

Divide and Conquer

Genesis 3:1-8, 12-13,17

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1. Together

- a. They were supposed to work together
 - i. Not of good value to be alone. Showed the importance to God “not good”
- b. They were supposed to have roles
 - i. Man- Worker-Worshipping through purposeful serving and moral responsibility
 - ii. Woman-Helper- an aid and support fit for him, an indispensable partner working with him for the service of the Lord. Accomplishing what the man cannot.
- c. They were supposed to be Suitable
 - i. Opposite and Corresponding

2. Divide vs. 1-5

- a. Satan’s Instantaneous Attack on God’s Purpose 2:21-25
 - i. Satan wants to attack the family (Job)
- b. Satan Questions God’s Purpose
 - i. Questions God’s motivation with the subtle addition “really say.”
 - (1) In any case the substance of what the serpent says is more important than who or what the serpent is. Moreover, the serpent was among the “good” animals God had made (chap. 1), and there was no ostensible reason for the woman to suspect the animal’s deceit other than the content of what the animal spoke. Perhaps that the snake was of the wild (see 2:19–20 with 3:1), not as familiar to the domestic couple, explains the woman’s gullibility.
 - ii. The serpent reworks the wording of God’s command slightly
 - iii. The tempter also cast doubt over God’s character, suggesting that **God** was jealous, holding them back from their destiny (3:5). They would become **like God** when they ate—

3. Shift vs. 1-5

- a. Eve Responds, Adam Doesn't
 - i. The woman's first mistake was her willingness to talk with the serpent
 - ii. Eve either did not know God's command very well or did not want to remember it.
 - (1) By contrast, Christ gained victory over Satan by His precise knowledge of God's Word (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).
 - (2) The woman corrects the snake, but not quite accurately. Whereas the LORD had said, "You may freely eat of every garden tree," she omits "every," saying simply, "We may eat of the fruit ..." She also adopts the snake's description of the LORD God, describing him simply as "God," and most significantly, she adds to the ban on eating of the tree of knowledge a prohibition on even touching it "lest you die." These slight alterations to God's remarks suggest that the woman has already moved slightly away from God toward the serpent's attitude. The creator's generosity is not being given its full due, and he is being painted as a little harsh and repressive, forbidding the tree even to be touched. Indeed, the way "lest you die" follows "touch" suggests that not just eating it but touching it may be lethal.
 - iii. Eve disparaged the privileges, added to the prohibition, and weakened the penalty—all seen by contrasting her words
 - (1) The woman's first experience of falsehood leads to an eager repudiation of the serpent's intentional calumny, in which she emphasises the generosity of the divine rule, but unconsciously intensifies the stringency of the prohibition by adding the words: *nor shall ye touch it*] A Jewish legend says that the serpent took advantage of this innocent and immaterial variation by forcing her to touch the fruit, and then arguing that as death had not followed the touch, so it would not follow the eating
- b. She saw it was "Good"
 - i. The temptation of the fruit is (1) its substance as food, (2) its appearance, and (3) its potential for making the woman "wise."
 - ii. James likewise warns that illicit desires lead to sin and sin to death (Jas 1:14–15), 1 John 2:16
- c. Adam Guilty Bystander
 - i. Adam was not misled (1 Tim 2:14). T
 - ii. The blame on Adam's shoulders (Ezra 3:21; 7:118).
 - iii. how the man listens to his wife instead of God, the woman to the creature, and so on. The very phraseology of these verses strengthens his observations. Actions hitherto characteristic of the creator are now ascribed to the woman. She "saw *that* the tree was *good*," clearly echoing the refrain of Gen 1, "God saw ... that it was good." In chap. 2 it is the

LORD God who *takes* the man and the rib (15, 21, 22, 23); here she takes the fruit. Hitherto it has been God who has made all that man requires; now man and wife attempt to make loincloths (1:7, 11, 26, 31; 2:18; etc.). The human pair are shown usurping divine prerogatives as well as explicitly disobeying God's express word. When God makes the couple clothes of skin in 3:21, this is both an act of grace and a reassertion of the creator's rights.

4. In it Together v. 7

- a. Eyes of Both Open
 - i. Knew they Were Naked
 - (1) Certainly their behavior before meeting God shows (*pace* Westermann, 1:253) that they had a sense of guilt before he addressed them
- b. Made Coverings
 - i. Fig Leaves
 - (1) Their efforts to hide their shame are as puny as their efforts to hide from God since their man-made coverings are ineffective (v. 21).
 - ii. Loins
 - (1) Here that shame is explained as the consequence of the guilt of sin. Before human disobedience there was no shame (2:25), but with sin the man's self-consciousness had changed. His sense of humiliation impacts his covering up before the woman as well as before God. By this Adam admits his sense of shame, which has been motivated by his guilt

5. Conquer vs. 12-13,17

- a. The man points to the woman as the real offender.
 - i. In particular Adam's punishment is later related to his consent to the woman (3:17).
 - ii. The woman is depicted as God's gift in 2:22, where Adam initially responds with enthusiastic glee but now, "the woman you put here with me."
 - iii. The woman, who was Adam's delight and was designed by God to be his "helper" in achieving blessing (2:18), becomes a partner in crime. Like the man, she shifts the blame to another party—the serpent.

Exegetical Outline

6. God's Intent for Together
 - a. They were supposed to work together
 - i. Not of good value to be alone. Showed the importance to God "not good"
 - b. They were supposed to have roles
 - i. Man- Worker-Worshipping through purposeful serving and moral responsibility
 - ii. Woman-Helper- an aid and support fit for him, an indispensable partner working with him for the service of the Lord. Accomplishing what the man cannot.
 - c. They were supposed to be Suitable
 - i. Opposite
 - ii. Corresponding

7. Satan's attack of on God's Purpose v.1-5
 - a. Instantaneous Attack on God's Purpose 2:21-25
 - i. After God made woman
 - ii. Adam called her woman bone of my bone
 - iii. Immediately the Serpent Attacks
 - iv. Satan wants to attack the family (Job)
 - b. He Question God's Purpose
 - i. First, the opponent does not controvert outright the saying of the Lord (2:16); rather, he questions God's motivation with the subtle addition "really say."
 - ii. Second, the serpent uses the name "God" rather than the covenant name "LORD" that has characterized the narrative of 2:4–25, where "LORD God" appears.
 - iii. Third, the serpent reworks the wording of God's command slightly by
 - (1) adding the negative "not" at the head of the clause, which with "any" expresses an absolute prohibition;
 - (2) omitting the emphatic "freely";
 - (3) using the plural "you" (hence bypassing the man) rather than the singular as in 2:16; and
 - (4) placing the clause "from any tree" at the end of the sentence rather than at the head as in 2:16, thereby robbing God's command of its nuance of liberality. All of this is to say that the divine injunction in the mouth of the serpent was refashioned for its own interests.
 - (5) The tempter also cast doubt over God's character, suggesting that **God** was jealous, holding them back from their destiny (3:5). They

would become **like God** when they ate—and God knew that, according to Satan. So Satan held out to them the promise of divinity—**knowing good and evil**.

8. Role Reversal v.1-5

a. Eve Responds, Adam Doesn't

- i. The woman's first mistake was her willingness to talk with the serpent and to respond to the creature's cynicism by rehearsing God's prohibition (2:17).
- ii. Eve either did not know God's command very well or did not want to remember it. By contrast, Christ gained victory over Satan by His precise knowledge of God's Word (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).
- iii. Eve disparaged the privileges, added to the prohibition, and weakened the penalty—all seen by contrasting her words
- iv. First, she omits those elements in the command, "any" and "freely," which placed the prohibition in a context of liberality.
- v. (v. 2). Second, Eve identifies the tree according to its location rather than its significance;
- vi. third, she refers to "God" as the serpent had done, rather than "the LORD" (v. 3).
- vii. Fourth, she also adds the phrase "you must not touch it" (v. 3), which may make the prohibition more stringent.
- viii. Finally, she failed to capture the urgency of certain death, "You will [surely] die" (v. 3).

b. She saw it was Good

- i. The temptation of the fruit is (1) its substance as food, (2) its appearance, and (3) its potential for making the woman "wise."
- ii. James likewise warns that illicit desires lead to sin and sin to death (Jas 1:14–15), a course Adam acts out.
- iii. The Hebrew word תַּאֲוָה (*ta'avah*, translated "attractive" here) actually means "desirable." This term and the later term נְחָמָה (*nekhmad*, "desirable") are synonyms. **sn** *Attractive (Heb "desirable") ... desirable*. These are different words in Hebrew. The verbal roots for both of these forms appear in Deut 5:21 in the prohibition against coveting. Strong desires usually lead to taking

c. Adam Guilty Bystander

- i. Adam was not misled (1 Tim 2:14). This concurs with early Jewish tradition, which placed the blame on Adam's shoulders (e.g., 4 Ezra 3:21; 7:118).
- ii. Although "with her" does not in itself demand that he is present since the serpent speaks "to the woman," nevertheless, the action of the verse implies that Adam is a witness to the dialogue. "You" at each place in 3:1–5 is plural and thus suggests his presence. However, there is no indication that he too is deceived by the serpent.

iii. At this point she still is thinking collectively with her husband, from whom, as the narrator implies, she received the command: “we may eat”

9. Who's to Blame? V.12-13,17

- a. **3:12** Despite his culpability the man points to the woman as the real offender. Unlike the woman, the man was not deceived by the serpent—at least he does not refer to the serpent—so he cites her part in the matter. In particular Adam’s punishment is later related to his consent to the woman (3:17). Adam’s contention is given force by the emphasis on “she,” yielding the sense, “I only took what *she* gave me!” But there could be no exoneration for his crime on this flimsy basis. Not finished with shifting blame, Adam even accuses God for the tragedy by adding, “the woman you put here with me.” The NIV’s “put” translates the literal “gave,” which is repeated in the next clause, “she gave me.” By this Adam charges that the Lord “gave” the woman to him and in turn she “gave” him the fruit. The implication is inescapable: God ultimately is responsible for the success of the tempter and Adam’s demise.
- b. The woman is depicted as God’s gift in 2:22, where Adam initially responds with enthusiastic glee. Now, like the serpent, he charges that God’s good gift was malicious, for she has led to his downfall. She is a mistake. This is a line still heard today. Commonly, the Old Testament is not timid in assigning divine responsibility for all manner of human affliction, but nowhere does the Bible acknowledge any divine culpability for this turn of events. The apostle James said that each person is responsible for his own sin (1:13). Sin was the deliberate choice of the man. By shifting the blame, the man hoped to evade accountability for his autonomous actions. Of course, interpretive speculation has always reflected on why God would permit the tempter’s ploy, but the narrative does not address such theological dilemmas.
- c. **3:13** The Lord challenges the woman to explain herself by questioning her actions. The language of the question, “What is *this*?” may point back to the man’s exclamation in 2:23, where the pronoun “this” dominates. The woman, who was Adam’s delight and was designed by God to be his “helper” in achieving blessing (2:18), becomes a partner in crime. Like the man, she shifts the blame to another party—the serpent. But unlike the man she can rightly claim to be the “victim” of deception. Also she stops short of attributing the snake’s wily deed to God as Adam has insinuated (cp. Jer 4:10). The result is that the authority of God has been successfully undermined, first through trickery and then through willful rebellion.
- d.

Good – In order for Adam to experience all the practical benefits God has put in place for him and to fulfill God’s plan for mankind God provided to Adam a helper.

7. Good – **A woman makes a man stronger and more productive for God (Proverbs 18:22). By finding a wife a man obtains favor from God and to mistreat a wife, a man's prayers are blocked (1 Peter 3:7) and he can suffer financial consequences.**
8. Good – **This is the first time God said good relevant to mankind. Every time God made everything else He said ‘it is good’, but with mankind man alone was not in a good place until he had a helper to fulfill all that God planned for mankind (1:26-31).**

If he is to be complete, he must have a helper who is like him, his equivalent. “Let us make man” (1:26), so here the need for the creation of women is adumbrated by God, “It is not good for man to be alone.” Against the sevenfold refrain of “and God saw that it was (very) good” in chap. 1, the divine observation that something was not right with man’s situation is startling. **To help someone does not imply that the helper is stronger than the helped; simply that the latter’s strength is inadequate by itself (e.g. Josh 1:14; 10:4, 6; 1 Chron 12:17, 19, 21, 22). The compound prepositional phrase “matching him,” כנגדו, literally, “like opposite him” is found only here.** It seems to express the notion of complementarity rather than identity. The help looked for is not just assistance in his daily work or in the procreation of children, though these aspects may be included, but the mutual support companionship provides. **“Two are better than one ... for if they fall one will lift up his fellow” (Eccl 4:9–10; cf. Prov. 31:10–31).**

7. How do we recognized Satan:

- a) Facts – truth revealed is always denied (John 8:44).
- b) Satan quotes God with a twist – He always seems credible (2 Cor. 11:14).
- c) It is impossible for Satan to tell the truth (John 8:44).
- d) A destroyer (John 10:10). He turns people against each other – Judas.
- e) Deceptive (Rev. 12:9) – twist the truth.
- f) He seeks to set things out of order – turn stone to bread (Luke 4:1-11).
- g) He likes to create doubt – kills faith and wisdom (James 1:5-8).
- h) He blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4).
- i) He takes the Word of God from their hearts (Luke 8:12)
- j) He does his best to hinder the work of the Gospel (Acts 13:7-8).
- k) He will tempt Christians to lie (Eph. 4:25-27)
- l) He tempts us to immorality (1 Cor. 7:5)
- m) He tempts believers to cover up selfishness (Acts 5:1-11).

Commentary Studies

3:1 The serpent is unforeseen in the narrative and appears suddenly. The reader is caught off guard, but not as unsuspecting as Eve. The snake is described by the narrator as “crafty,” alerting the reader to weigh the words of the beast carefully. “Crafty” (‘*ārûm*) can be spoken of approvingly or negatively, thereby introducing ambiguity at this stage in the story.¹⁶¹⁸ Perhaps this also prepares the reader for the serpent as a talking animal, since it is distinguished from all others as “more crafty.”¹⁶²⁹ Its wordplay with “naked” (‘*ārummîm*) in 2:25, as noted, links the serpent’s shrewdness with the woman’s deception, finally resulting in the self-consciousness of human nakedness. Also the serpent is identified as an animal that God “had made” among the beasts of the field, referring to 2:19. This dismisses any notion of a competing dualism since the animal owes its existence to God.

Although the origin of the snake is attributed to God, there is no attempt here to explain the origins of evil. The narrative explains only the origin of human sin and guilt. There is no explanation for the serpent’s capacity to talk other than possibly that it was “crafty.” It is assumed that the animal has this ability, and the fact that the woman did not find this alarming only heightens the suspicion that the serpent is representative of something or someone sinisterly powerful. In any case the substance of what the serpent says is more important than who or what the serpent is.¹⁷³⁰ Moreover, the serpent was among the “good” animals God had made (chap. 1), and there was no ostensible reason for the woman to suspect the animal’s deceit other than the content of what the animal spoke. Perhaps that the snake was of the wild (see 2:19–20 with 3:1), not as familiar to the domestic couple, explains the woman’s gullibility.¹⁷⁴¹ The reader, on the other hand, has the advantage of the narrator’s commentary.

Various explanations for the serpent compete for our understanding. It has been interpreted as a mythological character related to magical powers or taken as a symbol of human curiosity, the fertility cult, or of chaos/evil. Still others have proposed that the voice of the snake is the inner person.¹⁷⁵² Others have found it to be a polemical response to the apostasy of magic or a

¹⁶¹⁸ For the negative sense of “crafty,” see Job 15:5, where it is used of the “tongue” (cf. Job 5:12–13; Exod 21:14); for the sense of shrewdness see the wisdom of Proverbs (e.g., 12:23; 14:18). Saul deemed David “very crafty,” who used his wits to escape danger (1 Sam 23:22).

²¹⁶⁹ The preposition ׀ is rendered as comparative in the NIV and NRSV, indicating degree; *IBHS* § 14.5d has it comparative superlative “most cunning,” but it has also been read as separation, meaning “subtle as none other of the beasts” (GKC § 119w).

³¹⁷⁰ von Rad comments, “We are not to be concerned with what the snake is but with what it says” (*Genesis*, 88).

⁴¹⁷¹ J. Magonet notes that “the snake is described as being more cunning ‘than all living creatures of the field,’ that is to say, the snake comes from that group defined as living apart from man” (“The Themes of Genesis 2–3,” in *A Walk in the Garden*, JSOTSup 136 [Sheffield: JSOT, 1992], 39–46).

⁵¹⁷² Cassuto, e.g., interprets the snake as an allegory for the “man himself”; the serpent’s voice is the woman’s own thoughts, and therefore it is not surprising that the snake talks (*Genesis*, 142–43).

demythologizing of the serpent deity, which was revered in the ancient Near East. And the traditional opinion among Jewish and Christian interpreters is that the serpent is Satan's instrument.¹⁷⁶³ Luther explained: "The devil was permitted to enter beasts, as he here entered the serpent. For there is no doubt that it was a real serpent in which Satan was and in which he conversed with Eve" (*L⁷W* 1.151).

"Serpent" (*nāḥāš*) is the general term for "snake." This reptile had a significant role in the ancient world, where it was both an object of reverence and of disdain. It commonly is found in ancient myths and is represented by religious objects. It conveyed the ambivalent meanings of life/recurring youth, death/chaos, and wisdom.¹⁷⁸⁴ The Bible possesses the same associations for the serpent: the rejuvenating effects of Moses' bronze serpent (Num 21:8; cf. 2 Kgs 18:4), its respected shrewdness (Matt 10:16), its venomous death (e.g., Ps 58:4), and as divine opponent (Isa 27:1). The Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* illustrates how the serpent was perceived in ancient times as man's antagonist. Gilgamesh searches for the immortal Utnapishtim, the famed survivor of the flood, to learn how he too might obtain eternal life. Utnapishtim reveals a secret known only to him and the gods; there is a plant in the depths of the sea that can rejuvenate his life. Gilgamesh obtains it and names it "Man Becomes Young in Old Age." The plant, however, is subsequently stolen away by a serpent which carries it off and when doing so sheds its skin, suggesting the process of rejuvenation.¹⁷⁹⁵

As we discussed in 2:4–25, the description of the garden scene uses imagery drawn from the tabernacle to convey by double entendre the meeting place for God and man in the garden. This reptile achieves the same purpose, indicating that opposition to God lurks in the garden. Serpents in the Mosaic community were classified among the unclean animals because of their movement on the ground (Lev 11:41–45) and were associated with the judgment of God for Israel's complaints against God in the wilderness ("venomous snakes," Num 21:6). Furthermore, the snake occurs in ancient Near Eastern imagery as antithetical to creation, representing powerful forces that oppose the creator-god. This imagery occurs in 1:21, where the monsters (*tannîn*) of ancient myth are no more than "sea creatures"—not hostile powers—created by the spoken word of Israel's God. This "monster" (*tannîn*) is the same as the many-headed "Leviathan" or "serpent" (*nāḥāš*).¹⁷¹⁰⁶ "Rahab" is identified as the "serpent" (*nāḥāš*) defeated by God's omnipotent hand at creation (Job 26:12–14). This creation imagery is used in the psalter and among the prophets to depict how God, who overcame hostile powers in creation, is the One whose mighty power overcomes Israel's enemies (cf. Ps 74:13–14; Isa 51:9). In the same way, the serpent in the garden symbolized the hostile opposition to the woman and her seed (3:15). This is continued in the Christian tradition as evidenced in John's Apocalypse (Rev 12:9; 20:2).

⁶¹⁷³ E.g., Wis 2:24; Sir 21:2; 4 Macc 18:8; Rom 16:20 with v. 15; Rev 12:9; 14–15; 20:2.

⁷*LW Luther's Works. Lectures on Genesis*, ed. J. Pelikan and D. Poellot, trans. G. Schick

⁸¹⁷⁴ See K. R. Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament: A Linguistic, Archaeological, and Literary Study* (Haddonfield, N.J.: Haddonfield House, 1974).

⁹¹⁷⁵ *ANET*, 96.

¹⁰¹⁷⁶ Cf. Isa 27:1, where all three are the same; נָחָשׁ occurs at Exod 7:9–10 for "snake" and שֵׁשׁ־בָּרָק for the rod that turned into a snake at Exod 4:3; 7:15.

Many modern interpreters, however, fail to recognize that the serpent's trickery is ultimately the voice of Satan. Although the snake is never identified as Satan in the Old Testament, more than the principle of evil must have been intended by the serpent's presence since 3:15 describes an ongoing war between the serpent and the seed of the woman.¹⁷¹¹⁷ "All the days of your life" (3:14) shows that the serpent is treated as a personal being. The role of the serpent is consistent with the adversary (*haśśātan*) depicted in Job 1–2. Although not identified as a serpent, he impugns the character of God and attempts to destroy Job. Jesus' rebuke of the Jews as the children of their "father" (cf. "offspring," 3:15) alludes to the garden scene, where the serpent is the "devil," "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44; cf. 1 John 3:12). This interpretation was also found in earlier Jewish wisdom (e.g., Wis 2:24) and was shared by Paul (Rom 16:20). In accord with the traditional opinion, the snake is more than a literal snake; rather it is Satan's personal presence in the garden.

We may interpret the role of the serpent in the same vein as Peter's resistance to Jesus' death, where the Lord responded to Peter: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Matt 16:23). Jesus does not mean Peter is possessed with Satan as Judas was when "Satan entered" him (Luke 22:3), nor was he threatened with possession (Luke 22:31). But Peter unwittingly was an advocate for Satan's cause. Similarly, the snake is a creature speaking against the "things of God" and whose cause is that of Satan. From the viewpoint of the Mosaic community, the snake's presence in the garden would have been surprisingly incongruent with the pristine character of Eden. The snake was reviled by the Hebrews as a source of uncleanness and a remembered menace.¹⁷¹²⁸ The notion of a slithering snake communicates powerfully that the woman is in grave jeopardy. Job 1–2, where the amorphous "Satan" is named but not described, does not have the same force that the figure of a snake portrays spoiling the garden. By the presence of the snake the Scripture shows that the malevolent Satan was in the garden.

The tactic used by the serpent was to cause doubt in the mind of the woman through interrogation and misrepresentation. First, the opponent does not controvert outright the saying of the Lord (2:16); rather, he questions God's motivation with the subtle addition "really say."¹⁷¹³⁹ Second, the serpent uses the name "God" rather than the covenant name "LORD" that has characterized the narrative of 2:4–25, where "LORD God" appears. Third, the serpent reworks the wording of God's command slightly by (1) adding the negative "not" at the head of the clause, which with "any" expresses an absolute prohibition;¹⁸¹⁴⁰ (2) omitting the emphatic "freely"; (3) using the plural "you" (hence bypassing the man) rather than the singular as in 2:16; and (4) placing the clause "from any tree" at the end of the sentence rather than at the

¹¹¹⁷⁷ Argued by Kidner, *Genesis*, 67.

¹²¹⁷⁸ An exception was the bronze serpent later revered (Num 21:8–9; 2 Kgs 18:4; John 3:14).

¹³¹⁷⁹ יִּי אֱלֹהִים is difficult since there is no exact parallel for it as a question, which is the traditional rendering (as NIV). Speiser comments, "The serpent is not asking a question; he is deliberately distorting a fact" (*Genesis*, 23). BHS recommends the emendation אֱלֹהִים (with interrogative). Cassuto retains the sense of question by taking יִּי as the interrogative and אֱלֹהִים as the emphatic (*Genesis*, 144). But intonation is a sufficient explanation since for yes/no questions the interrogative is not required (*IBHS* § 40.3.b).

¹⁴¹⁸⁰ GKC § 152b.

head as in 2:16, thereby robbing God's command of its nuance of liberality. All of this is to say that the divine injunction in the mouth of the serpent was refashioned for its own interests.

3:2–3 The woman's first mistake was her willingness to talk with the serpent and to respond to the creature's cynicism by rehearsing God's prohibition (2:17). However, she compounded her mistake by misrepresenting God's command as the serpent had done, although definitely without the malicious intent of the snake. The serpent had succeeded in drawing the woman's attention to another possible interpretation of God's command. It would seem that the serpent had heard it all differently! Now the woman changes the tenor of the original command. First, she omits those elements in the command, "any" and "freely," which placed the prohibition in a context of liberality. At this point she still is thinking collectively with her husband, from whom, as the narrator implies, she received the command: "we may eat" (v. 2). Second, Eve identifies the tree according to its location rather than its significance; and third, she refers to "God" as the serpent had done, rather than "the LORD" (v. 3). Fourth, she also adds the phrase "you must not touch it" (v. 3), which may make the prohibition more stringent. Yet to her credit the fear of touching the fruit may have been out of deference for God's command. For Israel "touch" was associated with prohibition and death or with consecration to God.¹⁸¹⁵¹ Finally, she failed to capture the urgency of certain death, "You will [surely] die" (v. 3).

3:4–5 With the woman lured into dialogue on his terms, the serpent directly disputes God's command. The negative "not" (*lō*) at the head of the Hebrew clause contradicts the immediately preceding claim by the woman, "You will die."¹⁸¹⁶² Any second thought the woman might have had at hearing the serpent's bold statement is answered by the serpent's following explanation (v. 5). The motivation for God's command is impugned by the serpent. In the wisdom tradition the adversary argues the same case in Job (1:9–11; 2:4–5). God is not good and gracious; he is selfish and deceptive, preventing the man and woman from achieving the same position as "Elohim" (v. 5).¹⁸¹⁷³ What are we to say of God's actions? Admittedly, the narrative presents a God who makes a peculiar demand, on the face of it out of "sheer

¹⁵¹⁸¹ E.g., Exod 19:12; Num 16:26; Deut 14:8; cf. 2 Sam 6:1–8; and, e.g., Exod 29:37; 30:29.

¹⁶¹⁸² לֹא־מוֹת תָּמוּתוּ. Unlike here, the negative particle regularly comes between the infinitive absolute and finite verb (GKC § 113v), which is taken as the negation of God's command at 2:17; but Cassuto shows that the plural verb negates the woman's claim, מוֹת תָּמוּתוּ ("lest you die"), which rewords 2:17 (*Genesis*, 145–46). The addition of the infinitive absolute emphasizes the serpent's negation, "will not surely die."

¹⁷¹⁸³ The traditional rendering is "God," but it can be taken as "gods" or "divine beings" as the LXX rendering: καὶ ἔσσεσθε ὡς θεοὶ γινώσκοντες καλὸν καὶ πονηρόν. This discussion is complicated by the identity of the plural ("us") in v. 22, where some contend that an angelic host is inferred (see 1:26). The plural participle "knowing" (יָדְעִי) argues for the plural "gods" since "Elohim" as "God" normally takes the singular (e.g., Sarna, *Genesis*, 25). "God" can be retained if the participle is predicative, "like God, that is, you shall know good and evil" (e.g., Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 189); but *IBHS* § 37.6a indicates that the subject of the predicative use is usually expressed, unlike here (see also 11.2.9b #3). Ambiguity here may be purposeful since the whole tenor of the serpent's speech is marked with clever devices. Since Elohim as "God" occurs earlier in the verse, it is best to retain the singular sense.

irrationality.”¹⁸¹⁸⁴ When he catches the culprits, he condemns them with all manner of threats and eventually expels them for a motive that could be interpreted as selfish (3:22); yet he does not follow through on his tirade, granting them clothing and assurances. A cynical reader could conclude that the serpent was right. But it may be that this uncertainty about God is used by the author to put his readers in the same place of decision as Eve (and Job). What do we do when presented with the “fruit of temptation”?

Hence the serpent made three counterclaims: First, they will not die. Second, “your eyes will be opened,” a metaphor for knowledge, suggesting a newfound awareness not previously possessed. In the Old Testament this awareness sometimes is said to be obtained through divine assistance (e.g., Gen 21:19; 2 Kgs 6:17, 20). And finally, they will gain what belongs to God, “knowing good and evil.” Essentially he is contending that God is holding her back—a claim that is sometimes echoed today.¹⁸¹⁹⁵

When set in the larger context of the story, the serpent’s words are shown to be both true and false. They proved true in that the man and woman did not immediately die physically. Their eyes were indeed opened (v. 7), and they obtained knowledge belonging to God as the serpent had promised (v. 22). However, the serpent’s half-truths concealed falsehood and led the woman to expect a different result altogether. The serpent spoke only about what she would gain and avoided mentioning what she would lose in the process. Though the man and woman did not die immediately upon eating the fruit, the expectation and assignment to death were soon enough. Furthermore, they experienced expulsion from the garden, which was indicative of death.¹⁸²⁰⁶ Later Israel experienced excommunication when any of its members were discovered ceremonially unclean; such victims were counted as dead men in mourning (e.g., Lev 13:45). Expulsion from the garden, which represented the presence of God as did the tabernacle in the camp, meant a symbolic “death” for the excommunicated (cf. 1 Sam 15:35–16:1). Although their eyes were opened, they were rewarded only with seeing their nakedness and were burdened with human guilt and embarrassment (v. 7). Although they became like God in this one way, it was at an unexpected cost. They achieved isolation and fear. The couple was cut off as well from the possibility of life, the one feature of divinity for which otherwise they were destined. They obtained “wisdom” in exchange for death.

(2) *The Man and Woman Sin (3:6–8)*

⁶When 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. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then 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.

⁸Then 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.

¹⁸¹⁸⁴ So Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 12.

¹⁹¹⁸⁵ Remarkd by A. Ross, “Woman after the Fall,” *Kindred Spirit* 5 (1981): 11.

²⁰¹⁸⁶ See Wenham’s discussion, *Genesis 1–15*, 74–75.

3:6 At its centerpiece the account moves with a rapid pace: “The woman saw,” “she took,” “ate,” “she gave ... and he ate.” Eve saw what was “good”; the adjective heads the clause accentuating the ironic results of her evaluation. There is a double entendre here: the term for “good” (*tôb*) can mean beautiful and also what is moral. In this case what was beautiful proved to be an allurement to disobedience. The term “good” is reminiscent of the created order God declares as “good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31). But the verbal echo of God’s earlier evaluation suggests that she has usurped God’s role in determining what is “good.” The temptation of the fruit is (1) its substance as food, (2) its appearance, and (3) its potential for making the woman “wise.” “Desirable” (*hāmad*) is the same word used in the prohibition against covetousness (Exod 20:17). Eve supposes that the tree’s fruit would obtain for her “wisdom” (*haskil*), which she must have equated with the tempter’s promise of obtaining divine knowledge (3:5). The term is broad in meaning, indicating sight, insight, and also success. We have commented (2:16) that the transgression is the acquisition of wisdom independently of God. Though the narrative does not specify the fault in this, traditionally since Augustine the sin has been related to human pride. Pride is perceived as the antithesis to prudence in Proverbs (e.g., 11:2). The serpent’s guile may be likened to the apostle John’s forewarning regarding the enticement of the “world” (1 John 2:16). James likewise warns that illicit desires lead to sin and sin to death (Jas 1:14–15), a course Adam acts out.

The long-standing interpretation of why Eve fails is the deception of the crafty beast (2 Cor 11:3), but no explanation occurs for Adam’s decision to eat. If the naming of the animals by Adam shows an awareness of their characteristics (2:19–20), then it is not surprising that the woman is unaware of the serpent’s shrewdness, but there is no excuse for the man.¹⁸²¹⁷ Paul was emphatic that Adam was not misled (1 Tim 2:14). This concurs with early Jewish tradition, which placed the blame on Adam’s shoulders (e.g., 4 Ezra 3:21; 7:118). Adam’s participation is rather understated in the account, given the attention it receives from God (3:17–19) and in later Jewish and Christian tradition. He simply followed the example of the woman without hesitation. There is no sense that Adam is lured by logic or sexual provocation.¹⁸²²⁸ “For he would have never dared oppose God’s authority unless he had disbelieved in God’s Word.”¹⁸²³⁹ Was Adam privy to the conversation between Eve and the snake? Although “with her” does not in itself demand that he is present since the serpent speaks “to the woman,” nevertheless, the action of the verse implies that Adam is a witness to the dialogue. “You” at each place in 3:1–5 is plural and thus suggests his presence. However, there is no indication that he too is deceived by the serpent.

3:7 The results are told in the same rapid-fire fashion as the transgression, paralleling the actions of the woman in v. 6: (1) eyes open, (2) realize their nakedness, (3) sew fig leaves, and (4) make coverings. What they “saw” is that they are “naked,” what is “pleasing to the eye” causes displeasure with their own nakedness and the need to cover it with “fig leaves,” and the “wisdom” gained only enables the making of “coverings.” The linkage between act and consequence is found in the wordplay between *ta’āwâ* (“pleasing”) in v. 6 and similar *tē’ēnâ*

²¹¹⁸⁷ Noted by Hess, “The Roles of the Man and the Woman in Genesis 3,” 16.

²²¹⁸⁸ *Gen. Rab.* 19.5 attributes to Eve persuasive argument and even tears. Job, who did not yield to his wife’s advice, is contrasted with Adam (19.10).

²³¹⁸⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.4.

(“fig”). The plural “they” shows that the couple simultaneously experiences the results of eating. The verb “realized,” when literally rendered “knew” (*yd’*), echoes the “tree of knowledge” from which they had partaken; the word “naked” is reminiscent again of the “crafty” serpent who tricked the woman into exchanging her innocence for the embarrassing knowledge that they are naked (3:1; 2:25). Their efforts to hide their shame are as puny as their efforts to hide from God since their man-made coverings are ineffective (v. 21). “Made” (*’āšā*) and “coverings” (*ḥăgōrōt*) anticipate v. 21, where God “made” durable “garments” (*kotēnôt*) from animal skins for their needed apparel.

3:8 The anthropomorphic description of God “walking” (*mithallēk*) in the garden suggests the enjoyment of fellowship between him and our first parents. The adverbial phrase “in the cool of the day” (NIV

3:12 Despite his culpability the man points to the woman as the real offender. Unlike the woman, the man was not deceived by the serpent—at least he does not refer to the serpent—so he cites her part in the matter. In particular Adam’s punishment is later related to his consent to the woman (3:17). Adam’s contention is given force by the emphasis on “she,” yielding the sense, “I only took what *she* gave me!”¹⁹²⁴⁵ But there could be no exoneration for his crime on this flimsy basis. Not finished with shifting blame, Adam even accuses God for the tragedy by adding, “the woman you put here with me.” The NIV’s “put” translates the literal “gave,” which is repeated in the next clause, “she gave me.” By this Adam charges that the Lord “gave” the woman to him and in turn she “gave” him the fruit. The implication is inescapable: God ultimately is responsible for the success of the tempter and Adam’s demise.

The woman is depicted as God’s gift in 2:22, where Adam initially responds with enthusiastic glee. Now, like the serpent, he charges that God’s good gift was malicious, for she has led to his downfall. She is a mistake. This is a line still heard today. Commonly, the Old Testament is not timid in assigning divine responsibility for all manner of human affliction, but nowhere does the Bible acknowledge any divine culpability for this turn of events. The apostle James said that each person is responsible for his own sin (1:13). Sin was the deliberate choice of the man. By shifting the blame, the man hoped to evade accountability for his autonomous actions. Of course, interpretive speculation has always reflected on why God would permit the tempter’s ploy, but the narrative does not address such theological dilemmas.

3:13 The Lord challenges the woman to explain herself by questioning her actions. The language of the question, “What is *this*?” may point back to the man’s exclamation in 2:23, where the pronoun “this” dominates.¹⁹²⁵⁶ The woman, who was Adam’s delight and was designed by God to be his “helper” in achieving blessing (2:18), becomes a partner in crime. Like the man, she shifts the blame to another party—the serpent. But unlike the man she can rightly claim to be the “victim” of deception. Also she stops short of attributing the snake’s wily

²⁴¹⁹⁵ The NIV shows this by the insertion of the hyphen, distinguishing the dangling element at the beginning (nominative absolute) from the main clause that follows (also NAB, NJPS). What grammarians have termed nominative absolute or *casus pendens* is a grammatical element that is outside the main clause; it is resumed usually by a pronoun to highlight that element. In this case the nominative absolute is “woman,” and the resumptive pronoun is “she,” the proper subject of the clause (GKC § 135c; *IBHS* § 4.7.b; 8.3.a).

²⁵¹⁹⁶ Jonah was asked similarly by the frightened sailors, “What have you done?” (2:10).

deed to God as Adam has insinuated (cp. Jer 4:10). The result is that the authority of God has been successfully undermined, first through trickery and then through willful rebellion.

3:17 Although the woman will die too (2:17), the death oracle is not pronounced against her since she is the source of life and therefore living hope for the human couple. It is the man who bears the greater blame for his conduct and is the direct recipient of God's death sentence.²⁶

2. THE TEMPTATION AND THE FALL (CHAP. 3)

3:1–7. These verses provide both the record of the historical Fall of man and the archetypal temptation. This passage is a perfect case study of temptation, for sin cannot be blamed on environment or heredity.

Genesis 1–2 recorded what God said; **now the serpent** (the devil, Rev. 20:2) spoke. The word of the Lord brought life and order; the word of the serpent brought chaos and death. Truth is older than falsehood; God's word came before Satan's lies.

Genesis 3:1 is connected with 2:25 by a Hebrew wordplay: Adam and Eve were "naked" (*'ărûmmîm*); and the serpent **was more crafty** (*'ārûm*, "shrewd") than all. Their nakedness represented the fact that they were oblivious to evil, not knowing where the traps lay, whereas Satan did and would use his craftiness to take advantage of their integrity. That quality of shrewdness or subtleness is not evil in itself (indeed, one of the purposes of the Bible is to make believers so, according to Prov. 1:4, where *'ārmâh*, shrewdness, is trans²⁷. "prudence"). But it was used here for an evil purpose.

The tempter was a serpent (Satan in the form of a snake), thus suggesting that temptation comes in disguise, quite unexpectedly, and that it often comes from a subordinate (someone over whom one should have exercised dominion; cf. Gen. 1:28). Also there may well be a polemical element here, for the serpent was worshiped by pagans. Their symbol of life was in fact the cause of death. Divinity is not achieved (the promise of Satan here; 3:5) by following pagan beliefs and symbols. That is the way of death, not of life.

Eve either did not know God's command very well or did not want to remember it. By contrast, Christ gained victory over Satan by His precise knowledge of God's Word (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). (See the chart "Satan's Temptations of Eve and of Jesus," near Matt. 4:3–11.) Eve disparaged the privileges, added to the prohibition, and weakened the penalty—all seen by contrasting her words (Gen. 3:3) with God's original commands (2:16–17). After Satan heard this, he blatantly negated the penalty of death that God had given (3:4). Satan is a liar from the beginning (John 8:44), and this is his lie: one can sin and get away with it. But death is the penalty for sin (Gen. 2:17).

The tempter also cast doubt over God's character, suggesting that **God** was jealous, holding them back from their destiny (3:5). They would become **like God** when they ate—and God knew

²⁶ K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 1-11:26](#), vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 252.

²⁷trans. translation, translator, translated

that, according to Satan. So Satan held out to them the promise of divinity—**knowing good and evil**.

With this the work of Satan was finished. The woman was then left to her natural desires and physical appetites. The word for **desirable** (*neḥmād*, v. 6) is related to a word that appears later in the command, “You shall not covet” (*taḥmōd*, Ex. 20:17). Physical practicality (**good for food**), aesthetic beauty (**pleasing to the eye**), and the potential **for gaining wisdom**—to be “in the know”—these draw a person over the brink once the barrier of punishment is supposedly removed.

The results, of course, were anticlimactic. The promise of divine enlightenment did not come about. They both ate and saw, but they were spoiled by so doing. They were ill at ease with one another (mistrust and alienation) and they were ill at ease with God (fearful and hiding from Him). Satan’s promises never come true. Wisdom is never attained by disobeying God’s Word. Instead the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7).²⁸

3:1–5 The third scene opens with a circumstantial clause describing the snake as “more shrewd than all the wild animals of the plain which the LORD God had made.” The rest of the scene is dialogue between the snake and the woman (cf. scene 5, vv 9–13). Now, explicit characterization of actors in the story is rare in Hebrew narrative, so it seems likely that in noting the snake’s shrewdness the narrator is hinting that his remarks should be examined very carefully. He may not be saying what he seems to be saying. Perhaps we should not take his words at their face value as the woman did.

1 “Now the snake was more shrewd than all the wild animals.” “Shrewd” ערום is an ambiguous term. On the one hand it is a virtue the wise should cultivate (Prov 12:16; 13:16), but misused it becomes wiliness and guile (Job 5:12; 15:5; cf. Exod 21:14; Josh 9:4). The choice of the term ערום “shrewd” here is one of the more obvious plays on words in the text; for the man and his wife have just been described as ערום “nude” (2:25). They will seek themselves to be shrewd (cf. 3:6) but will discover that they are “nude” (3:7, 10).

The snake is here described as one of “the wild animals which the LORD God had made.” Why, it is often asked, did a snake appear and tempt the woman? Very diverse answers have been offered, though none appear entirely satisfactory. Early Jewish and Christian commentators identified the snake with Satan or the devil, but since there is no other trace of a personal devil in early parts of the OT, modern writers doubt whether this is the view of our narrator. It is often asserted that the serpent is the symbol of the Canaanite fertility cults, and that therefore Gen 3 illustrates the choice before Israel—should they obey Yahweh or follow Baal? But as Westermann observes, it hardly seems likely that Gen 3 would have mentioned the LORD God’s creating the snake if it was supposed to represent the archenemy of the true faith. It has also been pointed out that in the ancient Orient snakes were symbolic of life, wisdom, and

²⁸ Allen P. Ross, “[Genesis](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 32.

chaos (K. R. Joines, *ZA*²⁹W 87 [1975] 1–11), all themes that have points of contact with the present narrative, though whether this is sufficient explanation of a snake's presence here is doubtful. It may be that we have here another transformation of a familiar mythological motif. The Gilgamesh Epic relates how Gilgamesh found a plant through which he could avoid death. Unfortunately while he was swimming in a pond a snake came out and swallowed the plant, thereby depriving him of the chance of immortality. Here in Genesis we have a quite different story, but once again a snake, man, plants, and the promise of life are involved, though here man loses immortality through blatant disobedience, whereas in the epic that loss seems to be just a matter of bad luck. Furthermore, it may be noted that according to the classification of animals found in Lev 11 and Deut 14, the snake must count as an archetypal unclean animal. Its swarming, writhing locomotion puts it at the farthest point from those pure animals that can be offered in sacrifice. Within the world of OT animal symbolism a snake is an obvious candidate for an anti-God symbol, notwithstanding its creation by God. In one way, a dead animal, which is even more unclean than any living creature, would be a better anti-God symbol, yet it would be quite absurd to have a corpse talk. So for any Israelite familiar with the symbolic values of different animals, a creature more likely than a serpent to lead man away from his creator could not be imagined. The serpent Leviathan, mentioned in Ugaritic mythology, is also referred to in Isa 27:1 (cf. Job 26:13) as a creature destroyed by God, further evidence of the familiar association in biblical times of serpents and God's enemies.

The serpent begins by asking an apparently innocent question, "Has God really said ...?" However, in the very first words כִּי אֵל "really," there is possibly a touch of scepticism or at least surprise, which carries through into "you must not eat from *any* of the trees," a total travesty of God's original generous permission (2:16). Yet taken as a question, the snake's remark appears ingenuous enough. But how, the narrator expects us to ask, did the snake know anything about God's command? If he heard that command, why has he so grossly distorted it? Thus in his very first words the snake's shrewdness is illustrated. Furthermore, in describing God simply as God (אלהים) instead of as the LORD God, which is characteristic of the rest of Gen 2–3, there is a suggestion of the serpent's distance from God. God is just the remote creator, not Yahweh, Israel's covenant partner (cf. *Comment* on 2:4).

2–3 The woman corrects the snake, but not quite accurately. Whereas the LORD had said, "You may freely eat of *every* garden tree," she omits "every," saying simply, "We may eat of the fruit ..." She also adopts the snake's description of the LORD God, describing him simply as "God," and most significantly, she adds to the ban on eating of the tree of knowledge a prohibition on even touching it "lest you die." These slight alterations to God's remarks suggest that the woman has already moved slightly away from God toward the serpent's attitude. The creator's generosity is not being given its full due, and he is being painted as a little harsh and repressive, forbidding the tree even to be touched. Indeed, the way "lest you die" follows "touch" suggests that not just eating it but touching it may be lethal.

4–5 It is in the snake's reply that we appreciate why he is called shrewd. His words sound like a sharp rejection of God's. "You will not certainly die," he says, "but God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will become like God." And yet, greatly to our surprise (for biblical narrative generally adopts a divine or prophetic perspective), his remarks

²⁹ZAW *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

are apparently vindicated. The man and his wife do not die, at least not until Adam reached the ripe age of 930 years (5:5)! While v 7 notes that their eyes were opened and in v 22 God says, “Man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” On first reading at least, God seems to have tried to deceive his creatures by issuing threats he subsequently did not fulfill. The snake told the truth, not the LORD God.

But as commentators have often pointed out, the snake was uttering half-truths. There is a subtle ambiguity in his words which warrants describing him as “shrewd.” Furthermore, as Gunkel (17) notes: “It is very neat that the snake never directly demands that they should eat—he understands the art of seduction.” The ambiguity is clearest in the serpent’s claim that their eyes will be opened. They were indeed, but with more than a touch of pathos and irony the story continues: “they realized they were nude”! Similarly, becoming “like God, knowing good and evil,” only serves to separate them from him. On hearing him approach, they hide among the bushes and they are expelled from the garden. The snake’s promises have come true but in a very different way from the way one might have expected, had they come from God.

Similarly, there is undoubtedly a double-entendre in his opening remark “You will not certainly die.” This English translation, like the original Hebrew, is ambiguous; does it mean “Certainly you will not die” or “It is not certain that you will die?” The latter understanding is preferred by Vawter (78). Roth (*Tarbiz* 41 [1972] 245–54), on the other hand, calls attention to the unusual Hebrew word order (usually the “not” comes between the verb and infinitive absolute; the only parallels to this order are Ps 49:8 and Amos 9:8) and thinks the ambiguity means the hearer must choose between taking it as “No: you will certainly die” or “You will certainly not die.” Yet another possibility that has been suggested is that the snake is simply denying the woman’s incorrect addition to God’s words, namely, that touching the tree will kill. ³⁰Or, finally, it could be that the snake is partially quoting God’s words in 2:17, “you will certainly die,” by prefacing them with “not” and then going on to give a different divine motivation. So we might render his words “Not ‘certainly die,’ but God knows ... you will become like God, knowing good and evil.”

Finally, it may be that just as the other two serpentine remarks about opening eyes and becoming like God can be understood in two ways, there are two meanings of “you shall die.” We have seen that the garden of Eden narrative is full of symbols suggesting the presence of God and his life-giving power—trees, gold, rivers, and jewels used to adorn the holy of holies. In Israelite worship, true life was experienced when one went to the sanctuary. There God was present. There he gave life. But to be expelled from the camp, as lepers were, was to enter the realm of death. Those unfortunates had to behave like mourners, with their clothes torn and their hair disheveled (Lev 13:45). If to be expelled from the camp of Israel was to “die,” expulsion from the garden was an even more drastic kind of death. In this sense they did die on the day they ate of the tree: they were no longer able to have daily conversation with God, enjoy his bounteous provision, and eat of the tree of life; instead they had to toil for food, suffer, and eventually return to the dust from which they were taken. A parallel to this idea of death before death is to be found in the story of Saul. As far as Samuel was concerned, Saul “died” when he rejected the word of the LORD at Gilgal. So Samuel mourned for him (1 Sam 15:35–16:1). And evidently the narrator shared Samuel’s perspective, for he states, “and Samuel

³⁰Or *Orientalia*

did not see Saul again until the day of his death,” although he relates another encounter between Samuel and Saul in 1 Sam 19:24. Evidently this did not count, for Saul was as good as dead, though his physical death was to be delayed some years.

Seen in this light, the snake was indeed shrewd. He told no outright lies, merely highly suggestive half-truths. At face value they contradicted God’s warnings about the inevitability of death, but at a deeper level the latter were vindicated.

6–8 Here in the central scene the narrative reaches its climax. Here Hebrew prose style is seen to be at its most effective. With remarkable brevity, compared with the long-winded descriptions that precede it and the recriminations that follow, the fatal steps are described in a series of eleven *waw*-consecutive clauses that suggest the rapidity of the action—“she saw,” “she took,” “she gave...” We have already noted (see *Form/Structure/Setting*) how the scenes themselves are arranged in a concentric palistrophic pattern (ABCDCBA). Within this central scene, the same device is used; the midpoint “and he ate” employs the key verb of this tale—“eat.” On either side we have the woman’s hopes of eating, “good to eat,” “delight to the eyes,” “giving insight,” balanced by its effects, “eyes opened,” “knowing they were nude,” “hiding in the trees.” These contrasts are deliberately drawn. The woman’s inflated expectations of the wisdom she will acquire are hinted at in v 6. Then the actual consequences, mentioned in a very matter-of-fact way, are so comic as to be hilarious, were it not for the seriousness of the subject.

Walsh (*JB*³¹L 96 [1977] 161–77) has already drawn attention to the inversion of roles that characterizes this narrative: how the man listens to his wife instead of God, the woman to the creature, and so on. The very phraseology of these verses strengthens his observations. Actions hitherto characteristic of the creator are now ascribed to the woman. She “saw *that* the tree was *good*,” clearly echoing the refrain of Gen 1, “God saw ... that it was good.” In chap. 2 it is the LORD God who *takes* the man and the rib (15, 21, 22, 23); here she takes the fruit. Hitherto it has been God who has made all that man requires; now man and wife attempt to make loin cloths (1:7, 11, 26, 31; 2:18; etc.). The human pair are shown usurping divine prerogatives as well as explicitly disobeying God’s express word. When God makes the couple clothes of skin in 3:21, this is both an act of grace and a reassertion of the creator’s rights.

6 “Then the woman saw that the tree was good to eat and ... a delight to the eyes” (cf. 2:9). In the woman’s eyes, the forbidden tree is now like the other trees. It was also “desirable to give one insight.” This is preferable to the “desirable to look at” of V³²g, S, Gunkel, and Skinner, who, prompted by 2:9, would ascribe a rare, if not unparalleled, meaning to הִשְׂכִּיל, which otherwise has to do with understanding. The woman’s covetousness is described in terminology that foreshadows the tenth commandment. “Delight,” תַּאוּה, and “desirable,” נִחְמַד, are from roots meaning “to covet” (Deut 5:21; cf. Exod 20:17). She “gave it to her husband with her”: this last phrase emphasizes the man’s association with the woman in the eating (cf. 6:18; 7:7; 13:1). Indeed, his eating is the last and decisive act of disobedience, for immediately the consequences of their sin are described.

7 “Then the eyes of both of them were opened” combines phrases from 2:25 and 3:5. The snake’s prediction is literally fulfilled, but their vision is somewhat of a letdown: “They realized

³¹*JBL Journal of Biblical Literature*

³²Vg Latin Vulgate (as published in Weber’s edition)

they were nude, and they sewed fig leaves together.” “Fig leaves” were probably used because they are the biggest leaves available in Canaan, though their heavy indentations must have made them less than ideal for a covering!

“Loincloths” לִּינְיֹת: elsewhere used of a belt (1 Kgs 2:5; 2 Kgs 3:21; Isa 3:24). The usual term for loincloth is אֲזוּר. Perhaps again the skimpiness of their clothing is being emphasized. Though somewhat ineffective, these actions suggest urgency and desperation; the innocent serenity of 2:25 is shattered. But who are the couple trying to hide from? From each other or from God? Certainly their behavior before meeting God shows (*pace* Westermann, 1:253) that they had a sense of guilt before he addressed them (so Drewermann, 79).³³

The temptation.—Attention is at once directed to the quarter where the possibility of evil already lurked amidst the happiness of Eden—the preternatural subtlety of the serpent: *But the serpent was wily*] The wisdom of the serpent was proverbial in antiquity (Mt. 10:16: see Bochart,³⁴ *Hieroz*³⁵. iii. 246 ff.), a belief probably founded less on observation of the creature’s actual qualities than on the general idea of its divine or demonic nature: Πνευματικώτατον γὰρ τὸ ζῷον πάντων τῶν ἔρπετων (Sanchuniathon, in Eus. *Præp. Ev.* i. 10). Hence the epithet Διὸς might be used of it *sensu bono* (φρόνιμος), though the context here makes it certain that the bad sense (πανοῦργος) is intended (see below).—*beyond any beast, etc.*] The serpent, therefore, belongs to the category of ‘beasts of the field,’ and is a creature of Yahwe; and an effort seems to be made to maintain this view throughout the narrative (v. 14). At the same time it is a

³³ Gordon J. Wenham, [Genesis 1–15](#), vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 72–76.

³⁴Bochart, S. Bochartus, *Hierozoicon, sive bipertitum opus de animalibus Sacrae Scripturae* (ed. Rosenmüller, 1793–96).

³⁵*Hieroz*. S. Bochartus, *Hierozoicon, sive bipertitum opus de animalibus Sacrae Scripturae* (ed. Rosenmüller, 1793–96).

being possessing supernatural knowledge, with the power of speech, and animated by hostility towards God. It is this last feature which causes some perplexity. To say that the thoughts which it instills into the mind of the woman were on the serpent's part not evil, but only extremely sagacious, and became sin first in the human consciousness (so Merx, Di³⁶. al.), is hardly in accordance with the spirit of the narrative. It is more probable that behind the sober description of the serpent as a mere creature of Yahwe, there was an earlier form of the legend in which he figured as a god or a demon.

The ascription of supernatural characters to the serpent presents little difficulty even to the modern mind. The marvelous agility of the snake, in spite of the absence of visible motor organs, its stealthy movements, its rapid death-dealing stroke, and its mysterious power of fascinating other animals and even men, sufficiently account for the superstitious regard of which it has been the object amongst all peoples.^{37*} Accordingly, among the Arabs every snake is the abode of a spirit, sometimes bad and sometimes good, so that *ǧānn* and *ǧūl* and even *Shaitān* are given as designations of the serpent (We.³⁸

³⁶Di. *Die Genesis. Von der dritten Auflage an erklärt von A. Dillmann* (6th ed. 1892). The work embodies frequent extracts from earlier edns. by Knobel: these are referred to below as "Kn.-Di."

^{37*} Comp. the interesting sequel to the sentence from Sanchuniathon quoted above: ... καὶ πυρῶδες ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ παρεδόθη παρ' ὃ καὶ τάχος ἀνυπέρβλητον διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος παρίστησι, χωρὶς ποδῶν τε καὶ χειρῶν, ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν ἔξωθεν, ἐξ ὧν τὰ λοιπὰ ζῶα τὰς κινήσεις ποιεῖται· καὶ ποικίλων σχημάτων τύπους ἀποτελεῖ, καὶ κατὰ τὴν πορείαν ἑλικοειδεῖς ἔχει τὰς ὁρμὰς, ἐφ' ὃ βούλεται τάχος· καὶ πολυχρονώτατον δὲ ἐστίν, οὐ μόνον τῷ ἐκδυόμενον τὸ γῆρας νεάζειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐξήσιν ἐπιδέχεσθαι μείζονα πέφυκε ... Διὸ καὶ ἐν ἱεροῖς τοῦτο τὸ ζῶον καὶ ἐν μυστηρίοις συμπαρείληπται κτλ. (Orelli, p. 44).

³⁸We. *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (2nd ed. 1897).

Heid³⁹. 152 f.; cf. Rob. Sm.⁴⁰ R⁴¹S⁴²², 120¹, 129f., 442).^{43†} What is more surprising to us is the fact that in the sphere of religion the serpent was usually worshipped as a *good* demon. Traces of this conception can be detected in the narrative before us. The demonic character of the serpent appears in his possession of occult divine knowledge of the properties of the tree in the middle of the garden, and in his use of that knowledge to seduce man from his allegiance to his Creator. The enmity between the race of men and the race of serpents is explained as a punishment for his successful temptation; originally he must have been represented as a being hostile, indeed, to God, but friendly to the woman, who tells her the truth which the Deity withheld from man (see Gres. *l.c.* 357). All this belongs to the background of heathen mythology from which the materials of the narrative were drawn; and it is the incomplete elimination of the mythological element, under the influence of a monotheistic and ethical religion, which makes the function of the serpent in Gn. 3 so difficult to understand. In later Jewish theology the difficulty was solved, as is well known, by the doctrine that the serpent of Eden was the mouthpiece or impersonation

³⁹Heid. *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (2nd ed. 1897).

⁴⁰Rob. Sm. *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (2nd ed. 1894).

⁴¹RS *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (2nd ed. 1894).

⁴²² *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (2nd ed. 1894).

^{43†} Cf. Nö. ZVP, i. 413: "Das geheimnisvolle, dämonische Wesen der Schlange, das sie vor allen grösseren Thieren auszeichnet, die tückische, verderbenbringende Natur vieler Arten, konnte in dem einfachen semitischen Hirten leicht den Glauben erzeugen, in ihr wohne etwas Göttliches, den Menschen Bannendes und Bezauberndes. So finden wir die Schlange im Eingang des alten Testaments, so ist sie im Alterthum, wie noch jetzt, ein Hauptgegenstand orientalischer Zauberei. So glaubte auch der Araber, die Schlange (wie einige andere schädliche Thiere) sei kein gewöhnliches Geschöpf, sondern ein Dschinn, ein Geist. Schon die Sprache drückt dies dadurch aus, dass sie mit Džänn, einem Worte welches mit Džinn eng verwandt ist, eine Schlangenart bezeichnet, etc."

of the devil. The idea appears first in Alexandrian Judaism in Wisd. 2:24 ('by the envy of the devil, death entered into the world'): possibly earlier is the allusion in *En.* 69:6, where the seduction of Eve is ascribed to a Satan called Gadreel. Cf. *Secrets of En.* 31:3 ff.; *Ps. Sol.* 4:9; also *Ber. R*⁴⁴. 29, the name שַׁטָּן הַקְּדָמוֹנִי (*Sifrê* 138 b), and in the NT Jn. 8:44; 2 Co. 11:3; Ro. 16:20; Ap. 12:9; 20:2 (see Whitehouse, *D*⁴⁵*B*, iv. 40³ ff.). Similarly in Persian mythology the serpent *Dahâka*, to whose power Yima, the ruler of the golden age, succumbs, is a creature and incarnation of the evil spirit Angro-Mainyo (*Vend.* i. 8, xxii. 5, 6, 24; *Yaçna* ix. 27; cf. Di⁴⁶. 70). The Jewish and Christian doctrine is a natural and legitimate extension of the teaching of Gn. 3, when the problem of evil came to be apprehended in its real magnitude; but it is foreign to the thought of the writer, although it cannot be denied that it may have some affinity with the mythological background of his narrative. The religious teaching of the passage knows nothing of an evil principle *external* to the serpent, but regards himself as the subject of whatever occult powers he displays: he is simply a creature of Yahwe distinguished from the rest by his superior subtlety. The Yahwistic author does not speculate on the ultimate origin of evil; it was enough for his purpose to have so analysed the process of temptation that the beginning of sin could be assigned to a source which is neither in the nature of man nor in God. The personality of the Satan (the Adversary)

⁴⁴*Ber. R.* The Midrash *Bereshith Rabba* (tr. into German by A. Wünsche, 1881).

⁴⁵*DB A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. by J. Hastings (1898–1902).

⁴⁶Di. *Die Genesis. Von der dritten Auflage an erklärt von A. Dillmann* (6th ed. 1892). The work embodies frequent extracts from earlier edns. by Knobel: these are referred to below as "Kn.-Di."

does not appear in the O⁴⁷T till after the Exile (Zec. Jb. Ch.).

The serpent shows his subtlety by addressing his first temptation to the more mobile temperament of the woman (Ra⁴⁸. al.), and by the skilful *innuendo* with which he at once invites conversation and masks his ultimate design.—*Ay, and so God has said, etc.!*] Something like this seems to be the force of כִּי אָרָא (v.⁴⁹). It is a half-interrogative, half-reflective exclamation, as if the serpent had brooded long over the paradox, and had been driven to an unwelcome conclusion.—*Ye shall not eat of any tree*] The range of the prohibition is purposely exaggerated in order to provoke inquiry and criticism. The use of the name אֱלֹהִים is commonly explained by the analogy of other passages of ⁵⁰J, where the name יהוה is avoided in conversation with heathen (39:9 etc.), or when the contrast between the divine and the human is reflected upon (32:29). But ⁵¹J's usage in such cases is not uniform, and it is doubtful what is the true explanation here (see p. 53).—2, 3. The woman's first experience of falsehood leads to an eager repudiation of the serpent's intentional calumny, in which she emphasises the generosity of the divine rule, but unconsciously intensifies the stringency of the prohibition by adding the words: *nor shall ye touch it*] A Jewish legend says that the serpent took advantage of this innocent and immaterial variation by forcing her to touch the fruit, and then arguing that as death had not followed the touch, so it

⁴⁷OT Old Testament.

⁴⁸Ra. Rabbi Shelomoh Yizhaki († 1105).

⁴⁹v.i. *vide infra* Used in references from commentary to footnotes, and *vice versa*.

⁵⁰J Yahwist, or Jahwistic Narrative.

⁵¹J Yahwist, or Jahwistic Narrative.

would not follow the eating (*Ber. R*⁵², *Ra*⁵³). Equally futile inferences have been drawn by modern comm., and the surmise that the clause is redactional (*Bu.*⁵⁴ *Urg*⁵⁵. 241) is hypercritical.—*the tree ... midst*] See p. 66 f.—4. *Ye shall assuredly not die*] On the syntax, *v.i*⁵⁶. The serpent thus advances to an open challenge of the divine veracity, and thence to the imputation of an unworthy motive for the command, viz. a jealous fear on God's part lest they should become His equals.—5. *But God knoweth, etc.*] And therefore has falsely threatened you with death. The gratuitous insinuation reveals the main purpose of the tempter, to sow the seeds of distrust towards God in the mind of the woman.—*your eyes shall be opened*] The expression denotes a sudden acquisition of new powers of perception through supernatural influence (21:19; Nu. 22:31; 2 Ki. 6:17).—*as gods*] or 'divine beings,' rather than 'as God': the rendering 'as angels' (*IEz*⁵⁷.) expresses the idea with substantial accuracy. The likeness to divinity actually acquired is not equality with Yahwe (see *Gu*⁵⁸. on v. 22).—*knowing good and evil*] See p. 95 ff.—"The facts are all, in the view of the narrator, correctly stated by the serpent; he has truly represented the mysterious virtue of the tree; knowledge really confers equality with God (3:22); and it is also true that death does not immediately follow the act of eating. But at the same time the serpent insinuates a certain construction of these facts: God is envious, inasmuch as He grudges the

⁵²*Ber. R.* The Midrash *Bereshith Rabba* (tr. into German by A. Wünsche, 1881).

⁵³*Ra.* Rabbi Shelomoh Yizhaki († 1105).

⁵⁴*Bu.* K. Budde, *Die biblische Urgeschichte* (1883).

⁵⁵*Urg.* K. Budde, *Die biblische Urgeschichte* (1883).

⁵⁶*v.i. vide infra* Used in references from commentary to footnotes, and *vice versa*.

⁵⁷*IEz.* Abraham Ibn Ezra (†c. 1167).

⁵⁸*Gu.* *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, von H. Gunkel (2nd ed. 1902).

highest good to man:—φθονερὸν τὸ θεῖον, an antique sentiment familiar to us from the Greeks” (Gu⁵⁹).—6. The spiritual part of the temptation is now accomplished, and the serpent is silent, leaving the fascination of sense to do the rest. The woman looks on the tree with new eyes; she observes how attractive to taste and sight its fruit seems, and how desirable *for obtaining insight* (so most) or *to contemplate* (⁶⁰6162; so Tu⁶³. Ges. De⁶⁴. Gu⁶⁵. al.). The second translation is the more suitable—for how could she tell by sight that the fruit would impart wisdom?—although the vb. is not elsewhere used in Heb. for mere looking (*v.i.*⁶⁶).—*gave also to her husband*] “The process in the man’s case was no doubt the same as that just described, the woman taking the place of the serpent” (Ben⁶⁷). That Adam sinned with his eyes open in order not to be separated from his wife has been a common idea both among Jews and Christians (*Ber. R.*⁶⁸, *Ra.*⁶⁹. *IEz.*⁷⁰. Milton, etc.), but is not true to the intention of the narrative.—7. *the eyes ... opened*] The prediction of the serpent is so far fulfilled; but the change fills them with guilty fear and shame.—*they knew that they were naked*] The new sense of shame is spoken of as a sort of *Werthurtheil* passed by the

⁵⁹Gu. *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, von H. Gunkel (2nd ed. 1902).

⁶⁰☞ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M’Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

⁶¹☞ The Vulgate.

⁶²☞ The Syriac Version (*Peshittâ*).

⁶³Tu. Fr. Tuch, *Commentar über die Genesis* (2nd ed. 1871).

⁶⁴De. F. Delitzsch, *Neuer Commentar über die Genesis* (5th ed. 1887).

⁶⁵Gu. *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, von H. Gunkel (2nd ed. 1902).

⁶⁶*v.i. vide infra* Used in references from commentary to footnotes, and *vice versa*.

⁶⁷Ben. W. H. Bennett, *Genesis* (Century Bible).

⁶⁸*Ber. R.* The Midrash *Bereshith Rabba* (tr. into German by A. Wünsche, 1881).

⁶⁹Ra. Rabbi Shelomoh Yizhaki († 1105).

⁷⁰IEz. Abraham Ibn Ezra (†c. 1167).

awakened intelligence on the empirical fact of being unclothed. A connexion between sexual shame and sin (Di⁷¹.) is not suggested by the passage, and is besides not true to experience. But to infer from this single effect that the forbidden fruit had aphrodisiac properties (see Barton,⁷² *S⁷³O*¹, 93 ff.; Gressman⁷⁴n, p. 356) is a still greater perversion of the author's meaning; he merely gives this as an example of the new range of knowledge acquired by eating of the tree. It is the kind of knowledge which comes with maturity to all,—the transition “from the innocence of childhood into the knowledge which belongs to adult age” (Dri⁷⁵.)—*foliage of the fig-tree*] To the question, Why fig-leaves in particular? the natural answer is that these, if not very suitable for the purpose, were yet the most suitable that the flora of Palestine could suggest (Di⁷⁶. Dri⁷⁷. Ben⁷⁸. al.). An allusion to the so-called fig-tree of Paradise, a native of India (probably the plantain), is on every ground improbable;—“*ein geradezu philisterhafter Einfall*” (Bu.). For allegorical interpretations of the fig-leaves, see

⁷¹Di. *Die Genesis. Von der dritten Auflage an erklärt von A. Dillmann* (6th ed. 1892). The work embodies frequent extracts from earlier edns. by Knobel: these are referred to below as “Kn.-Di.”

⁷²Barton, G. A. Barton, *A Sketch of Semitic Origins* (1902).

⁷³SO G. A. Barton, *A Sketch of Semitic Origins* (1902).

⁷⁴Gressmann *Texte und Bilder*.

⁷⁵Dri. S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the OT* (9th ed. 1913).

Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel (1890).

A Treatise on the use of the Tenses in Hebrew (3rd ed. 1892).

⁷⁶Di. *Die Genesis. Von der dritten Auflage an erklärt von A. Dillmann* (6th ed. 1892). The work embodies frequent extracts from earlier edns. by Knobel: these are referred to below as “Kn.-Di.”

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⁷⁸Ben. W. H. Bennett, *Genesis* (Century Bible).

Lagarde,⁷⁹ *Mitth*⁸⁰, i. 73 ff., who adds a very original and fantastic one of his own.⁸¹

2. The Man and Woman Expelled from the Garden (3:1–24)

The events of this chapter disrupt Eden's calm and are central to the purpose of the *tōlēdōt* segment, which explains what became of the man and woman in their idyllic habitat on earth (2:4–4:26). The Eden narrative in 2:4–4:26 turns on the depiction of the man and woman's sin (3:6–8; see introduction to 2:4–4:26). The narrative 3:6–8 is bracketed by two dialogue exchanges involving the episode's four participants: the serpent and woman (3:1–5) and the Lord's questioning of the man and woman (3:9–13). Divine pronouncement of three judgments against the culprits follows (3:14–19). The reactions of the man, the naming of Eve, and the Lord making skin garments are described in a concise narrative (3:20–21). The garden account ends with an intradivine monologue, determining the couple's expulsion, and the execution of that deliberation (3:22–24).

Genesis 2:4–25 sets the stage for interpreting the snake's challenge to the woman and for recognizing what is at jeopardy for the human couple. If we did not have 2:4–25, we would have no idea how much was lost in Adam's bite of the fruit. Genesis 4:1–26 shows us the aftermath of our first parents' lamentable deed by Cain's murder of Abel and the swelling tide of human wickedness exhibited by his progeny (4:23–24). Yet concomitant with God's three "oracles of destiny" uttered against the criminals (3:14–19), we hear within the judgments themselves the hopeful notes of reconciliation. This too is evidenced in the subsequent account where Eve perpetuates the family through birth (4:1–2), Seth supplants Cain (4:25), and the *tōlēdōt* section ends with humanity calling upon the name of the Lord (4:26).

LITERARY SOURCE. AS we noted in our discussion at 2:4–25, the Eden story is widely thought to owe its origins to a mythological corpus. Many suppose that originally chap. 3's purpose was solely etiological, that is, an explanation of origins, either of evil or of the enmity between humans and snakes, or perhaps how the snake became a legless creature. Since the Eden narrative offers no explanation for the origins of the serpent (other than that it was a created beast—2:19) and does not explicitly call for a change in its anatomy, there is little basis for finding such an etiological purpose.

Moreover, as we have said, Genesis does not explain the origins of evil; rather, the biblical account, if anything, says where evil does *not* have its source. Evil was not inherent in man nor can it be said that sin was the consequence of divine entrapment. The tempter stands outside the human pair and stands opposed to God's word. His career is obscure to the author of Genesis 3, who can only speak of the snake's destiny (3:14–15). As we find elsewhere in Scripture, little is said about the source of evil. Old Testament thought consistently affirms God

⁷⁹Lagarde, *Mittheilungen*, i–iv (1884–91).

⁸⁰*Mitth. Mittheilungen*, i–iv (1884–91).

⁸¹John Skinner 1851–1925, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1910), 71–76.

as the ultimate cause of all things, even the existence of the serpent (3:1), but it never attributes evil to God. He is not morally responsible for the sin of the first couple nor is he culpable for the serpent's deceit.

ADAM'S SIN. John Milton's revered *Paradise Lost* captures in imaginative verse the classical rendition of Adam's sin:

Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
In pangs, and nature gave a second groan;
Sky loured, and muttering thunder, some sad drops
Wept at completing of the mortal sin
Original ...

Until recent times the traditional Christian interpretation of Adam's fall, as the first sin and the origin of all human and earthly travail, has reigned with little challenge among Christian interpreters. The witness of early Jewish interpretation was mixed, attributing the human predicament of sin to the first couple,¹⁴⁸²⁸ but elsewhere it is said to be each person's responsibility alone.¹⁴⁸³⁹ Augustine hammered out the doctrine of original sin that subsequently was reiterated in the church's councils and refined by the pen of the Reformers, especially Luther's debate with semi-Pelagian Erasmus. The Bishop of Hippo assumed correctly that Genesis told a historical account, as did all interpreters until the ascent of biblical criticism, and thus Eden depicted the first sin, which indelibly marked the whole human family with the misdeed. His touchstone was the view of Paul, who had read Adam's disobedience as the initiation of sin (and human death) in the world, which determined the corrupted condition of people universally (Rom 5:12–21). Paul established the analogy between Adam and Christ, the last Adam, to contrast Christ's achievement of justification and the transgression of Adam (5:15–17). Augustine cut a course that avoided the excesses of the Manichean view that being human was evil and the Pelagian optimism that all were indeterminately free to choose their own destiny, unencumbered by Adam's sin.¹⁵⁸⁴⁰ Luther depicted human will in bondage to sin requiring deliverance, while Erasmus thought man, though fallen, still could obey God but was in need of assisting grace to come to salvation.¹⁵⁸⁵¹ This antithesis has been rehearsed in our

⁸²¹⁴⁸ "For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him" (4 Ezra 3:21), and "O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants" (4 Ezra 7:118). Cf. also 2 Apoc. Bar. 23:4. Alternatively, sin is attributed to Eve, "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die" (Sir 25:24), or to the devil, "Through the devil's envy sin entered the world" (Wis 2:24).

⁸³¹⁴⁹ "For though Adam first sinned and brought untimely death upon all men, yet each one of those who were born from him has either prepared for his own soul its future torment or chosen for himself the glories that are to be.... Thus Adam was responsible for himself only; each one of us is his own Adam" (2 Apoc. Bar. 54:15–16, 19).

⁸⁴¹⁵⁰ See the discussion in S. J. Duffy, "Our Hearts of Darkness: Original Sin Revisited," *TS* 49 (1988): 597–622.

⁸⁵¹⁵¹ In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther comments: "Furthermore, seeing that through the one transgression of the one man, Adam, we are all under sin and damnation, how can we attempt

century by the debate of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.¹⁵⁸⁶² Calvin asserted like Luther that man's sin was not merely imitation of Adam's sin as Pelagius had thought, for the sin of Father Adam "proved the destruction of the whole human race." And no part of the human being escaped its calamitous effects.¹⁵⁸⁷³

This time-honored interpretation of an original fall has been wrongly dismissed as a pre-Enlightenment misunderstanding of the garden narrative.¹⁵⁸⁸⁴ According to this modern viewpoint, Eden does not concern itself with the abstract notions of the origin of absolute evil or death. Eden's story explains no more than what happens to men and women when they disobey God, which is true of Everyman.¹⁵⁸⁹⁵ Or it is proposed that Genesis concerns immortality, how Adam and Eve as mortals almost achieved immortality (3:22) and were denied it because of their disobedience or by the trickery of the serpent. Thus there is no sense of rebellion and alienation from God in chap. 3 as later Christian tradition interpreted it.¹⁵⁹⁰⁶ Other proposals are many, including this representative sampling: chaps. 2–3 are polemical against Canaanite worship; a parable from the exilic period chastening the ruling elite that had sought power through wisdom and brought down the nation; the story of struggle between monarchic rule and peasantry; and a parable explaining the human predicament of early Israel's agrarian

anything that is not sinful and damnable?" Human sin with Adam is not mere imitation on our part, "since it would be we and not Adam who committed it; but it becomes ours the moment we are born" (*LW* 33.272).

⁸⁶¹⁵² E. Brunner and K. Barth, *Natural Theology*, trans. P. Frankel (London: Centenary, 1946); Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. O. Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947); Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/Part One (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958 [Eng. trans.]).

⁸⁷¹⁵³ "For all who are not utterly blind, perceive that no part of us is sound; that the mind is smitten with blindness, and infected with innumerable errors; that all the affections of the heart are full of stubbornness and wickedness; that vile lusts, or other diseases equally fatal, reign there; and that all the senses burst forth with many vices," Calvin, *Comm.*, 155. Also *Institutes* 2.1.4–7.

⁸⁸¹⁵⁴ As Carmichael bluntly states: "No sophisticated biblical scholar, standing aside from Jewish or Christian tradition, today interprets the paradise story as a fall into a chasm from a state of innocence and bliss" ("The Paradise Myth: Interpreting without Jewish and Christian Spectacles," 47).

⁸⁹¹⁵⁵ E.g., Westermann understands Gen 2–3 as answering the existential question of why a person is limited by death, suffering, and toil (*Genesis 1–11*, 275–78). The answer lies in primeval time, not history; there is no first sin, no inherited sin, no death as a penalty; rather the narrative speaks to the universal condition of humanity as fallible.

⁹⁰¹⁵⁶ So Barr, *Garden of Eden and Hope of Immortality*. A. S. Kapelrud likens Eden to the myths of Adapa and Gilgamesh, who are tricked into losing their chance at immortality by the gods ("You Shall Surely Die," in *History and Traditions of Early Israel* [Leiden: Brill, 1993], 50–61). Genesis, he says, shows similarly how chthonic forces (i.e., netherworld deities), represented by the serpent, stole away eternal life from the human couple but left them with the knowledge necessary to cope. There is no rebellion against God in Eden, only the couple's inability to stand up to the shrewd serpent.

struggle in the hill country upon entry into Canaan.¹⁵⁹¹⁷ Thus, they say, mythological Eden has been wrongly read as historical narrative, resulting in centuries of misunderstanding. With myth as its substratum, the story's purpose by universal setting and symbolic features (e.g., trees, serpent) was to depict the universal human experience in the archetypal Humanity. Moreover, there is no explicit connection in Genesis between Adam's sin and his successors. Original sin as inherited sin is foreign to the Genesis narrative.

Regarding the Christian tradition, proponents of this paradigmatic interpretation find support in Paul's use of Adam as a "pattern" ("type," Rom 5:14) of the human condition (Rom 5; 1 Cor 15). Later the apostle's view was misconstrued by Augustinian tradition and perpetuated in the Western church. Alternatively, for others, Paul was following the Jewish tradition of his day and was simply wrong in his interpretation of Genesis 2–3 as the story of sin's origins in the world.¹⁵⁹²⁸ Contemporary theologians have reinterpreted the garden story as a depiction of the anxiety of human existence and the self-alienation that results from the exercise of autonomous freedom.¹⁵⁹³⁹ R. Niebuhr redefined sin as the outcome between the human capacity to choose and the limitation of human finitude. This anxiety gives opportunity for sin by appealing to prideful autonomy because of the human ability to make choices or by practicing sensuality to

⁹¹¹⁵⁷ For polemical interpretations see F. Hvidberg, "The Canaanite Background of Gen I–III," *VT* 10 (1960): 285–94; A. Gardner, "Genesis 2:4b–3: A Mythological Paradigm of Sexual Equality or of the Religious History of Pre-Exilic Israel?" *SJT* 43 (1990): 1–18; N. Wyatt, "Interpreting the Creation and Fall Story in Genesis 2–3," *ZAW* 93 (1981): 10–21. As a critique of wisdom see Mendenhall, "The Shady Side of Wisdom." For royal interpretations see Brueggemann, "From Dust to Kingship," 1–18; J. M. Kennedy, "Peasants in Revolt: Political Allegory in Genesis 2–3," *JSOT* 47 (1990): 3–14; K. Holter, "The Serpent in Eden as a Symbol of Israel's Political Enemies: A Yahwistic Criticism of the Solomonic Foreign Policy," in *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 1 (1990): 106–12. And for labor in early Israel's survival see C. Meyers, "Gender Roles and Genesis 3:16 Revisited," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns/ASOR, 1983), 337–54, and *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). For more see the catalogue of interpretations in Hess, "The Roles of the Woman and the Man in Genesis 3," *Themelios* 18 (1993): 15–19.

⁹²¹⁵⁸ "Far from it being the case that Paul's thinking is deeply rooted in the thought world of ancient Israel, it is much more precisely formed by the *interpretation* of these ancient texts which took place in Hellenistic times and in a different intellectual atmosphere" (Barr, *Garden of Eden and Hope of Immortality*, 18).

⁹³¹⁵⁹ For survey discussion see D. Bloesch, "Sin," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1013–14.

escape the realities of our finitude.¹⁶⁹⁴⁰ Alienation from one's ground of being or true self was the essence of sin for P. Tillich.¹⁶⁹⁵¹

But Paul's reading of Genesis is not as remote to the narrative as some would contend. Granted, Genesis does not explicitly convey the linkage of Adam's sin and universal guilt as we find it in Paul; but the narrative provides the ideological soil in which Paul cultivated the concepts of universal sin, guilt, and death. What evidence from Genesis points to the idea of original sin, universal guilt, and death? Did Adam's sin irrevocably affect all humanity or only himself? G. Wenham has argued convincingly that the idea of a first sin with universal consequences can be supported from the Genesis narratives.¹⁶⁹⁶² First, Genesis testifies that Adam is an individual, not solely typological, and shows that the world after Adam's sin is forever altered as a consequence of Eden's rebellion. We have already asserted that the intentional *tōlēdōt* heading (2:4) indicates that the account is to be read as history (see 2:4–25 discussion). Genesis 5:1 echoes creation and also reiterates the *tōlēdōt* rubric, linking the genealogy of actual people (Adam-Noah) with creation. Certainly the refrain "and he died" is a deliberate association of Adam's sin (2:17; 3:19) with the inevitable experience of Adam's progeny. For the compiler of the Genesis narratives the genealogical strategy unmistakably places Adam on the same historical plane as the individual Abraham (5:1–32; 11:10–26).

Second, Genesis presents real consequences from Adam's sin as noted in chap. 3 itself and the subsequent narrative of chaps. 4–11. Whereas the garden was the perfect and "very good" place of fellowship with God, the human condition was altered forever by their expulsion, and as a consequence the human family lost much. Adam's experience is not repeated by each person, for Abel's and Cain's lives (and all others) begin at a very different point—*outside* the garden. We do not enjoy Eden today, for the expulsion changed the condition of humanity permanently. When we consider the account of Genesis 4, we find in it a number of deliberate structural and lexical echoes of chap. 3's narrative and the dialogue exchange between Adam and God. The questioning (4:9 with 3:9; 4:10 with 3:13), the curses (4:11 with 3:14, 17), the beneficent mark of Cain and provision of Adam's clothing (4:15 with 3:21), the divine forewarning of "desire" and "rule" (4:7 with 3:16), and the expulsion (4:14 with 3:24) indicate a linkage. But Cain's sin is not merely a repetition of Adam's failure; the narrative shows a different starting point for Cain's relationship with God. His offering is initially rejected by the Lord (4:5), and the intensity of Cain's rebellion exceeds his father's, culminating in his descendant Lamech (4:23–24). The advance of human wickedness and pride is attested again and again in the narratives that ensue: innate human wickedness is the reason of the

⁹⁴¹⁶⁰ R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Scribner, 1941–43); also S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, trans. and ed. R. Thomte, with B. Albert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). Among modern commentators, e.g., "the story is a theological critique of anxiety. It presents a prism through which the root problem of anxiety can be understood" (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 53).

⁹⁵¹⁶¹ P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951–1963).

⁹⁶¹⁶² See Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 90–91, who concludes that Gen 3 is both typological and historical. Cf. also his "Original Sin in Genesis 1–11," *Churchman* 104 (1990): 309–28.

catastrophic flood that nonetheless continues (6:5; 8:21); Noah's curse impacts Ham's progeny (9:20–27); and the threatening Babelites seek to enlarge their place (11:1–9).

Third, the judgment oracles (3:14–19) anticipate actual historical results that exceed the immediate punishment of the guilty. It is presupposed by 3:15 that the serpent as humanity's enemy is a given; each person does not discover this anew. Never again will the creation be deemed "good" because Eden's sin has transfigured creation and the human condition irreparably (Rom 8:19–25). It should not surprise us that Paul, while recognizing the typological value of Adam's act, also spoke of him as the "one man" (Rom 5:12) who committed "one man's trespass" (5:15).¹⁶⁹⁷³ Death's reign from Adam to Moses held sway though they "did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam" (5:14). The terror of Adam's act was both concrete and consequential as was Christ's one deed of life at the cross, which was concrete and had universal consequence.

Has Western tradition distorted Paul? A common remark is that Augustine's notion of inherited sin was due to his unfortunate dependence on the Latin's mistaken rendering of Rom 5:12d, "in whom all sinned."¹⁶⁹⁸⁴ Modern versions rightly read the final clause as causal, "because all sinned." But the matter does not hinge solely on the four Greek words of Rom 5:12d, for most agree that the Greek *eph' hō* ("because") is a conjunction expressing cause or result.¹⁶⁹⁹⁵ Also contended is that Rom 5:12 speaks of both Adam's "sin" (*hamartia*) that entered the world and its power over all individuals who "sinned" (*hamarton*);¹⁶¹⁰⁰⁶ but the universality of Adam's sin dominates the passage (Rom 5:12–21), and this demands that we understand humanity as culpable for more than personal sins.¹⁶¹⁰¹⁷

⁹⁷¹⁶³ For a defense of the traditional view see J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 180–210.

⁹⁸¹⁶⁴ Vg's *in quo omnes peccaverunt* ("in whom [Adam] all sinned") for ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον in Rom 5:12d. E.g., D. Moody, *The Word of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 286–87.

⁹⁹¹⁶⁵ After noting as many as eleven possible translations for ἐφ' ᾧ, J. A. Fitzmyer concludes: "The fate of humanity ultimately rests on what its head, Adam, has done to it. The primary causality for its sinful and mortal condition is ascribed to Adam, no matter what meaning is assigned to *eph' hō*, and a secondary causality to the sins of all human beings" (*Romans*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 416).

¹⁰⁰¹⁶⁶ J. D. G. Dunn concludes: "In short, Paul could be said to hold a doctrine of *original sin*, in the sense that from the beginning everyone has been under the power of sin with death as the consequence, but not a doctrine of *original guilt*, since individuals are only held responsible for deliberate acts of defiance against God and his law" (*Romans 1–8*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1988], 291). Cf. also C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 1.278: "While men do not sin in Adam in Augustine's sense [i.e., participating in Adam's transgression], they certainly do sin in Adam in the sense that they sin in a real solidarity with him [i.e., inheriting his corrupt nature], as a result of the entail of his transgression."

¹⁰¹¹⁶⁷ Fitzmyer remarks: "The universality of Adam's sin is presupposed in 15a, 16a, 17a, 18a, 19a. It would then be false to the thrust of the whole paragraph to interpret 5:12 as though it implied that the human condition before Christ's coming were due solely to personal individual sins" (*Romans*, 417). See also S. L. Johnson, Jr., "Romans 5:12—An Exercise in Exegesis and Theology," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney

(1) The Serpent and the Woman (3:1–5)

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’ ”

⁴ “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

3:1 The serpent is unforeseen in the narrative and appears suddenly. The reader is caught off guard, but not as unsuspecting as Eve. The snake is described by the narrator as “crafty,” alerting the reader to weigh the words of the beast carefully. “Crafty” (‘*ārûm*) can be spoken of approvingly or negatively, thereby introducing ambiguity at this stage in the story.¹⁶¹⁰²⁸ Perhaps this also prepares the reader for the serpent as a talking animal, since it is distinguished from all others as “more crafty.”¹⁶¹⁰³⁹ Its wordplay with “naked” (‘*ārummîm*) in 2:25, as noted, links the serpent’s shrewdness with the woman’s deception, finally resulting in the self-consciousness of human nakedness. Also the serpent is identified as an animal that God “had made” among the beasts of the field, referring to 2:19. This dismisses any notion of a competing dualism since the animal owes its existence to God.

Although the origin of the snake is attributed to God, there is no attempt here to explain the origins of evil. The narrative explains only the origin of human sin and guilt. There is no explanation for the serpent’s capacity to talk other than possibly that it was “crafty.” It is assumed that the animal has this ability, and the fact that the woman did not find this alarming only heightens the suspicion that the serpent is representative of something or someone sinisterly powerful. In any case the substance of what the serpent says is more important than who or what the serpent is.¹⁷¹⁰⁴⁰ Moreover, the serpent was among the “good” animals God had made (chap. 1), and there was no ostensible reason for the woman to suspect the animal’s deceit other than the content of what the animal spoke. Perhaps that the snake was of the wild (see 2:19–20 with 3:1), not as familiar to the domestic couple, explains the woman’s gullibility.¹⁷¹⁰⁵¹ The reader, on the other hand, has the advantage of the narrator’s commentary.

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 298–316, who argues for the Reformed doctrine that Adam sinned as the representative of the race, making his sin our sin, his guilt our guilt.

¹⁰²¹⁶⁸ For the negative sense of “crafty,” see Job 15:5, where it is used of the “tongue” (cf. Job 5:12–13; Exod 21:14); for the sense of shrewdness see the wisdom of Proverbs (e.g., 12:23; 14:18). Saul deemed David “very crafty,” who used his wits to escape danger (1 Sam 23:22).

¹⁰³¹⁶⁹ The preposition *מִן* is rendered as comparative in the NIV and NRSV, indicating degree; *IBHS* § 14.5d has it comparative superlative “most cunning,” but it has also been read as separation, meaning “subtle as none other of the beasts” (GKC § 119w).

¹⁰⁴¹⁷⁰ von Rad comments, “We are not to be concerned with what the snake is but with what it says” (*Genesis*, 88).

¹⁰⁵¹⁷¹ J. Magonet notes that “the snake is described as being more cunning ‘than all living creatures of the field,’ that is to say, the snake comes from that group defined as living apart

Various explanations for the serpent compete for our understanding. It has been interpreted as a mythological character related to magical powers or taken as a symbol of human curiosity, the fertility cult, or of chaos/evil. Still others have proposed that the voice of the snake is the inner person.¹⁷¹⁰⁶² Others have found it to be a polemical response to the apostasy of magic or a demythologizing of the serpent deity, which was revered in the ancient Near East. And the traditional opinion among Jewish and Christian interpreters is that the serpent is Satan's instrument.¹⁷¹⁰⁷³ Luther explained: "The devil was permitted to enter beasts, as he here entered the serpent. For there is no doubt that it was a real serpent in which Satan was and in which he conversed with Eve" (*L*¹⁰⁸*W* 1.151).

"Serpent" (*nāḥāš*) is the general term for "snake." This reptile had a significant role in the ancient world, where it was both an object of reverence and of disdain. It commonly is found in ancient myths and is represented by religious objects. It conveyed the ambivalent meanings of life/recurring youth, death/chaos, and wisdom.¹⁷¹⁰⁹⁴ The Bible possesses the same associations for the serpent: the rejuvenating effects of Moses' bronze serpent (Num 21:8; cf. 2 Kgs 18:4), its respected shrewdness (Matt 10:16), its venomous death (e.g., Ps 58:4), and as divine opponent (Isa 27:1). The Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* illustrates how the serpent was perceived in ancient times as man's antagonist. Gilgamesh searches for the immortal Utnapishtim, the famed survivor of the flood, to learn how he too might obtain eternal life. Utnapishtim reveals a secret known only to him and the gods; there is a plant in the depths of the sea that can rejuvenate his life. Gilgamesh obtains it and names it "Man Becomes Young in Old Age." The plant, however, is subsequently stolen away by a serpent which carries it off and when doing so sheds its skin, suggesting the process of rejuvenation.¹⁷¹¹⁰⁵

As we discussed in 2:4–25, the description of the garden scene uses imagery drawn from the tabernacle to convey by double entendre the meeting place for God and man in the garden. This reptile achieves the same purpose, indicating that opposition to God lurks in the garden. Serpents in the Mosaic community were classified among the unclean animals because of their movement on the ground (Lev 11:41–45) and were associated with the judgment of God for Israel's complaints against God in the wilderness ("venomous snakes," Num 21:6). Furthermore, the snake occurs in ancient Near Eastern imagery as antithetical to creation, representing powerful forces that oppose the creator-god. This imagery occurs in 1:21, where the monsters (*tannîn*) of ancient myth are no more than "sea creatures"—not hostile powers—created by the spoken word of Israel's God. This "monster" (*tannîn*) is the same as the many-headed

from man" ("The Themes of Genesis 2–3," in *A Walk in the Garden*, JSOTSup 136 [Sheffield: JSOT, 1992], 39–46).

¹⁰⁶¹⁷² Cassuto, e.g., interprets the snake as an allegory for the "man himself"; the serpent's voice is the woman's own thoughts, and therefore it is not surprising that the snake talks (*Genesis*, 142–43).

¹⁰⁷¹⁷³ E.g., Wis 2:24; Sir 21:2; 4 Macc 18:8; Rom 16:20 with v. 15; Rev 12:9; 14–15; 20:2.

¹⁰⁸ *LW Luther's Works. Lectures on Genesis*, ed. J. Pelikan and D. Poellot, trans. G. Schick

¹⁰⁹¹⁷⁴ See K. R. Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament: A Linguistic, Archaeological, and Literary Study* (Haddonfield, N.J.: Haddonfield House, 1974).

¹¹⁰¹⁷⁵ *ANET*, 96.

“Leviathan” or “serpent” (*nāhāš*).¹⁷¹¹¹⁶ “Rahab” is identified as the “serpent” (*nāhāš*) defeated by God’s omnipotent hand at creation (Job 26:12–14). This creation imagery is used in the psalter and among the prophets to depict how God, who overcame hostile powers in creation, is the One whose mighty power overcomes Israel’s enemies (cf. Ps 74:13–14; Isa 51:9). In the same way, the serpent in the garden symbolized the hostile opposition to the woman and her seed (3:15). This is continued in the Christian tradition as evidenced in John’s Apocalypse (Rev 12:9; 20:2).

Many modern interpreters, however, fail to recognize that the serpent’s trickery is ultimately the voice of Satan. Although the snake is never identified as Satan in the Old Testament, more than the principle of evil must have been intended by the serpent’s presence since 3:15 describes an ongoing war between the serpent and the seed of the woman.¹⁷¹¹²⁷ “All the days of your life” (3:14) shows that the serpent is treated as a personal being. The role of the serpent is consistent with the adversary (*haššātan*) depicted in Job 1–2. Although not identified as a serpent, he impugns the character of God and attempts to destroy Job. Jesus’ rebuke of the Jews as the children of their “father” (cf. “offspring,” 3:15) alludes to the garden scene, where the serpent is the “devil,” “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44; cf. 1 John 3:12). This interpretation was also found in earlier Jewish wisdom (e.g., Wis 2:24) and was shared by Paul (Rom 16:20). In accord with the traditional opinion, the snake is more than a literal snake; rather it is Satan’s personal presence in the garden.

We may interpret the role of the serpent in the same vein as Peter’s resistance to Jesus’ death, where the Lord responded to Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt 16:23). Jesus does not mean Peter is possessed with Satan as Judas was when “Satan entered” him (Luke 22:3), nor was he threatened with possession (Luke 22:31). But Peter unwittingly was an advocate for Satan’s cause. Similarly, the snake is a creature speaking against the “things of God” and whose cause is that of Satan. From the viewpoint of the Mosaic community, the snake’s presence in the garden would have been surprisingly incongruent with the pristine character of Eden. The snake was reviled by the Hebrews as a source of uncleanness and a remembered menace.¹⁷¹¹³⁸ The notion of a slithering snake communicates powerfully that the woman is in grave jeopardy. Job 1–2, where the amorphous “Satan” is named but not described, does not have the same force that the figure of a snake portrays spoiling the garden. By the presence of the snake the Scripture shows that the malevolent Satan was in the garden.

The tactic used by the serpent was to cause doubt in the mind of the woman through interrogation and misrepresentation. First, the opponent does not controvert outright the saying of the Lord (2:16); rather, he questions God’s motivation with the subtle addition “really say.”¹⁷¹¹⁴⁹ Second, the serpent uses the name “God” rather than the covenant name “LORD” that

¹¹¹¹⁷⁶ Cf. Isa 27:1, where all three are the same; נִנְּוּ occurs at Exod 7:9–10 for “snake” and שִׁנָּה for the rod that turned into a snake at Exod 4:3; 7:15.

¹¹²¹⁷⁷ Argued by Kidner, *Genesis*, 67.

¹¹³¹⁷⁸ An exception was the bronze serpent later revered (Num 21:8–9; 2 Kgs 18:4; John 3:14).

¹¹⁴¹⁷⁹ כִּי אִשָּׁה is difficult since there is no exact parallel for it as a question, which is the traditional rendering (as NIV). Speiser comments, “The serpent is not asking a question; he is deliberately distorting a fact” (*Genesis*, 23). BHS recommends the emendation אִשָּׁה (with interrogative).

has characterized the narrative of 2:4–25, where “LORD God” appears. Third, the serpent reworks the wording of God’s command slightly by (1) adding the negative “not” at the head of the clause, which with “any” expresses an absolute prohibition;¹⁸¹¹⁵⁰ (2) omitting the emphatic “freely”; (3) using the plural “you” (hence bypassing the man) rather than the singular as in 2:16; and (4) placing the clause “from any tree” at the end of the sentence rather than at the head as in 2:16, thereby robbing God’s command of its nuance of liberality. All of this is to say that the divine injunction in the mouth of the serpent was refashioned for its own interests.

3:2–3 The woman’s first mistake was her willingness to talk with the serpent and to respond to the creature’s cynicism by rehearsing God’s prohibition (2:17). However, she compounded her mistake by misrepresenting God’s command as the serpent had done, although definitely without the malicious intent of the snake. The serpent had succeeded in drawing the woman’s attention to another possible interpretation of God’s command. It would seem that the serpent had heard it all differently! Now the woman changes the tenor of the original command. First, she omits those elements in the command, “any” and “freely,” which placed the prohibition in a context of liberality. At this point she still is thinking collectively with her husband, from whom, as the narrator implies, she received the command: “we may eat” (v. 2). Second, Eve identifies the tree according to its location rather than its significance; and third, she refers to “God” as the serpent had done, rather than “the LORD” (v. 3). Fourth, she also adds the phrase “you must not touch it” (v. 3), which may make the prohibition more stringent. Yet to her credit the fear of touching the fruit may have been out of deference for God’s command. For Israel “touch” was associated with prohibition and death or with consecration to God.¹⁸¹¹⁶¹ Finally, she failed to capture the urgency of certain death, “You will [surely] die” (v. 3).

3:4–5 With the woman lured into dialogue on his terms, the serpent directly disputes God’s command. The negative “not” (*lō*) at the head of the Hebrew clause contradicts the immediately preceding claim by the woman, “You will die.”¹⁸¹¹⁷² Any second thought the woman might have had at hearing the serpent’s bold statement is answered by the serpent’s following explanation (v. 5). The motivation for God’s command is impugned by the serpent. In the wisdom tradition the adversary argues the same case in Job (1:9–11; 2:4–5). God is not good and gracious; he is selfish and deceptive, preventing the man and woman from achieving the same position as “Elohim” (v. 5).¹⁸¹¹⁸³ What are we to say of God’s actions? Admittedly, the

Cassuto retains the sense of question by taking *וְ* as the interrogative and *וְאֵל* as the emphatic (*Genesis*, 144). But intonation is a sufficient explanation since for yes/no questions the interrogative is not required (*IBHS* § 40.3.b).

¹¹⁵¹⁸⁰ GKC § 152b.

¹¹⁶¹⁸¹ E.g., Exod 19:12; Num 16:26; Deut 14:8; cf. 2 Sam 6:1–8; and, e.g., Exod 29:37; 30:29.

¹¹⁷¹⁸² לֹא-מוֹת תָּמּוּתָּם. Unlike here, the negative particle regularly comes between the infinitive absolute and finite verb (GKC § 113v), which is taken as the negation of God’s command at 2:17; but Cassuto shows that the plural verb negates the woman’s claim, מוֹתָּם תָּמּוּתָּם (‘‘lest you die’’), which rewords 2:17 (*Genesis*, 145–46). The addition of the infinitive absolute emphasizes the serpent’s negation, ‘‘will not surely die.’’

¹¹⁸¹⁸³ The traditional rendering is ‘‘God,’’ but it can be taken as ‘‘gods’’ or ‘‘divine beings’’ as the LXX rendering: καὶ ἔσσεσθε ὡς θεοὶ γινώσκοντες καλὸν καὶ πονηρόν. This discussion is complicated by the identity of the plural (‘‘us’’) in v. 22, where some contend that an angelic

narrative presents a God who makes a peculiar demand, on the face of it out of “sheer irrationality.”¹⁸¹¹⁹⁴ When he catches the culprits, he condemns them with all manner of threats and eventually expels them for a motive that could be interpreted as selfish (3:22); yet he does not follow through on his tirade, granting them clothing and assurances. A cynical reader could conclude that the serpent was right. But it may be that this uncertainty about God is used by the author to put his readers in the same place of decision as Eve (and Job). What do we do when presented with the “fruit of temptation”?

Hence the serpent made three counterclaims: First, they will not die. Second, “your eyes will be opened,” a metaphor for knowledge, suggesting a newfound awareness not previously possessed. In the Old Testament this awareness sometimes is said to be obtained through divine assistance (e.g., Gen 21:19; 2 Kgs 6:17, 20). And finally, they will gain what belongs to God, “knowing good and evil.” Essentially he is contending that God is holding her back—a claim that is sometimes echoed today.¹⁸¹²⁰⁵

When set in the larger context of the story, the serpent’s words are shown to be both true and false. They proved true in that the man and woman did not immediately die physically. Their eyes were indeed opened (v. 7), and they obtained knowledge belonging to God as the serpent had promised (v. 22). However, the serpent’s half-truths concealed falsehood and led the woman to expect a different result altogether. The serpent spoke only about what she would gain and avoided mentioning what she would lose in the process. Though the man and woman did not die immediately upon eating the fruit, the expectation and assignment to death were soon enough. Furthermore, they experienced expulsion from the garden, which was indicative of death.¹⁸¹²¹⁶ Later Israel experienced excommunication when any of its members were discovered ceremonially unclean; such victims were counted as dead men in mourning (e.g., Lev 13:45). Expulsion from the garden, which represented the presence of God as did the tabernacle in the camp, meant a symbolic “death” for the excommunicated (cf. 1 Sam 15:35–16:1). Although their eyes were opened, they were rewarded only with seeing their nakedness and were burdened with human guilt and embarrassment (v. 7). Although they became like God in this one way, it was at an unexpected cost. They achieved isolation and fear. The couple was cut off as well from the possibility of life, the one feature of divinity for which otherwise they were destined. They obtained “wisdom” in exchange for death.

(2) The Man and Woman Sin (3:6–8)

host is inferred (see 1:26). The plural participle “knowing” (יָדָעוּ) argues for the plural “gods” since “Elohim” as “God” normally takes the singular (e.g., Sarna, *Genesis*, 25). “God” can be retained if the participle is predicative, “like God, that is, you shall know good and evil” (e.g., Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 189); but *IBHS* § 37.6a indicates that the subject of the predicative use is usually expressed, unlike here (see also 11.2.9b #3). Ambiguity here may be purposeful since the whole tenor of the serpent’s speech is marked with clever devices. Since Elohim as “God” occurs earlier in the verse, it is best to retain the singular sense.

¹¹⁹¹⁸⁴ So Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 12.

¹²⁰¹⁸⁵ Remarkd by A. Ross, “Woman after the Fall,” *Kindred Spirit* 5 (1981): 11.

¹²¹¹⁸⁶ See Wenham’s discussion, *Genesis 1–15*, 74–75.

⁶When 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. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then 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.

⁸Then 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.

3:6 At its centerpiece the account moves with a rapid pace: “The woman saw,” “she took,” “ate,” “she gave ... and he ate.” Eve saw what was “good”; the adjective heads the clause accentuating the ironic results of her evaluation. There is a double entendre here: the term for “good” (*tôb*) can mean beautiful and also what is moral. In this case what was beautiful proved to be an allurement to disobedience. The term “good” is reminiscent of the created order God declares as “good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31). But the verbal echo of God’s earlier evaluation suggests that she has usurped God’s role in determining what is “good.” The temptation of the fruit is (1) its substance as food, (2) its appearance, and (3) its potential for making the woman “wise.” “Desirable” (*hāmād*) is the same word used in the prohibition against covetousness (Exod 20:17). Eve supposes that the tree’s fruit would obtain for her “wisdom” (*haskil*), which she must have equated with the tempter’s promise of obtaining divine knowledge (3:5). The term is broad in meaning, indicating sight, insight, and also success. We have commented (2:16) that the transgression is the acquisition of wisdom independently of God. Though the narrative does not specify the fault in this, traditionally since Augustine the sin has been related to human pride. Pride is perceived as the antithesis to prudence in Proverbs (e.g., 11:2). The serpent’s guile may be likened to the apostle John’s forewarning regarding the enticement of the “world” (1 John 2:16). James likewise warns that illicit desires lead to sin and sin to death (Jas 1:14–15), a course Adam acts out.

The long-standing interpretation of why Eve fails is the deception of the crafty beast (2 Cor 11:3), but no explanation occurs for Adam’s decision to eat. If the naming of the animals by Adam shows an awareness of their characteristics (2:19–20), then it is not surprising that the woman is unaware of the serpent’s shrewdness, but there is no excuse for the man.¹⁸¹²²⁷ Paul was emphatic that Adam was not misled (1 Tim 2:14). This concurs with early Jewish tradition, which placed the blame on Adam’s shoulders (e.g., 4 Ezra 3:21; 7:118). Adam’s participation is rather understated in the account, given the attention it receives from God (3:17–19) and in later Jewish and Christian tradition. He simply followed the example of the woman without hesitation. There is no sense that Adam is lured by logic or sexual provocation.¹⁸¹²³⁸ “For he would have never dared oppose God’s authority unless he had disbelieved in God’s Word.”¹⁸¹²⁴⁹ Was Adam privy to the conversation between Eve and the snake? Although “with her” does not in itself demand that he is present since the serpent speaks “to the woman,” nevertheless, the action of the verse implies that Adam is a witness to the dialogue. “You” at each place in 3:1–5

¹²²¹⁸⁷ Noted by Hess, “The Roles of the Man and the Woman in Genesis 3,” 16.

¹²³¹⁸⁸ *Gen. Rab.* 19.5 attributes to Eve persuasive argument and even tears. Job, who did not yield to his wife’s advice, is contrasted with Adam (19.10).

¹²⁴¹⁸⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.4.

is plural and thus suggests his presence. However, there is no indication that he too is deceived by the serpent.

3:7 The results are told in the same rapid-fire fashion as the transgression, paralleling the actions of the woman in v. 6: (1) eyes open, (2) realize their nakedness, (3) sew fig leaves, and (4) make coverings. What they “saw” is that they are “naked,” what is “pleasing to the eye” causes displeasure with their own nakedness and the need to cover it with “fig leaves,” and the “wisdom” gained only enables the making of “coverings.” The linkage between act and consequence is found in the wordplay between *ta ʾāwâ* (“pleasing”) in v. 6 and similar *tě ʿēnâ* (“fig”). The plural “they” shows that the couple simultaneously experiences the results of eating. The verb “realized,” when literally rendered “knew” (*yđ*’), echoes the “tree of knowledge” from which they had partaken; the word “naked” is reminiscent again of the “crafty” serpent who tricked the woman into exchanging her innocence for the embarrassing knowledge that they are naked (3:1; 2:25). Their efforts to hide their shame are as puny as their efforts to hide from God since their man-made coverings are ineffective (v. 21). “Made” (*ʿāśâ*) and “coverings” (*ḥăgōrōt*) anticipate v. 21, where God “made” durable “garments” (*kotěnôt*) from animal skins for their needed apparel.

3:8 The anthropomorphic description of God ¹²⁵

Notes for Genesis 3

¹²⁵ K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 1-11:26](#), vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 226–239.

Notes for 3:1

² **sn** Many theologians identify or associate *the serpent* with Satan. In this view Satan comes in the disguise of a serpent or speaks through a serpent. This explains the serpent's capacity to speak. While later passages in the Bible may indicate there was a satanic presence behind the serpent (see, for example, Rev 12:9), the immediate context pictures the serpent as simply one of the animals of the field created by God (see vv. 1, 14). An ancient Jewish interpretation explains the reference to the serpent in a literal manner, attributing the capacity to speak to all the animals in the orchard. This text (Jub. 3:28) states, "On that day [the day the man and woman were expelled from the orchard] the mouth of all the beasts and cattle and birds and whatever walked or moved was stopped from speaking because all of them used to speak to one another with one speech and one language [presumed to be Hebrew, see 12:26]." Josephus, Ant. 1.1.4 (1.41) attributes the serpent's actions to jealousy. He writes that "the serpent, living in the company of Adam and his wife, grew jealous of the blessings which he supposed were destined for them if they obeyed God's behests, and, believing that disobedience would bring trouble on them, he maliciously persuaded the woman to taste of the tree of wisdom."

³ **tn** The Hebrew word עָרוּם (*'arum*) basically means "clever." This idea then polarizes into the nuances "cunning" (in a negative sense, see Job 5:12; 15:5), and "prudent" in a positive sense (Prov 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 22:3; 27:12). This same polarization of meaning can be detected in related words derived from the same root (see Exod 21:14; Josh 9:4; 1 Sam 23:22; Job 5:13; Ps 83:3). The negative nuance obviously applies in Gen 3, where the snake attempts to talk the woman into disobeying God by using half-truths and lies.

sn There is a wordplay in Hebrew between the words "naked" (עָרוּמִים, *'arummim*) in 2:25 and "shrewd" (עָרוּם, *'arum*) in 3:1. The point seems to be that the integrity of the man and the woman is the focus of the serpent's craftiness. At the beginning they are naked and he is shrewd; afterward, they will be covered and he will be cursed.

⁴ **tn** *Heb* "animals of the field."

⁵ **tn** *Heb* "Indeed that God said." The beginning of the quotation is elliptical and therefore difficult to translate. One must supply a phrase like "is it true": "Indeed, [is it true] that God said."

⁶ **sn** *God*. The serpent does not use the expression "Yahweh God" [LORD God] because there is no covenant relationship involved between God and the serpent. He only speaks of "God." In the process the serpent draws the woman into his manner of speech so that she too only speaks of "God."

⁷ **tn** *Heb* "you must not eat from all the tree[s] of the orchard." After the negated prohibitive verb, מִכֹּל (*mikkol*, "from all") has the meaning "from any." Note the construction in Lev 18:26, where the statement "you must not do from all these abominable things" means "you must not do *any* of these abominable things." See Lev 22:25 and Deut 28:14 as well.

Notes for 3:2

⁸ **tn** There is a notable change between what the LORD God had said and what the woman says. God said “you may freely eat” (the imperfect with the infinitive absolute, see 2:16), but the woman omits the emphatic infinitive, saying simply “we may eat.” Her words do not reflect the sense of eating to her heart’s content.

Notes for 3:3

⁹ **sn** *And you must not touch it.* The woman adds to God’s prohibition, making it say more than God expressed. G. von Rad observes that it is as though she wanted to set a law for herself by means of this exaggeration (*Genesis* [OT¹²⁶L], 86).

¹⁰ **tn** The Hebrew construction is *פן* (*pen*) with the imperfect tense, which conveys a negative purpose: “lest you die” = “in order that you not die.” By stating the warning in this way, the woman omits the emphatic infinitive used by God (“you shall surely die,” see 2:17).

Notes for 3:4

¹¹ **tn** The response of the serpent includes the infinitive absolute with a blatant negation equal to saying: “Not—you will surely die” (*לֹא מוֹת תִּמָּוֶתֶנּוּ*, *lo’ mot témuten*). The construction makes this emphatic because normally the negative particle precedes the finite verb. The serpent is a liar, denying that there is a penalty for sin (see John 8:44).

sn *Surely you will not die.* Here the serpent is more aware of what the LORD God said than the woman was; he simply adds a blatant negation to what God said. In the account of Jesus’ temptation Jesus is victorious because he knows the scripture better than Satan (Matt 4:1–11).

Notes for 3:5

¹² **tn** Or “you will have understanding.” This obviously refers to the acquisition of the “knowledge of good and evil,” as the next statement makes clear.

¹³ **tn** Or perhaps “like God, knowing.” It is unclear how the plural participle translated “knowing” is functioning. On the one hand, *יֹדְעִי* (*yodé’e*) could be taken as a substantival participle functioning as a predicative adjective in the sentence. In this case one might translate: “You will be, like God himself, knowers of good and evil.” On the other hand, it could be taken as an attributive adjective modifying *אֱלֹהִים* (*’elohim*). In this case *אֱלֹהִים* has to be taken as a numerical plural referring to “gods,” “divine beings,” for if the one true God were the intended referent, a singular form of the participle would almost certainly appear as a modifier. Following

this line of interpretation, one could translate, “You will be like divine beings who know good and evil.” The following context may favor this translation, for in 3:22 God says to an unidentified group, “Look, the man has become like one of *us*, knowing good and evil.” It is probable that God is addressing his heavenly court (see the note on the word “make” in 1:26), the members of which can be called “gods” or “divine beings” from the ancient Israelite perspective. (We know some of these beings as messengers or “angels.”) An examination of parallel constructions shows that a predicative understanding (“you will be, like God himself, knowers of good and evil,” cf. NI¹²⁷V, NRS¹²⁸V) is possible, but rare (see Gen 27:23, where “hairy” is predicative, complementing the verb “to be”). The statistical evidence strongly suggests that the participle is attributive, modifying “divine beings” (see Ps 31:12; Isa 1:30; 13:14; 16:2; 29:5; 58:11; Jer 14:9; 20:9; 23:9; 31:12; 48:41; 49:22; Hos 7:11; Amos 4:11). In all of these texts, where a comparative clause and accompanying adjective/participle follow a copulative (“to be”) verb, the adjective/participle is attributive after the noun in the comparative clause.

¹⁴ **sn** *You will be like divine beings who know good and evil.* The serpent raises doubts about the integrity of God. He implies that the only reason for the prohibition was that God was protecting the divine domain. If the man and woman were to eat, they would enter into that domain. The temptation is to overstep divinely established boundaries. (See D. E. Gowan, *When Man Becomes God* [PTM¹²⁹S], 25.)

Notes for 3:6

¹⁵ **tn** *Heb* “And the woman saw.” The clause can be rendered as a temporal clause subordinate to the following verb in the sequence.

¹⁶ **tn** *Heb* “that the tree was good for food.” The words “produced fruit that was” are not in the Hebrew text, but are implied.

¹⁷ **tn** The Hebrew word תַּאֲוָה (*ta'avah*, translated “attractive” here) actually means “desirable.” This term and the later term נֶחְמַד (*nekhmad*, “desirable”) are synonyms.

sn *Attractive (Heb “desirable”) ... desirable.* These are different words in Hebrew. The verbal roots for both of these forms appear in Deut 5:21 in the prohibition against coveting. Strong desires usually lead to taking.

¹⁸ **tn** *Heb* “that good was the tree for food, and that desirable it was to the eyes, and desirable was the tree to make one wise.” On the connection between moral wisdom and the “knowledge of good and evil,” see the note on the word “evil” in 2:9.

sn *Desirable for making one wise.* The quest for wisdom can follow the wrong course, as indeed it does here. No one can become like God by disobeying God. It is that simple. The Book of Proverbs stresses that obtaining wisdom begins with the fear of God that is evidenced through obedience to his word. Here, in seeking wisdom, Eve disobeys God and ends up afraid of God.

¹²⁷NIV The New International Version

¹²⁸NRSV New Revised Standard Version (1989)

¹²⁹PTMS Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series

¹⁹ **tn** The pronoun “it” is not in the Hebrew text, but is supplied (here and also after “ate” at the end of this verse) for stylistic reasons.

sn *She took ... and ate it.* The critical word now discloses the disobedience: “[she] ate.” Since the LORD God had said, “You shall not eat,” the main point of the divine inquisition will be, “Did you eat,” meaning, “did you disobey the command?” The woman ate, being deceived by the serpent (1 Tim 2:14), but then the man ate, apparently willingly when the woman gave him the fruit (see Rom 5:12, 17–19).

²⁰ **sn** This pericope (3:1–7) is a fine example of Hebrew narrative structure. After an introductory disjunctive clause that introduces a new character and sets the stage (3:1), the narrative tension develops through dialogue, culminating in the action of the story. Once the dialogue is over, the action is told in a rapid sequence of verbs—she took, she ate, she gave, and he ate.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 2:25–3:6.