

JANUARY 2

Genesis 4 & 5

Today, we see the next stage of the consequences of sin in the garden. Did you notice that prior to the rebellion of Adam and Eve, relationships were pure. God walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve. They were naked and unashamed. There was nothing hindering their relationships.

In Genesis 3, from yesterday's readings, as well as 4 and 5, you encountered the second of the four great events recorded in Genesis 1 through 11 - The Fall - the record of how Adam and Eve, created in the very image of God, perfect and without sin, by an act of their will disobeyed God, and broke their relationship with Him. You also read of how that sin affected their relationship to each other and how within just one generation, evil had such a firm hold on our ancestors that a young man rose up and killed his own brother out of jealousy and anger against God.

This passage is extremely significant for us because it is the only explanation in the Bible, (and indeed in all of human literature), of how sin came into the world; because it marks the beginning of man's interaction with Satan, whose presence lurks just beneath the surface of this account; and because it contains the first hint of the purpose of God from eternity past to redeem a fallen humanity by sending His own Son to die that we might live again.

Though God created our first parents perfect, because they were made in His image they were also free moral agents with their own ability and responsibility to obey. It is for this reason that along with all of the freedom of Eden (and the emphasis in God's explanation of man's environment in chapter 2 is really on freedom - 'You are free to eat of any tree in the garden except for one'), God also gave them responsibility and one simple prohibition: "*You must not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil for when you eat of it, you will surely die....*"

They could do anything else that they wanted to do...

This one prohibition constituted a test for Adam, and in this test he represented all of us. It was a test to see if Adam would truly choose to love God. Without the power to choose, the whole concept of love is meaningless. (That thought also might provide you with a lot of productive reflection upon the relationships and choices you face in your life.)

The temptation which Satan brought to Eve through the serpent is interesting. The Bible says in another place that Satan is the "Father of Lies" and from the beginning of the conversation there is truth and falsehood all mixed up together. God had told them not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but He never said not even to 'touch' it. The serpent adds that thought to make God's command look unreasonably restrictive. He challenges God's warning by saying, "*If you eat of it, you will not surely die.*" There is a half-truth there as well, for physical death did not come instantly to our forbearers - but spiritual death did - and

physical decay that inevitably leads to death began at the time of their sin. Eternal death, that is eternal separation from God as described in II Thessalonians 1: 9, (*"They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power"*), became the fate of everyone who sinned - unless some satisfactory sacrifice could be provided.

In I John 2, the apostle talks about the "lust of the flesh" (our human appetites), the "lust of the eyes", and the "pride of life" as being everything in the world that pulls us from God. It is worth noticing that all three of these elements are mentioned in the account of Eve's encounter with the serpent: The fruit was beautiful to look at, it promised to be good to eat, and the eating of it, promised the serpent, would make Eve and her husband wise like God with heavenly wisdom. Satan tricked Eve into believing that she deserved a better deal than God had given her. What Eve got instead of a better deal was the sense of true moral guilt. He fooled her into the presumption of security by telling her she would surely not die, but Eve bought instead the fear of death and the reality of death which would, from that day onward, color all of her thoughts and actions. Finally, Eve presumed to make herself autonomous, that is, equal to God, but what she really got was bondage to Satan. That's what sin is always like - it looks good - it even tastes good - and it promises everything, but it is all a sham - and the results are fearsome in the extreme.

When God came seeking Adam in the Garden that day, Adam was hiding.... As if you can hide from God. When confronted by His sin, he started 'hurling' - 'it was all Eve's fault, she made me do it', and of course, Eve hurled at the serpent and said, 'It was the serpent!'

Did you ever notice that when you and I sin, we are just like our first parents - we try to hide, and when that doesn't work, we start hurling blame and accusations at others. I guess some things never really change. If you take some time to reflect on this, you'll discover a hiding and hurling pattern in your life too! The when you are caught in sin, you will avoid people who might 'find you out' and you lie to get out of it when they find you.

Immediately after the fall of Adam, in the context of the curses which God lays down on the serpent, the earth, and upon the disobedient couple, there is an oblique but definite promise that God makes - indicating that a plan is already in place to reverse the damage done by The Fall. God says to the serpent, "*I will put enmity between you and the women, between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.*" It is an obscure but very definite reference to the first promise of a Messiah. From this tiny stream a mighty torrent of Messianic prophecy will develop. (You may want to start to fill in the page in your notebook for Messianic prophecies and passages. Before your Old Testament reading is done, it will be very full indeed)

And look how fast everything deteriorated! In just one generation, we go from perfection in Eden to Abel being murdered by his brother Cain. That's how fast sin

takes over in people's lives. It always goes faster and further than we dreamed. In Chapter 4, verse 7, there is a stark warning to all of us. God says to Cain, "*If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door - it desires to have you, but you must master it!*"

The other important thing to note is that God shows mercy to Cain. Sure, he punishes Cain, but he allowed him to live, to travel, to marry, bear children and build a city. God always give us more than we deserve for our sin. Cain is just the first example of many in this regard.

As you go through your day, consider how the consequences of sin affect all of our lives. From lying to shame to hiding. From murder to abuse to broken relationships. All of us are both perpetrators of rebellion and victims of other people's rebellion. Sin causes pain and it will as long as humans walk this planet.

But consider as well the grace of God. Grace that brings covering for nakedness. Grace that does not berate and demean. Grace that allows Cain - and every one of us - to live, and marry and have kids and build - despite our fallenness. And grace that promises that there is one coming who will crush the serpent's head and reverse all of the curses that result from sin. This is a good God.

And this has been Mark Ashton, reminding you that God's word is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Peace be with you.