

Series: Answering God's Questions
2. A Question in Eden after the Fall.
WHERE ARE YOU?
Genesis 3v9.

This second question in our series is one which reminds me of Francis Thompson's poem 'The Hound of Heaven.' It is about running away from God.

*"I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him.....
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat – and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet - " (1)*

Thompson could have slipped our text in here. **"Where are you?"** In Genesis 3v9 this is a question addressed to someone trying to run and hide from God.

Doctrinally the question is about the "Fall", though you won't find this word in the text. The word may bring to mind the illustration of Humpty Dumpty from Lewis Carroll's 'Alice Through the Looking Glass'. There he is an egg who falls from a wall and breaks into pieces and cannot be put together again. (The original Humpty Dumpty in the nursery rhyme was a large cannon at the siege of Colchester in 1648 during the English Civil War.)

The term, the Fall is used of the events described in Genesis 3 to assert that something disastrous and irretrievable happened which affected the whole of human history. It faces the issue of what has gone wrong with the world. And in particular why are we as we are? Why is there so much alienation and strife between human beings? Where do guilt and shame and fear and lying and cheating and murder come from? And why do so many people reject the very idea of God or feel alienated from God? Genesis 3 addresses these huge issues. The main characters are Adam and Eve, God Himself and a serpent; the setting is the Garden of Eden. Chapter 2v7-25 gives us the background.

Over two weeks we will look first at the text of Genesis 3v1-9, and secondly at the theology of the Fall.

1. The Biblical Text: Genesis 3v1-9.

v1: Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman.." Hold it right there! To state the obvious, snakes don't speak. Something is not right here. This raises the issue of what kind of story this is. Is this a *fable*? Are we in the Old Testament

equivalent of Narnia, with a wonderful garden, a talking serpent and magic fruit trees? Or is this a *legend* - a Hebrew story with some vague historical basis handed down through the generations? We have our Robin Hood and King Arthur legends. Perhaps it is a *parable* – a story, like the Prodigal Son, which presents a profound theological message? Or is it a *myth*? This is a favourite word of liberal Bible scholars, used to identify an event which did not take place in literal history but which belongs to a spiritual reality. So, this event “took place” in a spiritual Eden, whatever that means!

Poor, naïve man that I am - I understand this to be a *historical event*. The story is written as “*straightforward narrative history*” (2), with a family line springing from Adam and Eve. Bible teacher David Pawson agrees: “*This is a real event in real history; we are given both the place and the time of it. At the dawn of human history a gigantic moral catastrophe took place.*” (3) In Romans 5v12-21, the apostle Paul views Adam and his sin as historical as the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(The serpent) said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The serpent was one of God's creatures. But something had happened to this particular serpent! “*With the serpent's first utterance it becomes apparent that an enemy of God is speaking.*” (4) “The serpent” (Satan) had entered into “a” serpent. There is a supernatural being behind evil. Satan works to ruin everything associated with God. This is not introducing dualism – two equal spiritual powers. Satan is not another god or an equal power, he is a created being, a fallen angel. There had been a Fall in heaven before ever there was a Fall on earth.

Notice how the serpent targets Eve. **"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"** The text puts the emphasis on the word “really” and no, God had *not* said they couldn't eat from *any* tree. The serpent is drawing Eve into conversation. She should turn away. You don't talk to serpents! Instead she answers.

v2,3: The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden..'" What is this tree? It is the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” introduced in chapter 2v9. Does this mean God has created something evil? No! God is all powerful but evil is something He is incapable of making. Everything He makes is “good”. So what is this tree?

I understand it to be an actual tree but its nature is “*sacramental.*” (5) Taking the fruit from this tree *would mean something* - just as taking bread and wine means something. So, not to eat the fruit of this tree meant you were living in obedience to God. The tree's presence in the garden gave Adam and Eve a simple way to affirm their obedience and trust every day. But to eat from the tree meant disobedience. But there was more!

By taking the fruit from this tree *something would change*. The sacramental is more than symbolic. Something actually happens. In the Bible, “*knowledge*” is not just intellectual. It is experiential. By eating this fruit they will experience

something which will change them. Adam and Eve were already experiencing good; by taking the fruit they would experience evil too!

“..and you must not touch it, or you will die.” This is sometimes interpreted as an exaggeration, perhaps even hinting at God’s severity. The late E.J. Young, a renowned Old Testament scholar, took a different tack. He thought it showed Eve fully understood God’s command. The word for *“touch”* in the text means more than simply feeling something with the fingers. Eve was talking about touch that would result in *taking possession* of the fruit. God had said this would lead to death.

v4,5: "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened," The serpent abandons subtlety. First he contradicts what God has said; and does so forcibly. In the text the negative comes first: *“NO – it is not true that you will surely die.”* Second he implies God is jealous and afraid of rivals. Third the serpent suggests there is some magical quality to the fruit; in fact the issue is obedience or disobedience. Fourth the serpent tells a half truth. Yes, their eyes would be opened. But he does not explain how terrible their condition would be as a result; they would experience evil from the standpoint of those who have mutinied from God.

Here we have the essence of sin. Abandon trust in God and strike out on your own! Make your own evaluation. Decide for yourself whether God is right or not. Interpret life apart from God. The serpent is saying that reverent obedience to God is *not* the beginning of wisdom!

“your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Charles Colson writes this: *“Adam & Eve’s sin was not eating a piece of fruit. Their sin was coveting godlike power, craving something that was not rightfully theirs. They rejected their nature as created, limited, finite beings & they tried to be what they could never be - divine. They wanted to be their own god.”* (6)

A few years ago football icon David Beckham was photographed wearing a jacket with a poem written on the back. It read:

*“Look into the palm of my right hand.
What do you see? Nothing? I see my fate.
Look into the palm of my left hand.
What do you see? Nothing? I see my destiny.
Look into both of my hands.
What do you see? Nothing? I see my future
for my future is in my hands and my hands hold my future.
....Be your own god.”*

v6: When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom she took some and ate it. Temptation changes Eve’s way of looking at the tree. In the garden all the trees were a delight, but suddenly this one is especially

desirable and beautiful. To be deprived of its fruit is too much to ask! **She took some and ate it.** *“So simple the act, so hard its undoing.”* (5)

She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Notice Adam is with Eve. He is nearby, probably close enough to hear. But he has not intervened. He has done nothing to stop her. He has gone along with the whole thing. Now she plucks the fruit, sinks her teeth into it and hands it to Adam who does the same.

v7: Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; “so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves *“The serpent’s promise of ‘eyes..opened’ came true in its fashion, but it was a grotesque anticlimax to the dream of enlightenment.”* (5) Instead of some new and wonderful knowledge all they saw was their nakedness. They began to look at everything from a different perspective – a lower position. Everything looked different now. What had been pure was now shameful. Corruption has entered their hearts and minds. The Bible calls it “sin” - a malignant disease of the soul that affects everything.

Then they experience something else that is new. For the first time they feel guilt and fear. **v8: Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.** This tells us something fascinating: before the “Fall” God Himself *“walked”* in the garden. God is spirit, so in order to come alongside them He must have appeared in human form. There are other instances of this in the Old Testament. We refer to them as *“theophanies”* - appearances of God in human form. They are distinct from the incarnation when God actually *became* a man in Jesus, but they foreshadow that great event.

Instead of delight at His approach Adam and Eve now experience dread. This is what sin has done. They want to run from God. Their instinct is to hide. They soon discover this is impossible. You cannot run from God. You cannot hide from God; which brings us to God’s question:

v9: But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” Asking questions is what we do in real relationships. We wait for an answer and then listen when it is given. There was a real relationship between God and the man and woman.

But what is behind the question? This isn’t a game of hide-and-seek! God is not in the dark about what has happened. Nor is this a threatening question. *“Where are you? Wait till I get my hands on you!”* Grace lies behind the question. There is even gentleness in it. *“He must draw rather than drive them out of hiding.”* (5) But God is calling Adam to face up to Him. Adam, before Eve, must give an account. The man and woman were not puppets. They were responsible for the choice they had made. We too will have to give an account to God.

What a Fall! What terrible consequences! Yet such is God's grace that He refuses to abandon sinful men and women. **Where are you?** Let God ask you this question today. Even if it is uncomfortable – it is better than no voice at all. Imagine if Genesis 3 had ended in silence with God turning His back and walking sadly away!

Ravi Zacharias recalls the terrifying, claustrophobic, experience of having a medical examination using magnetic resonance imaging. He was slid into a pitch-black silent world and the door was shut on him. As the minutes ticked by a voice came through on an electronic speaker saying, *“Before I begin, do you have any questions?”* He nervously blurted back: *“Sir! Will you be there the whole time that I am here?”*, and the reply came, *“I promise you, Mr. Zacharias, that I will be here through the entire length of the procedure.”*

He writes: *“Just recounting the incident sends a shiver through me. I want you to know that even a total stranger’s voice was of immense comfort to me in this closed box that had me in its clasp. As I lay there, a horrifying thought suddenly came upon me. In the naturalistic scheme (i.e. existence without God), humanity has been tossed into this closed system called the universe, and we are hurtling through space, with no voice out there to speak to us. There is nobody to ask is if we have any questions, and nobody to tell us that he is there for us.”* (7)

Where are you? God was still there. The relationship had been severed but God had not abandoned them. His question brought Adam and Eve out into the open; to confess to God's face what they had done.

God is still here, for you and me. And there is only one place to run to, to escape from God's judgment. To God Himself! There is only one place to hide for your shame to be covered. In God Himself!

How can this be? It is possible because of what God Himself has done in Jesus, to rescue us from sin's terrible grip and give us righteousness as a glorious free gift. Romans 5v18,19: *“Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”*

2. The Theology of the Fall.

Rather than walk away in silence God spoke to Adam and Eve. They had not been abandoned. Nevertheless they were now 'fallen' people in a 'fallen' world. A terrible disease of the soul called “sin” had been birthed in them which would infect everyone. Now, every one of *us* is like them.

This is the Bible's answer to questions like: What's gone wrong with humanity? Where have war, hatred, selfishness, abuse and all this chaos come from? Yet, astonishingly, this theology of 'the Fall' in Genesis chapter 3 is neglected by many Christians.

This is a serious mistake, for three reasons. First, the temptation to be like God is the basic sin behind every sin. It is experienced in the life of every one of us, every day. Second, the doctrine of 'the Fall' is an essential piece of the jig saw in making sense of life and the world around us. Many things *fit into* this piece of the puzzle. Third, the message of 'the Fall' offers hope. This is in stark contrast to the bleakness and despair offered by secular humanism. The Bible offers hope because it points us to the one Person who can reverse the effect of 'the Fall'.

So let's take some time to think about the implications of being fallen people in a fallen world. Here are some jig saw pieces which fit into this central piece.

- The Fall confirms this is *not* the best of all possible worlds.

Faced with the problem of evil, an 18th century philosopher called Leibniz concluded that this must be "*the best of all possible worlds*"; there must be a reason why God made the world the way it is. But Genesis 3 contradicts this. The world is not as God intended and we are not how God intended. This is not the best that men and women can be. This is a fallen world and we are fallen people. In fact we are no longer fully human! A new kind of man, a new species, says C.S. Lewis, has "*sinned itself into existence*". (8)

But the good news is: Jesus came as the perfect man - as the only one who could claim to be truly human! When Pilate said "*Ecco Homo*", "*Behold the man!*" (John 19v5) his words were prophetic. Take a look at the only perfect, "unfallen" man! He has come to rescue fallen men and women.

- The Fall explains why many people find life meaningless.

Separated from God life loses its meaning and purpose. Existentialism was a twentieth century philosophy which announced that there are no answers to anything. We don't know who to blame for the chaos all around us and we have no God to turn to. The French existentialist philosopher Albert Camus' last novel was actually called '*La Chute*', 'The Fall'. A judge-penitent called Jean-Baptiste Clamence reflects on his life to a stranger. He tells of his successful years as a Parisian lawyer and then of his "fall" from grace, in a clear allusion to the story of the Fall of Man in Eden. The man is guilt ridden but because he doesn't believe in God he confesses his sins to the stranger (and the reader) over the course of several evenings. But in the end he is left exhausted and without any sense of forgiveness or redemption.

One reviewer thinks the writer is "*questioning the relentlessly amoral, self-centred worldview of the existentialists, along with their notion of an essentially meaningless universe devoid of absolutes.*" (9) We were created for God. Any search for meaning in life is futile without Him. The good news is: Jesus says: "I have come that you might have life", and "I am the way, the truth and the life." (John 10v10; 14v6)

- The Fall gives us God's diagnosis of the human condition.

Most people around us tend to think that men and women are basically good. They are optimists about human nature. When they see something manifestly evil the best explanation they can come up with is a surface one. But the Fall declares that we are born with a disease of the soul which the Bible calls 'sin'. Even scientific humanists like Richard Dawkins come close to agreeing. His first book was called 'The Selfish Gene.' "*Be warned*" he writes, "*that if you wish, as I do, to build a society in which individuals cooperate generously and unselfishly towards the common good, you can expect little help from biological nature. Let us try to teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish.*" (10) Dawkins believes we are machines at the mercy of our genes. The Bible's diagnosis is that the problem lies deep in the human heart. Man was created by a loving, purposeful God but he mutinied and now we are infected. Because of 'the Fall', as hard as we try, we are slaves to the downward pull of sin.

But the good news is: Jesus came to rescue us from sin's mastery. He came to rescue us from the dominion of darkness where sin rules supreme and transfer us into His Kingdom, where sin's power has been broken. (Colossians 1v13) Jesus has come to set prisoners free; to open prison doors. (Luke 4v16-21) That is why Charles Wesley could write "*My chains fell off, my heart was free.*"

- The Fall recalls that we were the crown of creation.

In the beginning God made man "in his own image" and "a little lower than the angels." So, although 'the Fall' speaks of a catastrophe it also reminds us that we have fallen from *a height*. This is the exact opposite of worldviews which proclaim that humanity crawled out of the slime, accidents of evolution, without any purpose or meaning in life. The Bible also says that while 'the Fall' has damaged God's image in man, it has not shattered it into a thousand pieces. Humanity is still capable of goodness. Imagine this world if that were not true! But this goodness still falls far short of God's goodness and is no substitute for it.

The good news is: Jesus came to lift fallen men and women up again. He has come to restore the image of God in us so that we can mirror God's glory and reflect more and more of His likeness. (2 Corinthians 3v18)

- The Fall explains our longing to be loved.

This is what men and women search for more than anything. Our songs and literature and art are obsessed with the theme of love. It is the glue in all the TV soaps and American high school dramas. Adam and Eve knew love because they knew God. God *is* love. Love originates in Him and flows from Him. Sin spoiled this relationship of love. Human love is a faint glimpse of Divine love, but even in the best of human loves there is still a craving that can never be satisfied because we all need the love of God. The good news is: God comes seeking for us in Jesus Christ offering His love.

- The Fall is a reminder that we were made to know God.

... not to be religious! We were made for a personal and intimate relationship with God. In Eden God appeared in bodily form and Adam and Eve enjoyed His presence and walked and talked with Him. Sin severed this relationship, but God made arrangements for those whose hearts yearned for Him to approach Him via sacrifices. However rituals and special days and holy places easily become external routines and a poor substitute for knowing God personally. And they were always intended as a preview of something more substantial.

So when celebrity atheists rail against religion we have some sympathy. We agree, religion is not the answer. The good news is: Jesus does not invite us to be religious. He didn't come to start a new religion. He came to restore our relationship with the God. We were made to know God, personally.

- 'The Fall' sabotages a familiar defence for personal sin.

People sometimes say: "I'm no different from anyone else. He's no better than me!" It is the safety-in-numbers approach; if enough people do what I do it must be OK. *Everyone does it!* Yes indeed! 'The Fall' agrees. It says *everyone has fallen*; there are no exceptions. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3v22,23) "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves." (1 John 1v8)

The good news is that when we say this we are agreeing with God. So rather than make it a defence, take the next step and say, "Yes, I am no exception. I am responsible for my sin. God, have mercy on me!" Jesus didn't come for those who say they're OK, but for those who admit they need mercy.

- 'The Fall' validates our feelings of guilt and shame.

Secular humanism may dismiss this as some primitive legacy, but biblical Christianity regards guilt and shame as essential. This is not something to be embarrassed about but welcomed because it points to our need for atonement. In Ernest Hemingway's novel about the Spanish Civil War, 'For Whom the Bells Tolls', one of his characters, Anselmo, is thinking about all the killing. *"I think that after the war there will have to be some great penance done for the killing. If we no longer have religion after the war then I think there must be some form of civic penance organized that all may be cleansed from the killing or else we will never have a true and human basis for living... we must do something very strong to atone for it."* (11)

The Bible says there is nothing we can do to atone for sin; nothing that will ease our guilt and shame. But God Himself has done what we cannot do. He came in the perfect person of Jesus and died as a sacrifice to atone for our sin. Only this can deal with our guilt because sin is first and foremost against God. He therefore has the right to lay down how atonement is made. Amazingly, God chose the cross. He chose to come in Jesus and make atonement for us.

- ‘The Fall’ highlights that we live in an enemy-occupied world.

Genesis 3 introduced us to a malignant power in the universe – not one equal to God, but nevertheless significant. Satan is the temporary prince of this world. The good news is: the rightful King has landed! There is now a power greater than sin in this fallen world – the Kingdom of God. The great usurper’s days are numbered. We are living between ‘D Day’ and ‘VE Day’ The decisive battle has been won on the cross and the final victory is coming soon.

- ‘The Fall’ accounts for our mortality

Why do we die? Apparently the cells in our body have time-switches preset to operate within 24 hours of birth, then again at puberty and between the ages of 40-50. Then as we approach 70 the time switch clicks again. *“An aging device operates for the running down of the machinery. Specialists agree that aging is not the result of the machinery wearing out, for cells constantly renew themselves. There seems no reason why the body should not live for ever, apart from some preset clock which says “start the count down”.*(12)

According to Genesis 3 the Fall triggered this final countdown in the first man and woman and physical death followed. Adam returned to the dust from which he had come. The apostle Paul teaches that death entered the world by one man and this was passed on to all humanity (Romans 5v12) But the good news is: Jesus has reversed this terrible effect of the Fall. He says, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11v25)

- ‘The Fall’ helps us understand our longing for ‘home’.

We have a multitude of TV programmes where someone or other is looking for the perfect home. ‘Location, Location’, ‘Grand Designs’, ‘Changing Rooms’, ‘A Place in the Sun’, ‘House Doctor’. Adam and Eve had the Ideal Home in Eden and enjoyed it with God’s blessing. But after the Fall they were ejected. *“So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.”* (Genesis 3v23) There is plenty of evidence that men and women have a longing to “get back to the garden”. This might be expressed by a longing to belong, idolising the family, making your home your castle, having your identity tied in to a particular region or piece of land or believing in some kind of heaven. There is a longing for “home”.

But home is where God is! So here is good news: Jesus came to take us ‘home’. This is not a location on a map or somewhere beyond the clouds. Home is to be with God. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14v1-3; see also Philippians 1v21-23)

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Where are you? This question was addressed to a fallen man and a fallen woman. It highlights that it is not God who is hiding from us. Some think that, if God exists at all, He takes pleasure in making it as difficult as possible for us to find Him. No, the opposite is true. He is the One who is seeking us and it is 'fallen' men and women who do the hiding. The issue for many is not that they can't find God; it is that they don't want to be found by God.

That is not true of everyone. Some people *do* want to be found but don't feel they are worth looking for; God couldn't possibly be interested in them! The message of the Bible from beginning to end is that God is always seeking fallen men and women. Jesus said He had come "*to seek and to save the lost*". And when He finds even one He rejoices and all heaven with Him!

John Wilthew. April 2008.

- (1) Francis Thompson. (1859-1907)
- (2) Wayne Grudem. 'Systematic Theology' IVP. 1994.
- (3) David Pawson. 'Unlocking the Bible'. Collins. 1999.
- (4) E.J. Young. 'Genesis 3'. Banner of Truth Trust. 1966.
- (5) Derek Kidner. 'Genesis'. Tyndale Press. 1967
- (6) Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey. 'How Now Shall We Live?' Marshall Pickering. 1999
- (7) Ravi Zacharias. 'Jesus Among Other Gods' (Chapter 7. 'Is there a Gardener?') Word Publishing. 2000.
- (8) C.S. Lewis. 'The Problem of Pain'. Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press. 1940
- (9) J.Maher: 'Camus, *The Fall*, and the Question of Faith.
- (10) Richard Dawkins. 'The Selfish Gene.' Oxford University Press.1976
- (11) Ernest Hemingway. 'For Whom the Bell Tolls.' Jonathan Cape. 1941.
- (12) E.K. Pearce. 'Who was Adam?' Paternoster. 1969