

Study 29: Genesis – The Creation Story

Note: This study guide focuses only on Chapters 1-3 of the *Book of Genesis*.

"Ultimately it comes down to the alternative: What came first? Creative Reason, the Creator Spirit who makes all things and gives them growth, or Unreason, which, lacking any meaning, strangely enough brings forth a mathematically ordered cosmos, as well as man and his reason. The latter, however, would then be nothing more than a chance result of evolution and thus, in the end, equally meaningless. As Christians, we say: I believe in God the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in the Creator Spirit. We believe that at the beginning of everything is the eternal Word, with Reason and not Unreason" [Pope Benedict XVI]

Overview. *The Book of Genesis* gets its name from the 3rd century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament, the *Septuagint*, and the Greek word which means *birth, creation, origin, or generation*. The Jewish title of the book is the Hebrew word, *bereshith*, the book's opening word, meaning "In the beginning."

In many respects *The Book of Genesis* is the most important of the Old Testament books for it lays a firm foundation for all that follows. In *Genesis* we are presented first [Gen 1-3] with God's creative act of divine love, followed by man's rejection of God's love through sin. But God's love is so great that He promises redemption to Adam and his descendants through a Redeemer [Gen 3:15].

Genesis continues by giving us a brief glimpse into primeval history [Gen 4-11] during which Adam's sin leads only to more sin, a situation that degenerates to the point where God chastises humanity in the form of a flood. From Noah and his descendants arise the nations of the world, and from all of these God chooses a single man, Abram, whom he later renames Abraham, to be the father of His chosen people. This last and longest part of *Genesis* [Gen 12-50] describes the lives of the Patriarchs – that is, of Abraham and his immediate descendants – in a kind of family history in which these men, their wives, and their children struggle to fulfill God's will while dealing with their own personal conflicts of faithfulness and sinfulness.

Not to be overlooked in *Genesis* are the covenants in which God joins with His people in a series of binding relationships, promising loyalty and love. Despite the sinfulness of the human race in *Genesis* we find God establishing these covenants with Adam, Noah and Abraham. We will address each in greater detail as we encounter them during the course of our study.

R. R. Reno, in his comprehensive and magnificent theological commentary on *Genesis*, sums up the scope of this first book of the Bible when he writes:

"...Genesis tells of the origin of reality, the source of evil, the birth of the many languages and cultures that fill the earth, and then turns to tell the story of Abraham and his troubled descendants, the seed of the people of Israel, who will themselves give birth to the redemption of the whole world."

In a very real sense, then, *Genesis* is more concerned with the future of humanity, of what will be, of the unfolding of God's plan, than it is with our origins. *Genesis* is a book of promises by which God gives us a series of glimpses into their fulfillment.

Authorship. Jewish and Christian tradition long attributed the authorship of *Genesis* to Moses (c. 1400-1200 B.C.). Indeed, this attribution has generally been applied to the entire *Pentateuch* (or *Torah*), the first five books of the Old Testament; i.e., the books of *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*.

Many modern scholars, however, reject Mosaic authorship or even the idea of Mosaic influence, believing instead that *Genesis* is the product of a variety of later sources dating from the first millennium B.C. According to this hypothesis – first introduced by 19th-century German scholars – the creation story of *Genesis* is a compilation of two sources:

- The **P** (Priestly) Source that gave form to Gen 1:1-2:3, which reflects the Priestly tradition of Temple ritual and sacrifice. The **P** source is thought to have originated rather late with roots in the 5th century B.C.
- The **J** (Yahwist) Source is thought to be behind the second account, the creation of man and woman, found in Gen 2:4-24. The **J** source dates somewhat earlier, to the 9th century B.C.

Based on this hypothesis, then, these modern scholars believe that *Genesis*, indeed the entire *Pentateuch*, did not assume its current form until the 5th century B.C. This, of course, removes Moses as the author of the *Pentateuch* and considers him to be, at most, an ancient influence present perhaps in the oral traditions of the Jewish people.

This debate is still ongoing and will no doubt continue for many years to come. For a variety of reasons, many supported by recent archaeological and textual discoveries along with other evidence, I tend to support the traditional view that Moses had a significant role in the writing of much of the *Pentateuch*, and in particular, the *Book of Genesis*. I also accept that some later editing likely took place as scribes updated elements of the *Pentateuch* to make it more easily understood by later generations.

The Church, however, does not demand that scholars and the faithful accept one particular view or hypothesis. Scholars are free to pursue different approaches to most areas of Scriptural study, including the origin of *Genesis*, so long as they accept that Scripture is the inspired Word of God and don't denigrate the traditional teachings of the Church. [Note: for those interested in reading more about this, see the books referenced at the end of this study.]

History and Theology in Genesis.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" [Gen 1:1].

"And if the sacred and utterly truthful Scriptures say that 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,' so that nothing is to be understood as having been created prior thereto – for if He had made something before He created all the rest, it would be this which would be said to have been created in the beginning – then beyond any doubt the world was not created in time but along with time" – St. Augustine, *The City of God*.

St. Augustine reminds us that God exists outside of time and, therefore, when He created the material universe, He also created time itself. Because we exist within the physical universe and within time, we cannot conceive of existence outside of time (at least, I can't).

If we read the creation narrative in *Genesis* from a strictly temporal perspective we'll find ourselves facing the argument that the Biblical narrative is wildly contrary to present day scientific knowledge. Taking this temporal approach also attempts to force the ancient authors to step far outside their own milieu and approach their task as if they were modern historians. Of course they weren't. They were men of their own time who wrote for their contemporaries.

Its purpose ultimately would be to say one thing: God created all material existence; i.e., *the world*. The world isn't formed from the chaos of mutually opposed forces or the dwelling of demonic powers. The sun, moon, stars are not deities. It all comes from one power, from God's eternal Reason, which became – in the Word – the power of creation.

This is the same Word of God we meet in the Act of Faith. In this Word human beings experienced the true enlightenment that does away with the gods and the mysterious powers and that reveals to them that there is only one power everywhere and we are in His hands.

This is the living God, and this same power – which created the earth and the stars and which bears the whole universe – is the very one whom we meet in the Word of Holy Scripture.

Holy Scripture is the echo of God's history with His people, the story of God's struggle with human beings to make Himself understandable to them over the course of time; but it is also the story of their struggle to seize hold of God over the course of time.

The Old and New Testaments belong together. For the Christian the Old Testament represents, in its totality, an advance towards Christ; only when it attains to Him does its real meaning, which was gradually hinted at, become clear. Thus every individual part derives its meaning from the whole, and the whole derives its meaning from its end – from Christ.

Israel always believed in the Creator God, and this faith it shared with all the great civilizations of the ancient world. Even when monotheism was eclipsed, all the great civilizations always knew of the Creator of heaven and earth.

For Israel the moment when creation became a dominant theme occurred during the Babylonian Exile. It was then that the first creation account (Gen 1) – based certainly on very ancient traditions – assumed its present form. During this time of exile, Israel had lost its land and its temple. Had the God of Israel been vanquished? Was their faith meaningless? It was then the prophets showed the true face of God who was not restricted to one piece of land. As God ultimately revealed to Moses, He is existence itself (“I am Who am”). He is not a God of a place, but the God of heaven and earth. The God of Israel is not like other gods, but is the God of every land and people. In their exile the people of Israel came to understand that God holds every people and all history in His hands because He is the Creator of everything and the source of all power.

The First Creation Narrative [Gen 1:1-2:3].

This first creation narrative is cosmic in its approach and provides a summary of God's design for the universe. As stated above, scholars believe it was composed or compiled by the Priestly writer sometime after the Babylonian Exile. It offers a vivid response to the pagan creation myths, particularly those of Babylon and Canaan, in which the creation of the world came about as the result of battles and feuding among the pagan gods: Marduk, Ti'amat, et al. The universe, then, is not some chance occurrence, whether the outcome of natural chaos or the product of the battles between warring deities.

The universe, according to Genesis, is logical and rational. It stems from the decision of the one God and is the result of His divine will. He speaks and creation takes place. His divine Word makes things happen.

Many of these same Biblical scholars believe the Priestly writer was heavily influenced by Deutero-Isaiah who overtly claims the God of Israel to be the Creator of all, heaven and earth [Is 40:12-31]. The prophet addresses God's creation of the universe [Is 40:26; 45:7-18] as well as His work of establishing His people and bringing them out of sin and slavery [Is 43:1-7]. The writer, then, ties these two “creative” acts together. God not only creates all existence but brings humanity to the salvation He desires for them.

In the narrative, creation occurs step-by-step during a period of seven “days” in which God brings all into being in an orderly manner, culminating in the Sabbath rest. Throughout the process, there is no room for misunderstanding or confusion. Everything is clearly stated; every step identified as the work of God. All is blessed by God because He has made it and it is “good.”

There is one exception, a positive exception, which reflects God's creation of man and woman. This final creative action comes after some time of reflection and results in God's declaring it to be "very good." Only the man and woman, the crowning element of God's creation, are created in His own image and likeness giving humanity a dignity far above that of any other creature. And this dignity applies to both man and woman. They share in God's image and likeness and in union with each other. It applies, too, to all of humanity, not just to God's chosen or covenantal people.

At this point we will take a brief look at each "day" of creation and try to appreciate better how inspired authors understood God's creative act.

Day One: Time and Light.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" [Gen 1:1].

This first verse of the Bible sums up the entirety of God's creative act, an act that begins at the beginning with the creation of time itself. But is it time as we know it? After all, there were as yet no heavenly bodies – no galaxies, no stars, no sun, no planets, no earth, no moon – no markers for the passage of time. Like the rest of creation, which is still to come, time has not yet been shaped. It has not yet been formed to fit the needs of man. Right now, in the beginning, man does not exist; for the time being (pardon the pun) then, time serves God's purposes.

Years ago, entering Arizona on an old US highway, I saw a sign that read, "Arizona Stays on God's Time," a reference to the state's refusal to adopt daylight saving time. Time zones and Mountain Standard Time, of course, were invented by man, not by God, but the sign did elicit a smile. Although it's not limited to Arizona, there really is such a thing as *God's Time*. In the beginning, creation moved forward not through our time, but through *God's Time*. As its Creator, God is not limited by time, and we must keep this in mind as we study the creation narrative of *Genesis*. As St. Peter reminds us:

"But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day" [2 Pt 3:8].

As time is being formed, God initiates His creative act:

"And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" [Gen 1:3].

Before anything else, God gives His creation light. His first act, therefore, dispels the darkness. He creates light, the energy that will provide the basis for all material creation that follows. Is that initial light, that first manifestation of energy, the "big bang" hypothesized by modern science? Perhaps. But the key thing to understand is that creation and science are far more compatible than many people believe.

It's also important to recognize the presence of the Trinity at the beginning. We have already encountered the Father, the Creator. And in Gen 1:2 we find that "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." Here we have a beautiful foreshadowing of the Baptismal Waters blessed by the Holy Spirit. But the Son appears as well. For Who but Jesus is the Light.

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" [Jn 8:12].

And every Sunday, as we join together at Mass to pray the Nicene Creed, we remind each other that the Son is "born of the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light..."

As the Church has always taught, the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament, and so we encounter Jesus at the beginning of John's Gospel where the Evangelist uses the very words of Genesis to ensure we understand the divinity, the eternal presence, of Jesus:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” [Jn 1:1-5].

Jesus, then, is the Creative Word of God, the uncreated Light present at the Creation.

Day Two: Space.

“And God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters’...and God called the firmament Heaven” [Gen 1:6, 8].

On this, the second “day” of Creation, God creates the heavens, what today we would call “space.” He has already given us time, what modern science calls the “fourth dimension.” Now on day two He gives us the other three dimensions, the length, the breadth, and the depth of material space: “and God called the firmament Heaven” [Gen 1:8]. As the material universe comes into being, gases coalesce, galaxies form, stars are born, and time continues its ongoing formation.

Day Three: Life.

“Let the earth put forth vegetation...” [Gen 1:11]

Science tells us that all the basic elements of the material universe, including those that make up the plants, animals, and the human body, have their origin in the stars. God begins to fill the dimensional space He has created with the chemical elements that will form the basis of all matter.

And so, on this third “day” of Creation, God creates the basic ingredients of life, the DNA of plant life. Today, thanks to modern science, we know the life’s foundational elements are present in DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), a molecule that carries the genetic instructions necessary for the development, functioning, and reproduction of all living organisms.

Day Four: Sun, Moon, Planets – the Heavenly Bodies.

“And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night...’” [Gen 1:14]

God, speaking to us in *Genesis*, tells us that He created all the heavenly bodies. They are not gods, as the pagan world believed, but are simply elements of the natural universe, the result of God’s creative act. They have been created in advance of our own creation to provide the earth with necessary heat and light, with a means to measure time, and as navigational aids to allow us to find our way on the surface of the earth and beyond.

Day Five: Creatures of the Sea and Sky.

“Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures and let birds fly above the earth...” [Gen 1:20]

God creates the first living animals and places them in the seas, followed by the flying creatures – the birds of the air. Once again *Genesis* anticipates modern science which places the origins of life in the waters of the earth.

He goes on to bless the creatures He has brought into being, and instructs them through their instinctual drives to:

“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters of the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth” [Gen 1:22].

Day Six: Beasts of the Earth...and Man.

“And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds’ [Gen 1:24].

On this sixth “day” of creation God populates the earth with animal life – the beasts of the earth. But God doesn’t create man along with the beasts. Indeed, He seems to pause in anticipation of what is to come.

Saint Pope John Paul II, in a general audience on September 12, 1979, suggested:

“In the seven day cycle of creation a precise graduated procedure is evident. However, man is not created according to a natural succession. The Creator seems to halt before calling him into existence, as if he were pondering within himself to make a decision.”

Moreover, as God creates man we encounter God referring to Himself in the first person plural:

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth’ [Gen 1:26].

In Genesis 1 God is called by the Hebrew word, *Elohim*, a plural form. Many scholars have seen this usage as a hidden Old Testament revelation of the Blessed Trinity. And so we see Father, Son, and Holy Spirit taking part in the creation of man, the culmination of God’s creative act. As the psalmist prays:

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have established; what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than the angels, and you have crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hand; you have put all things under his feet” [Ps 8:3-6].

Yes, God’s plan assigns man a special place in His creation and has “put all things under his feet.” To emphasize man’s uniqueness, only man is created in God’s own image:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” [Gen 1:27].

Both men and women, then, are created in God’s image, joined together in the human family. We have been created as the culmination of a remarkable act of divine love. Up to this point, God saw His creation as “good,” but with the creation of man, Genesis tells us:

“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” [Gen 1:31].

What exactly does it mean to be created in God’s image? First of all, we were created for immortality, for eternal life, to be recipients of God’s grace. We also have the gifts of intellect and will through which we can come to know and to love, thus fulfilling God’s commandment to know Him, to love Him, and because we recognize God in each other, to know and love our neighbor. In this spiritual sense we are not unlike the angels. But it is our material existence, our bodies, that separates us from the angelic beings. God Himself was willing to share in this existence when He sent His Son to become one like us in all things except sin. The Incarnation, then, is an unfathomable act of divine humility, one that must have awed the angels when God

revealed it to them. Through this act we are truly formed in God's image and likeness as no other creature is. Only man is created for an existence that spans all of God's creation, the spiritual and the material.

In this view of Creation, known as the "framework hypothesis", for the first 3 days God creates time, space, and life and in the next 3 days, to govern or rule the first 3 days, God fills the first 3 days:

Creative Realms	Rulers of the Realms
Day 1: Time [Light and Energy out of the darkness]	Day 4: Galaxies, Stars, Sun, Moon, Planets...
Day 2: Space [Waters and Heavens]	Day 5: Sea Life and Flying Creatures
Day 3: Elements and Life [Matter]	Day 6: Beasts and Man

As a point of interest, Pope Benedict XVI remarks on God's Word during the creation narrative:

"The words, 'God said' appear ten times in the creation account. In this way the creation narrative anticipates the Ten Commandments. This makes us realize that these Ten Commandments are, as it were, an echo of the creation; they are not arbitrary inventions for the purpose of erecting barriers to human freedom but signs pointing to the spirit, the language, and the meaning of creation; they are a translation of God's logic, which constructed the universe" [*In the Beginning*, p. 26].

And then, only after God created man, did He rest.

Day Seven: the Day of Rest.

"And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested...So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation" [Gen 2:2-3].

God makes this day of rest, not for Himself since He needs no rest, but for us. As Jesus reminded us:

"The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" [Mk 2:27].

God commands, therefore, that this seventh day, the sabbath, be kept as a day of rest. It is for our benefit to do so.

Pope Benedict XVI, again in his marvelous little book, *In the Beginning*, tells us:

"In the creation account the sabbath is depicted as the day when the human being, in the freedom of worship, participates in God's freedom, in God's rest, and thus in God's peace. To celebrate the sabbath means to celebrate the covenant...It also means going forth into a new world in which there will no longer be slaves and masters but only free children of God...It is from this notion that the Mosaic law developed, which has as its foundation the idea that the sabbath brings about universal equality" [*In the Beginning*, p. 30-31].

The Second Creation Narrative [Gen 2:4-24].

With the end of the Priestly narrative of God's cosmic creation, the early editors lead us to the second creation narrative, the more ancient "personal" narrative which scholars believe was

composed or collected by the Yahwist source. We are taken from a vast perspective of the creation of the cosmos and all things material, to the creation of individual human beings, the first man and the first woman. In a sense we revisit the “sixth day” of creation and delve more deeply into God’s creation of man.

Immediately we note a remarkable change in tone. As man takes center stage in the unfolding drama, Genesis 2 seems to speak to us from man’s perspective. The language describing the act of creation is much more intimate, more personal. The God of the cosmos becomes the Lord God, not only the Creator of man but also his friend. And God doesn’t just speak His Word when He creates man, but He forms him from the earth (Adam, from *Adamah*, meaning “earth”) and personally breathes life into him. Here we encounter another foreshadowing of the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit, already encountered in Gen 1:2. This man, then, created personally by God, is described as something very precious [Gen 2:7]. He is, in essence, matter and spirit, both an earthly and a godly creature.

Although we live a material existence on earth, God has breathed something divine into us. As Jesus reminds us [see Jn 17], we are in the world, materially, but are not of the world, spiritually.

As the first man, Adam becomes our first parent, our human father. This relationship is one that the Church has long maintained. Indeed, Pope Pius XII, in his groundbreaking encyclical, *Humani Generis*, clearly instructs the faithful:

“For the faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains that either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents. Now it is in no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own” [*Humani Generis*, 37].

Adam is created in a state of perfection, of both body and soul, and placed in a garden, a place where the Lord God dwells. This original state reflects what the Church calls Adam’s *preternatural* gifts, special graces that take Adam beyond the normal human state.

Adam is also given all God’s creatures to name, thus echoing Genesis 1 and giving man dominion over what God has created [Gen 2:19-20]. But these other creatures lack man’s essential nature and are imperfect companions. God has created us with a need for each other, and only another human being can bring the completion we need and God intends. And so God creates another, one like man but different and complementary to him [Gen 2:20].

God induces sleep and forms woman (from man) from one of man’s ribs, signifying an equality of being. A parishioner once asked me, “Why the delay in creating woman?” The easy answer is, “We don’t know.” Revelation doesn’t tell us, at least not explicitly. But perhaps we can assume that God wanted man first to recognize this need for a like companion so that Adam would, in a sense, agree in advance to God’s plan for the creation of woman. After all, Adam has an active role in the creation of Eve. Out of this agreement, then, woman is created not only from man’s body, his material existence, but also from his spiritual existence, from his intellect and will. Man, therefore, will know and love woman, and woman will know and love man.

God bringing Eve into being is the only creative act described in Genesis which involves the participation of someone other than God Himself. As such it shows us that each of us receives his or her body from the bodies of others, and our souls directly from God.

Man and woman, then, become one, living in a shared, loving, and live-giving relationship [Gen 2:21-24]. The state of marriage is at the very heart of God's plan for humanity and it is through this relationship between man and woman, husband and wife, that we as human beings find completion. As the chapter concludes we encounter a statement defining this unique relationship:

"Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" [Gen 2:24].

Jesus refers to this verse when questioned by the Pharisees about divorce:

"But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother [and be joined to his wife], and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate" [Mk 10:6-9].

...thereby reinforcing His teaching that the sanctity of marriage has its roots in God's creation of man and woman. And Saint Pope John Paul II, in his 1981 apostolic exhortation on the family, reminds us that:

"Willed by God in the very act of creation, marriage and the family are interiorly ordained to fulfillment in Christ and have need of His graces in order to be healed from the wounds of sin and restored to their "beginning," that is, to full understanding and the full realization of God's plan" [*Familiaris Consortio*, 3].

Later, after the Fall, Adam names his companion "Eve" because she is "the mother of all the living" [Gen 3:20]. Just as Adam's name relates to his identity, so too does Eve's name describe who she is. This naming ritual continues throughout human history, whereby each person is given a unique identity, in a sense confirming that God creates each one of us in a special act of divine love.

The final verse of Genesis 2 provides us with an indication of the innocence of our first parents living in God's grace, but one that also offers a subtle hint of the tragedy to come:

"And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed" [Gen 2:25].

God's intent for us is seen clearly in the second creation narrative. We are called to live in the presence of God. We are called to close, personal relationship, not only with God Himself, but also with each other through marriage between man and woman.

We are called to be stewards of God's creation, always acting in accordance with the divine plan. This is a message repeated often by our recent popes – John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis.

This, then, is God's intent, but when the free will of others, His creatures, is involved, things and plans can change, leading to discord and disruption. The third chapter of Genesis describes this disorder in the Fall of man through sin.

The Fall [Gen 3:1-24].

The narrative of the Fall describes how sin originates within the human heart. Indeed, Jesus Himself will instruct His disciples on this:

"But what comes out of a person, that is what defiles. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile" [Mk 7:20-23].

From within us comes the suffering and death that results from man's Fall. What we encounter in the narrative is an act, not only of disobedience, but also of pride and idolatry. God has forbidden Adam and Eve to eat of one tree in the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Symbolically the tree represents a power that belongs only to God; that is, the power to decide what is good and what is evil. This is the power to determine right and wrong, a power which Adam and Eve decide belongs to them as well as to God. This power, then, would seem, to offer them a kind of divine wisdom. As the serpent suggests, "You will be like God, knowing good and evil" [Gen 3:5]

This same attitude toward sin continues to this day. How many people today, Catholics included, fail to listen to the Church's magisterial teaching and insist instead in listening only to their poorly formed consciences? Their consciences are formed by the teachings of the world rather than the Church. They rationalize accepting as permissible or good even that which is intrinsically evil; e.g., abortion, infanticide, assisted suicide, etc. Like our first parents, they believe they can usurp God's authority, that which He extended to the Church. They have decided that they, not God, have authority over life and death. They are the arbiters who can decide what is good and what is evil.

The evil one, depicted in the narrative as the serpent, is a personal being, one who, despite his cleverness, displays a deep hostility toward both God and man. In his cleverness he is able to distort God's commandments. He tries to change the human understanding of God from the personalized Lord God (Yahweh) into something far less personal by referring to Him simply as God. He wants to undermine the personal relationship the man and woman have with God by causing them to focus solely on themselves and their relationship with each other. The result is a growing hostility toward and distrust of God on the part of Adam and Eve. Rational thought goes out the window as they are overcome by their desires.

The sinful act of Adam and Eve is the Original Sin that leads to all other sin. The history of sin begins here. By succumbing to the temptation of Satan they fall prey to a kind of idolatry, which in the Old Testament is consistently held up as the greatest of sins. They expect, as the serpent suggest, to be "like God" once they have tasted the forbidden fruit of the tree. Their sin, in which their own desires are given greater importance than the will of God, in a sense encompasses all sin.

By succumbing to this temptation their relationship with God is disrupted and they become self-absorbed, overcome by shame, fear and guilt. Not only is their relationship with God broken, but so too is their relationship with each other. They withdraw into a kind of darkness, trying to escape into a seclusion beyond the sight of God.

This is not unlike what the world does today as it attempts to deny the existence of sin. Once again, we turn to Pope Benedict XVI, who reminds us in his book, *In the Beginning*, that:

"Sin has become almost everywhere today one of those subjects that are not spoken about. Religious education of whatever kind does its best to evade it. Theater and films use the word ironically or in order to entertain. Sociology and psychology attempt to unmask it as an illusion or a complex. Even the law is trying to get by more and more without the concept of guilt" [*In the Beginning*, p. 62].

Like today's deniers of sin, neither Adam nor Eve will accept responsibility for their sin, but try to place the blame on others [Gen 3:12-13]. Adam accuses Eve and Eve accuses the serpent. By denying responsibility for what they have done, they try to diminish their guilt, in a sense denying the very existence of the sin itself.

In a vain attempt to turn man into a god, Adam and Eve commit the Original Sin and reject their relationship with the one true God. Their sin also damages the interpersonal relationship

between man and woman. This act, therefore, by bringing sin into the world, damages all human relationships that follow. It is a sin so great that only an act of divine love can save us from its deadly effects.

Only God's love can overpower the Original Sin and its effects. This love becomes Incarnate in Jesus Christ, the new Adam, God's only begotten Son, and through the willing cooperation of His Mother, Mary, the new Eve. It is through Jesus that Redemption comes to the world. Jesus, in total obedience to the Father, offers Himself as the sacrificial victim, as the "Lamb of God" who will conquer sin and death, thus atoning for the sin of Adam through His passion, death on the Cross, and Resurrection.

This redemptive act is prophesied by God Himself when He proclaims that Eve's offspring will defeat Satan. It is a promise made in a single verse of Genesis and fulfilled in Mary and her Son, Jesus Christ. The Church calls this verse the *Protoevangelium* or "First Gospel" because it is the first reference to God's promise of a Redeemer.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" [Gen 3:15].

Until then man and woman are deprived of the preternatural gifts and the close relationship with God they experienced in the garden. Sin will be a constant part of their lives and death will inevitably follow. Welcome to the human condition! But take heart...the promised Redeemer comes.

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