the Mosaic and new covenants, blood was required to bring God and man together because humanity stood under God’s wrath due to their sin. Only the blood of a sacrifice, and ultimately only one sacrifice, could fulfill God’s justice. With Abraham, God establishes a covenant in which he makes an oath, symbolized in sacrifices (Gen. 15:9–18), to keep his promise to make Abraham a great nation. These covenants contain sacrifices because they are redemptive, but the fact that they are redemptive *is not what makes them covenants*. They are special types of covenantal relationships between God and man connected to the Bible’s big picture of reestablishing a people set apart for God so that they will be his people and he will be their God.⁸ They are, at heart, covenantal relationships because they contain agreements, promises, and warnings between the two

6. John Murray, *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2 (Carlisle, UK: Banner of Truth, 1977), 47–59.

7. For an insightful and concise discussion of the question of a covenant in Eden, see J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 112–22.

8. This refrain, or something similar to it, is found in every covenantal era. For instance, in Leviticus the phrase is used as a promise for what will be fulfilled if Israel obeys (26:12); in Jeremiah it is the reality promised in the new covenant (31:33)—and it is taken up as fulfilled by both Paul (2 Cor. 6:16) and the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 8:10). The last time these words are heard in the Bible is when John sees a vision of the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:3). The idea in the refrain is implicit everywhere in the Abrahamic covenant, with God promising to be with Abraham and his children and make them into a great nation (Gen. 12:2; 18:18).

parties involved in each relationship. Although God has something greater than Eden in store for humanity, the relationship in Eden is the model for the goal of redemption and the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity.

Christ the Head of the New Covenant. Second, the relationship established by and on Christ the second Adam is a covenant. It is the “new covenant in my blood,” as he told his disciples on the night that he was betrayed (Luke 22:20). The apostle Paul presents Christ as a second Adam who stands as the head of God’s people (Rom. 5:12–19; 1 Cor. 15:21–22). As Adam represented humanity, and as the consequence of his actions flowed to his race, so Christ stands as representative for those who believe and are counted righteous as a consequence of his actions. The writer to the Hebrews speaks at length of the new covenant, promised by the prophets (e.g., Jer. 31:33) and mediated by Christ (Heb. 8:13; 9:15; 12:24).

Hosea 6:7. In the context of Hosea 6, the prophet is speaking against the sins of Judah and Ephraim. In the midst of it we read these words: “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me” (Hos. 6:7). Readers of the ESV, NASB, and NIV might wonder why there is a question about this text since it says plainly, “like Adam” (*ke’adam*). The issue is how to translate the Hebrew behind “like Adam.” The Septuagint translator of Hosea chose the Greek for “as man” (*hws anthropos*), which is followed in English by the KJV and the NKJV.⁹ There is also the possibility, which some Old Testament scholars prefer, that the word refers to the geographical location mentioned in Joshua 3:16. When the feet of the priests carrying the ark touched the Jordan River, its waters “stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan.”

Taking “Adam” to be the place mentioned in Joshua 3:16 is not impossible, although we then have to assume that there was a well-known, serious breach of the covenant there not recorded in the Old Testament. That fact in itself does not rule out this

9. The Septuagint, sometimes abbreviated LXX, is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

interpretation—it is not hard to imagine that there were significant acts of rebellion on Israel’s part that are not mentioned in the Bible. It also fits with the inclusion of the word *sham* (“there”) in the text. It is worth noting, however, that in the *one text* where this place is named (Josh. 3:16), the focus is all about God’s faithfulness in bringing Israel to the Promised Land and his miraculous work of dividing the Jordan, not about Israel’s covenant breaking.¹⁰

Reading it as “like man” or “mankind” is also possible.¹¹ The problem with this interpretation, however, is that it makes the word “there” difficult to understand. “Like man (or mankind) they transgressed the covenant; *there* they dealt faithlessly with me.” The questions that remain unanswered in this interpretation are, Where is *there*? and How does *there* fit the context? The KJV and NKJV take it this way, but it is vague, to say the least.

Taking this verse to refer to Adam best fits the context of Hosea. True, this interpretation is not without problems, and it is certainly not accepted by everyone, but it does have the advantage of (1) referring to a known entity in the Bible, and (2) fitting the context of Hosea. There is still a problem with the word “there” referring back to a person, but it is not a great leap to infer that after mentioning the person Adam, Hosea refers to Eden. Second, the context of Hosea is all about Israel’s unfaithfulness to the covenant in spite the “abundant generosity of God, who had loaded Israel down with all manner of good things.”¹² Like Adam, God gave Israel everything they needed for life and well-being, including his own presence; yet, also like Adam, they chose their own way over God’s good gifts and thereby transgressed the covenant.¹³

10. Another thing often brought up against the view that Hosea refers to the place mentioned in Joshua 3:16 is that the Hebrew preposition *ke* rarely means “at.” This is not a very strong argument, however, because as long as it is possible for it to mean “at” (and it is possible), then the fact that it is rare is only suggestive and certainly not decisive.

11. Calvin, notably, read it this way. See, *Hosea*, Calvin Translation Society 13 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 235. Cited in Fesko, *Justification*, 117n21.

12. C. John Collins, “Adam and Eve in the Old Testament,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15, 1 (Spring 2011): 16. Collins cites the following texts in Hosea as some examples of Israel’s covenant breaking: 2:8–13; 7:15; 11:1–4; 13:4–6.

13. Choosing one’s own way over against the way God provides and commands is also known as “works righteousness.” More of that in later chapters, but like so many other biblical themes, works righteousness begins in Eden.

Covenantal Testing. The testing of Adam is the fourth thing that suggests a covenant in Eden. There is no need to repeat the discussion above, but like Abraham the covenant man, Israel the covenant nation, and Christ the covenant head, Adam's loyalty to God and his willingness to honor the relationship God established with him were tested.

The relationship established in Eden was covenantal. The evidence for it spans the Bible. At the very least the relationship between God and Adam in Eden suggests a covenant. In my view there is more than a suggestion—there is a sound biblical-theological conclusion. No doubt some people will remain unconvinced that an actual covenant is found here in Genesis because the word does not appear. Some Bible readers will continue to think that the idea of a covenant with Adam is a result of dedication to a larger theological system. And others will insist that covenants do not appear until after the fall when the biblical pattern of redemption unfolds—but I hope most will agree that the relationship between God and Adam in Eden sets the pattern for the relationships that will soon be called covenants in the Bible.

“You Can Be Like God”: The First and Greatest Temptation

There is a classic rock song by Fleetwood Mac called “Go Your Own Way.” That could have been the theme song of the first temptation in Eden.¹⁴ God held nothing back from Adam and Eve. Everything, including one another, was theirs to enjoy. There was one thing, however, that they could never have nor could ever be, and that is exactly what Satan dangled in front of them. The Serpent is introduced as “more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made” (Gen. 3:1), and he knew exactly how to tempt the first couple in ways they could not resist.

God's role as Creator, and the Serpent as both evil and a part of creation (a creation Adam was meant to rule over, not submit to), is emphasized as the temptation narrative begins.

14. For some, “My Way,” made famous by Frank Sinatra, might be a better analogy.

The rebellion against God originates with a created being before Adam and Eve ate the fruit. What follows is a thinly veiled attack on God as the Serpent implicitly calls God a liar, “you will not surely die” (3:4); a deceiver, “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened” (v. 5); and an equal rather than their Creator, “you will be like God” (v. 5). The created Serpent tells the created woman that she and her created husband can be just like God. The tempter succeeds. Addled by the temptation, Eve skews God’s revealed word and extends the prohibition against eating to include touching. The pace of the narrative hurtles toward the climactic moment that sets the future of the human race in motion: “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate” (v. 6). It takes only six verses to tell the story of the fall and just two verses to interpret what took place.

First, their eyes are opened, but not in the way that the Serpent had promised: “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (v. 7, NIV). Then they find that rather than being God’s equal, they are not even in the position granted to them in the original creation. Rather than enjoying the presence of their Creator, they hide from him when they hear him coming. Everything changes in the biblical narrative from this point.

Questions and Incriminations

“Where are you?” God calls to Adam. This is one of the most tragic lines in the biblical narrative. It is not tragic because God somehow cannot find them or does not know where they are; it is tragic because they must hide in guilt and shame. Well before the dialogue begins, Adam and Eve’s position before God is evident. God knows what they have done, and when confronted with it (v. 11), the first blame game begins. The last time we heard from

Adam about Eve, he was singing her praises and declaring her as his one and only (2:23), but now he turns on her: “She gave it to me.” Even worse, Adam not only blames Eve, he first implicates God and by doing so reveals the true depths of his newfound rebellion. He points his finger at God to try to shift blame to the one who is eternally blameless: “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate” (3:12). Of course, Eve too shifts the blame: “the serpent deceived me, and I ate” (v. 13). No one takes responsibility; no one is righteous. Hatred of God and neighbor begins.

Evil has a foothold in the world, man is in rebellion against God, and by rights the story could end here. “In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” was the word from God about the punishment for eating the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve, however, do not die, not immediately at least. God has a plan to make them and their children right again.

The End and the Beginning

The pastoral scene in Eden is destroyed by disobedience. Because of Adam’s failure, he and his descendants will bear the curse of 2:17. God first curses the Serpent, and the curse includes an enigmatic promise to both the Serpent and to Eve’s children. The defeat of the Serpent will come through the line of Eve (3:15). From this point on, curse and promise will flow together until, through a curse, the promise of God is fulfilled (Gal. 3:13–14).

Grace in the Curse

Genesis 3 introduces a central biblical theme that, like the word “covenant,” is not stated explicitly. That theme is grace. Many have argued that the grace of God is implicit from Genesis 1:1. After all, God did not *have* to create the world; he did not *have* to create humanity and provide for them—it was all done by his grace. There is a general way that we can speak of creation as an act of grace. This is especially so if we view creation as ultimately

inseparable from salvation, although typically when people refer to creation as an act of grace, I doubt that they have the whole complex of creation-fall-redemption-consummation in mind. We often use the word *grace* to signify what is sometimes called “common grace,” that is, the general grace of God that sustains the human race apart from their belief in him and in spite of their ongoing rebellion against him. But not even the idea of “common grace”—connected as it typically is to God’s general grace to humanity *after the fall*—really fits when applied to Genesis 1 and 2. “Grace” in the Bible, when applied particularly in the context of God’s acts of salvation, is more than God’s gift to neutral humanity. Christians often speak of “unmerited” or “unearned” favor to describe God’s grace, and put that way it can be applied to God’s act of creation. In the Bible, however, grace as it connects to salvation is not just *unmerited* but *de-merited* favor.

When the apostle Paul says we are “justified by his grace as a gift” (Rom. 3:24), he is not talking about the justification of the morally neutral who simply had done nothing to deserve God’s favor. To the contrary, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (v. 23). In Romans 6:14, “grace” is contrasted with “sin.” In Ephesians 2:5, it is those who were “dead in our trespasses” who were made “alive together with Christ.” In Titus 3, those who “were foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures” are the ones “justified by his grace” (vv. 3, 7). There are plenty of times in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, when the word “grace” is used in general ways, but in the context of God’s saving acts it is applied to those who are morally broken, undeserving to receive God’s favor because of their rebellion against him. Paul sums it up best when he says “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8), and goes on to describe us as at one time the enemies of God (v. 10). The backdrop for this is the “grace” in which those justified by grace stand (v. 2).

Grace as God’s gift to morally corrupt humanity fits the context of Genesis 3. The seed of the woman will continue on and ultimately be the cause of the Serpent’s destruction. Although it

is only through the woman's pain, the human race will still multiply. Although imbalanced and at odds, man and woman will stay together. Although only by sweating in thorn-laden fields, the human race will still be sustained (3:17–19). Life goes on, although enveloped by a shadow, “till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (v. 19). Even their banishment from the garden is for their ultimate benefit. God sends Adam and Eve out of the garden to prevent their eating of the Tree of Life, presumably to keep them from living forever in a fallen state (v. 22). God has a plan for providing eternal life. Through disobedience the last enemy, death, enters the world. As the story unfolds, it becomes gradually clearer that only through obedience and death will death itself be destroyed and life restored.

Out of Eden: The Setting for the Rest of the Story

The opening chapters of Genesis set the scene for the rest of Scripture. Salvation, and consequently justification, cannot fully be understood apart from this. In three short chapters the story of the human race unfolds from bliss to destruction. In an act that may foreshadow sacrifice for covering man's sin, God clothes Adam and Eve. The curse is complete as God throws them out of Eden. The presence of God is now hidden from man, guarded, not for the last time, by angelic figures.¹⁵ The first man and woman become the first exiles wandering the wilderness without God and without hope in the world.

Bridge to the Bible. There are two central figures in the Bible. Adam is one of them. Although other men receive far more attention (Abraham, Moses, and David, for example), none of them plays a role near that of Adam's. The figure of Adam stands over all of them; he is, one might say, the problem that will not go away. He explains why the human race plummets downward after him. He is the explanation for why people do not obey God when they are told explicitly what he wants them to do—after all, if Adam did

15. Think of the carved seraphim overshadowing the ark of the covenant.

not obey in his innocence, what is going to happen to people living under his curse when they are given commands from God? Adam explains sin and death—through his disobedience both come to the human race (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21–22). His act of disobedience determines the relationship of his children before God. We are, all of us, born outside Eden. There is, however, another figure, larger than Adam and yet also Adam. A second and last Adam. Adam is called “the son of God” (Luke 3:38), and this one is also called God’s Son. But this one is a “beloved” Son who pleases his Father in every way and is accepted by him. As Adam’s disobedience alienated his children from God, so will the second Adam’s obedience be the way that will right that relationship. Through the first Adam we were made sinners; through the second we are made righteous. The next chapter follows that trajectory.