

LESSON THREE: MAN'S FALL AND GOD'S PLAN FOR HIS REDEMPTION

Having examined the makeup of the Bible and surveyed its history, we now turn to those events that led to man's fall from God's favor and then to the great plan which God devised to save him from his sins, the plan which each of us is privileged and obligated to obey in order to spend eternity in heaven.

THE CREATION OF MAN

One of the characteristics of God given in Lesson One is his infinite goodness (Psalms 100:5, 106:1; Matthew 19:17; Romans 11:12; James 1:17). Out of this goodness he created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, a paradise possessed of everything he needed for his well-being and delight (Genesis 1 and 2). God loved man, and he wanted him to have everything that would be beneficial to him.

Among the blessings of the garden were two special trees. One was the tree of life, whose fruit would enable man to live forever (Genesis 2:9; 3:22). The other was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God forbade man to eat the fruit of this tree, and attached the penalty of death if he disobeyed (Genesis 2:9, 17). Yet this law was itself a blessing to man, first because it kept him away from what could harm him, and secondly because the existence of a law gave him the opportunity to obey God and thereby show his loyalty to him, an opportunity otherwise denied him. As man's creator and original father, God deserved obedience, and only by that obedience could man return the love, which had been shown him. So today we can only show our love for God and Christ by obeying their commandments (John 14:15; I John 2:3; 5:2-3; Revelation 14:12).

THE FALL OF MAN

Had Adam and his wife Eve continued to obey God's law, they would have lived and been happy forever. But Satan, the enemy of God and father of all evil (Job 1:6-12; Mark 4:15), induced them through lies to break the commandment by eating the fruit of the forbidden tree (Genesis 3; John 8:44). Thus sin, the transgression of God's law (I John 3:4), was introduced into the world, and with it came punishment and death.

You may wonder why, since God loved man, he allowed him the freedom to sin, or why he allowed Satan the opportunity to tempt him to sin. The answer lies in the nature of genuine obedience. Only if man were left free to choose to obey God would his obedience be truly worthwhile, and only if he could choose to disobey would he really be free in his choice. Likewise, to keep Satan, the origin of all evil, away from man would also in effect prevent him from choosing to obey.

The sin of man brought the terrible consequences of which God had warned, and which he detailed in Genesis 3. Some of these were physical consequences. Men would have to labor hard and contend with thorns and thistles in order to obtain food (Genesis 3:17-19). Women would suffer pain in childbirth and subjugation to their husbands (Genesis 3:16). And ultimately, denied access to the tree of life, all men would decay and suffer physical death (Genesis 3:19, 22-23).

But as serious as these physical consequences were, by far the most terrible result of man's sin was the spiritual consequence: separation from God and eternal damnation. When God had created man. He had given him a living soul (Genesis 2:7). This soul would never go out of existence as would his temporal life, but rather would continue forever, either in happiness with his Father or else in a place of punishment separated from Him (Matthew 10:28; 25:31-46; Luke. 16:19-31; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Philippians 1:21-24). So long as man obeyed, he was in union and harmony with Him. But when man sinned, his sins separated him from God (Isaiah 59:2) and doomed him to eternal death. This was the death God had primarily referred to when He had warned man that if he transgressed the law concerning the forbidden fruit he would "Purely die"

(Genesis 2:17). Having broken that law, man was now subject to this mortal penalty. He stood facing eternal separation from his Creator in a place especially designed for those who rebel against Him.

The Bible teaches that at the end of time Christ will come to judge the world, and that those who are separated from him by sin will be delivered over to everlasting punishment (Matthew 7:21-13; 25:31-33, 41-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9), a punishment called damnation (John 5:29) and the second death (Revelation 20:14). Those who are condemned will be cast into hell, a place of torment originally prepared for Satan and his angels (Matthew 25:41), but also reserved for men who are wicked and disobedient (Romans 2:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Revelation 21:8). Hell is described as a place of everlasting fire and darkness (Matthew 8:12; 25:41; Revelation 19:20). Worst of all, the punishment will go on forever, without end (Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9). Clearly, a man could be in no worse condition than to be separated from God by his sins, and this was the condition in which Adam and Eve now found themselves.

Further, it is the condition in which all men and women who have ever lived have found themselves. Although succeeding generations would not inherit the spiritual consequences of Adam's sin as they would its physical consequences (Ezekiel 18:20;

Romans 5:12), the sad fact remains that all men commit sins of their own (Romans 3:23), and thus they, like Adam and Eve, ultimately have become separated from the Father and stand in jeopardy of an eternity in hell.

THE SCHEME OF REDEMPTION

At this most tragic and fateful moment, when man stood condemned and faced the black prospect of eternal death. God's unfathomable love pierced the darkness of despair with a promise of hope.

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15)

In this stern judgment on the serpent, God first revealed that one called here "the seed of the woman" would come to defeat Satan and win back the soul of man, which the devil had stolen away. Here was the first glimpse of that great plan to save mankind from their sins, which God had prepared even before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Though as yet indistinct, this veiled prophecy from God foretells the coming of one who will redeem fallen man.

But how, in view of God's warning to man in Genesis 2:17 that he would "surely die"¹¹ if he sinned, could God save man without setting aside his own law? Since God is perfectly just (Psalms 89:14), his justice could not allow him to forgive man without the penalty of death being required and paid. How, then, could man escape the penalty?

There was one way, a way both terrible and wonderful. If God himself consented to pay the penalty in man's place, then justice would be served, the sin would be erased, and man could be saved. No one could then question God's justice; rather his love and mercy would be made manifest in an unparalleled way.

In the most sacrificial act of love that ever would be shown, God determined to pay the price. In the place of man, God's own Son, his only begotten Son more dear to him than any other being, the Son so perfect and divine that he alone could serve as the acceptable substitute, would come in the form of sinful flesh to die in man's place.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Jesus himself said that he had come "to give his life a ransom" for man (Matthew 20:28). And Paul declared of him that he "was delivered for our offenses" and that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 4:25; 5:6-8).

Thousands of years would pass before the Son would come to pay the ransom. Time was required in order for man to reach a full realization of the terrible nature of sin (cf. Romans 7:13) and how helpless he was to rid himself of its consequences. Time was required, to develop the system of prophecies and of symbolic acts and events that would prepare man to look for and anticipate the coming of the Savior. But even as Adam and Eve stood condemned and ashamed before their Creator, and even as the darkness of death and the corruption of the fallen world began to close over them, God's great scheme for the salvation of man was promised and set in motion. In Lesson Four, we will see how this plan was developed during the Old Testament period.

Please feel free to read and study this lesson as many times as you wish to do so. After you are comfortable with the knowledge you have gained you may want to test yourself to learn how well you remember. Questions for review and study on this lesson may be found by going to <http://64.177.52.39/8LESSONS/3Q.htm> .

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