

# The Primeval History

LESSON  
TWO

PARADISE LOST & FOUND



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# The Primeval History

## Lesson Two

### Paradise Lost & Found

#### INTRODUCTION

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I suppose that at one time or another everybody loses something. Maybe it's a book. Maybe it's the key to your home. I don't know about you, but when I lose something like that the first thing I do is retrace my steps. At least in my mind, I go backwards in time step-by-step to remember where I put the thing I lost. Then, once I retrace my steps, I carefully reverse what I did wrong. I put the keys on the table where they are supposed to be, and the book goes back on the shelf. Retracing and reversing what I did is one of the best ways I know to find something I've lost.

Now, we have entitled this lesson, "Paradise Lost and Found," and we will focus our attention on Genesis 2:4–3:24, the story of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden. We will see that Moses wrote about Adam and Eve losing paradise to encourage Israel to retrace and reverse the steps Adam and Eve took in that Garden of Eden. Only as Israel learned from this story could they hope to find paradise again, and we will see that the encouragement Moses gave to Israel is also God's message for us today. By going back to the steps of Adam and Eve, Christians today can find paradise too.

Our examination of Genesis 2 and 3 will divide into three parts: First, we will examine the literary structure of this passage. Second, we will focus on the original meaning of these chapters to discern why Moses wrote them as he did for the children of Israel. And third, we will draw attention to modern application by asking how the New Testament guides us toward the proper use of this passage in our lives. Let's begin with the literary structure of our passage.

#### LITERARY STRUCTURE

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Although Genesis 2–3 is a rather long passage and touches many topics, it actually forms a unified narrative. To understand this passage properly, we need to focus on these two chapters as one literary unit. Our examination of the literary structure in Genesis 2–3 will have two main concerns: first, we will gain an overview of the major sections of the passage; and second, we will comment on some of the significant symmetries among these various sections so that we may grasp the heart of what Moses was saying to Israel. Let's begin with an overview of the literary structure of Genesis 2–3.

## OVERVIEW

Apart from the brief title that appears in the first half of 2:4, these two chapters divide into four major sections, and these four major sections are indicated primarily by changes in topics and characters. We should walk through these four steps and summarize their basic content.

### In Garden

The first dramatic step of our story appears in 2:4-17, where we read that God put Adam in the Garden of Eden. These verses begin with a panoramic view of the Garden of Eden, and as the passage tells us, the whole garden was Adam's splendid place to dwell and to work. Then the concerns of this section narrow down to the creation of Adam and his commission to work within the garden. Adam was given a great privilege by God's grace. He was to keep the garden on God's behalf.

### Condition Enhanced

The second step of our narrative consists of 2:18-25, which we will designate humanity's "condition enhanced." In this material God added even greater blessings to Adam's life. This section begins by introducing a new problem which is noted in 2:18. There, God looked at Adam and said these words:

**It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him (Genesis 2:18).**

The rest of 2:18-25 reports how God dealt with this problem. Adam searched for a partner among the animals, but in the end, God formed a woman and brought her to Adam. In this way, God greatly enhanced the wonderful creation that he had made already for Adam and Eve.

### Condition Cursed

The third step of our narrative is 3:1-21, which we will call humanity's "condition cursed." This material begins in 3:1 with the introduction of a new topic and character, the tempting serpent. From this point forward, 3:1-21 deals with the serpent's temptation and the results of his temptation. Eve falls prey to the serpent's temptation so that she and Adam eat from the forbidden fruit and fall under divine curses.

## Out of Garden

The fourth element in the overarching structure of this passage is 3:22-24 which we have entitled humanity “out of the garden.” This section is marked by another significant shift in topic. We find God speaking about the problem of the Tree of Life. In 3:22 we read these words:

**The man ... must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever (Genesis 3:22).**

To deal with the potential problem of Adam eating from this tree, God drove Adam from the garden and placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the entrance to Eden. From that point on, human beings would no longer have access to the Garden of Eden apart from a direct intervention by God.

## SYMMETRY

With the four major divisions of this passage in mind, we may now look more closely at Genesis 2–3 to see the dramatic symmetry that this passage displays. By juxtaposing different elements in these sections, Moses revealed the central concerns of his narrative. To explore the symmetries of this narrative, we will look first at the balance which exists between the beginning and ending of our narrative, and then we will look at the symmetry of the two middle portions of the story. Let’s look first at the beginning and ending of this passage.

## Beginning and Ending

As we will see, Genesis 2:4-17 and 3:22-24 stand in sharp contrast with each other in at least three important ways.

The first contrast is in location. The account begins in 2:7 with God placing Adam within the paradise garden. Adam lived and worked in a place full of divine blessings; wonderful vegetation, life-giving water, precious metals and stones surrounded him on every side. By contrast, the narrative ends in 3:24 with God expelling Adam and Eve from the garden. This geographical contrast makes it clear that the most desirable place for human beings to be on earth was in the Garden of Eden.

A second difference in the focus in each section is on the special trees of the garden. Although 2:4-17 mentions two trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, by the time we come to 2:17 attention moves just to the one tree, the Tree of Knowledge. This tree held the power to give human beings the experiential knowledge of goodness and sin. It could open their eyes to see things they had not seen before.

By contrast, at the end of the narrative in 3:22-24, God was no longer concerned with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but exclusively with the Tree of Life.

This tree had the power to give human beings eternal life. But God banished Adam and denied access to this tree. This contrast made it clear that free access humanity once had to the garden, and all of the blessings that were there, had been lost until God decreed otherwise.

A third difference between the beginning and ending of our narrative is in humanity's commission. In 2:15 the first step reports that God commissioned Adam to blessed work in the garden with no pain and no difficulty. In 3:23, however, God banished Adam and Eve from the garden and condemned them to difficult toil outside of the garden. This contrast also provides an essential perspective on the story. Not only did humanity lose the wonder of life in Eden, we were also condemned to difficulty so long as we remained away from the garden.

These three contrasts between the opening and closing sections of Genesis 2–3 draw our attention to some of the most vital aspects of this narrative. Moses wrote about a major shift in the human condition that took place in primeval times. God originally ordained that human beings should dwell in his garden, but Adam and Eve's sin bound them to difficulty and trouble, and separated them from the tree that gives eternal life. Now, as we will see, this set of contrasts spoke directly to the situation in which the Israelites found themselves as Moses led them toward the Promised Land. The Israelites had been far from Eden as they suffered under the cruelty of slavery in Egypt. They needed to regain the blessings which God provided in Eden.

## Middle Portions

With the contrasting symmetries of the outer portions of the story in mind, we should turn our attention to the middle portions of the story, 2:18-25 and 3:1-21. These two inner steps fill in the gap between the beginning and ending and they form their own set of contrasting symmetries in at least three ways.

One contrast focuses on humanity's relationship with God. In the second step we see a harmonious relationship between Adam and God. In 2:18 God expressed concern for Adam and brought Adam a perfect partner in Eve. The picture here is that of God and the human race in intimacy and at peace. Yet, in the third portion of the narrative, disharmony replaces the initial harmony between God and the human race. Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command, and in 3:8 they hid from God's approach, and God spoke angrily against Adam and Eve.

A second contrast exists in human relationships. In the second step of 2:18-25, Adam and Eve were in perfect bliss. In 2:23 Adam broke forth with the first love poem in the Bible, saying that Eve was "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh," and they lived together naked and without shame. By contrast, however, in 3:16 God pronounced a curse on this relationship, declaring that strife would persist between the man and woman. The woman would desire her husband, and he would rule over her. These words revealed that the sin of Adam and Eve not only disrupted their relationship with God, but with each other as well. And from that point forward, human relationships have been characterized by difficulty and struggle.

A third contrast appears in humanity's relationship with evil. In the second step, evil is absent from the story. Adam and Eve were entirely innocent and separated from

the power of evil. But by the third section, humanity had fallen prey to the serpent and was locked into a long-term struggle with evil. In 3:15 God promised that Eve's seed would one day overcome the serpent, but no immediate victory was offered to Adam and Eve.

These contrasts between the second and third portions of the narrative help us see a number of concerns which Moses had as he wrote this narrative. Moses wrote about Adam and Eve in ways that connected to Israel's experience. Sin continued to wreak havoc in Israel's life. It damaged the peoples' relationship with God and with each other, and more than this, every day of hardship they endured reminded Moses and Israel that, just like Adam and Eve, they had to wait for the time when God would finally give victory over evil to his people.

With the literary structure of this material in mind, we are able to delve into the original meaning of this passage. Why did Moses write this account of humanity's expulsion from God's garden? What message was he conveying to the nation of Israel as he led them toward the Promised Land?

## ORIGINAL MEANING

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Now, to be sure, on a very basic level, Moses wrote this narrative to teach some general theological themes to the Israelites whom he led. He told them a lot about the origin, and the nature, and the results of sin in the world. And these were very important themes. Yet, as we saw in the previous lesson, Moses did not write his primeval history simply to inform Israel about such general historical and theological issues. Instead, like many other ancient writers, Moses wrote his primeval history to give his people practical instruction about current religious and social programs, mainly, in this case, leaving Egypt and going to Canaan.

To see how Moses connected the primeval Garden of Eden and Israel's conquest of Canaan, we will look at three elements of his story: first, Moses' portrait of the Garden of Eden; second, his focus on the requirement of loyalty from Adam and Eve; and third, his depiction of the curses placed on Adam and Eve. Let's look first at Moses' description of the Garden of Eden.

## GARDEN

Moses' description of the garden is so complex that many of our modern questions about Eden will always remain unanswered. Yet, it is possible for us to grasp the central concerns in Moses' presentation. As we will see, Moses described the Garden of Eden in ways that identified Eden with the Promised Land. From Moses' perspective, the land to which he was leading Israel in his day was actually the location of the primeval land called Eden.

Many aspects of Genesis 2–3 make it clear that Moses wanted Israel to connect Canaan with the land of Eden, but two features of his account are particularly important:

first, the identity of Eden; and second, the holiness of Eden. Let's look first at the identity of Eden.

## Identity

In Genesis 2:10-14 we read these words:

**A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold... The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates (Genesis 2:10-14).**

Moses wrote that a single river flowed from Eden and divided into four headwaters. These headwaters were the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris, and Euphrates Rivers. One central river in Eden fed into these four rivers. It was their central source.

Now, as we explore Moses' description here, we must always remember that many geographical changes have taken place throughout our planet's history since the beginning of the world. Even in Moses' day there was no longer a single river which fed these four headwaters. The Scriptures teach that this central source of water will appear only in the end of time. Yet, Moses' reference to the four rivers which were fed by this central source gives us an approximate picture of where he believed Eden had been located.

We can identify the Tigris and Euphrates mentioned in 2:14 with the region of the modern day Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The fact that Genesis refers to these rivers has suggested to most modern interpreters that Genesis agrees with Babylonian mythology, that Eden was in the region of Mesopotamia. In the Babylonian language, *edin* means "a plain," or "open flatland," a term well suited for the lower Tigris-Euphrates region. In Hebrew, however, *eden* does not mean "a plain". It means "a pleasant or delightful place." So, Moses was not using the Babylonian word at all. He used a Hebrew word that sounded like the Babylonian word for Eden, but his concept of this place was not the same. In fact, the account of Genesis explicitly states that Eden was not limited to Mesopotamia. As we saw in Genesis 2:10, the Tigris and Euphrates flowed from a greater river which was located in Eden. We read in verse 10:

**A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters (Genesis 2:10).**

This passage teaches that the river of Eden fed the Tigris and Euphrates, not that Eden was limited to the Tigris-Euphrates region. Moses mentioned the Tigris and Euphrates to provide a general orientation toward the eastern most extent of Eden. The great rivers in the east marked the eastern boundary region of Eden.

This outlook is confirmed by the locations of the other rivers mentioned in Genesis 2. In 2:11, 13 Moses mentioned another pair of rivers. He wrote that the river of Eden fed the Pishon, which winds through the Havilah, and it also fed the Gihon, which winds through the entire land of Cush. In the Old Testament, the lands of Havilah and Cush are often associated with the region of Egypt. We cannot be sure precisely how Moses understood these rivers in relation to the great river Nile, but it is safe to say that he pointed to the region of northern Egypt as the western border of Eden.

So we can see, in Moses' outlook, Eden was no small place. It was a large area extending from the Tigris-Euphrates to the border of Egypt — nearly all of the region that we now call the Fertile Crescent. Within this pleasant place was a special garden, the Garden of Eden, the centerpiece of the large territory of Eden.

At first, Moses' identification of Eden with the Fertile Crescent may not seem very important. But in reality, it is critical to understanding the significance of Eden for Israel as Moses wrote the book of Genesis. Elsewhere in the book of Genesis, Moses referred back to Genesis 2 to teach Israel that the land of Eden, the Fertile Crescent, was the land God promised to Israel, the land to which he was taking them. This perspective became especially clear when God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 15:18. Listen to the way God described the borders of the Promised Land in this passage:

**On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates” (Genesis 15:18).**

We see here on the one hand that God promised Abraham that his land would extend to the Tigris-Euphrates region, and it would also reach to “the river of Egypt.” Many interpreters have suggested that “the river of Egypt” may refer not to the Nile itself, but to a smaller river in the Sinai border region of Egypt. In all events, it is evident that this verse alludes to the geographical boundaries of Eden as they appear in Genesis 2. This allusion to Genesis 2 makes it clear that Moses believed God had promised Abraham and his descendants the land that was once known as the land of Eden. From Moses' point of view, as Israel moved toward Canaan, they actually moved toward the location of the primeval land of Eden.

In order to highlight the importance of Israel going to Eden, Moses stressed the holy character of that place. He pointed to the holiness of Eden to teach Israel that the Promised Land to which he was leading them was the place where they could receive the blessing of entering into the special presence of God.

## Holiness

The primary way in which Moses conveyed the holiness of Eden was to describe it in terms that he also used to describe the tabernacle. Although God is omnipresent, and lives in every place in a general sense, Moses built a tabernacle where God came in a special way to meet with his people, and at this tabernacle God would display his presence, give his law, receive the worship of his people and bless them with his favor. So, when Moses depicted the Garden of Eden in terms which he also used to describe the

tabernacle, he revealed that Eden, and thus Canaan, was the place of God's special presence on earth. There, Israel could receive the great blessings of God.

At least seven aspects of Eden indicate that it was a holy place of God's special presence, much like the tabernacle. First, in 3:8 Moses used a special expression when he said that God "was walking in the garden." The Hebrew expression translated "walking" is *mit halek* (מִתְהַלֵּךְ). This terminology is significant because it is one of the special ways in which Moses described God's presence at the tabernacle in Leviticus 26:12 and other passages.

Second, in 2:9 we read about the Tree of Life as a central feature of the Garden of Eden. This sacramental tree held the power to give eternal life to those who ate from it. And although the Bible does not say this explicitly, recent archaeological research has noted that many sites in the ancient world had stylized images of the Tree of Life in sacred places. This evidence strongly suggests that the menorah, the seven-pronged lampstand of Moses' tabernacle, was most likely a stylized representation of the Tree of Life. In this way, the Garden of Eden is shown to be the original holy place on earth.

A third way in which Moses noted the holiness of Eden was his focus on gold and onyx in the region. In 2:12 we learn that gold and onyx were bountiful in the region of Eden. As we might expect, Exodus 25–40 mention gold and onyx as important parts of the tabernacle construction.

A fourth connection between the Garden of Eden and the tabernacle is the presence of cherubim or angels. According to 3:24, God placed cherubim in the Garden of Eden to guard against access to the Tree of Life. In a similar way, cherubim appear throughout the decorations of the tabernacle in passages such as Exodus 25:18 and 37:9. These cherubim reminded Israel not only of the angels in heaven, but also the angels guarding the holy place in Eden.

Fifth, we read in 3:24 that the entrance of Eden was "in the east," that is, on the eastern side. This fact may seem insignificant until we realize that according to Exodus 27:13 and a number of other passages, the main entrance for the tabernacle was also on the eastern side. This was the case with most temples in the Ancient Near East. Once again, Eden is shown to be a holy dwelling of God.

Sixth, Moses spoke of Adam's service in Eden with language that he used elsewhere for Levitical service in the tabernacle. In 2:15 Moses described Adam's responsibility in the garden in this way:

**[God] put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15).**

These terms also appear together in Numbers 3:7-8 and 8:26. There, Moses described the work of the Levites in the tabernacle using the same expressions. Adam and Eve served as priests in the Garden of Eden.

Seventh, it is significant that the formation of the Garden of Eden took place after the six days of creation. As we saw in the preceding lesson, the six days of creation climaxed in God's Sabbath observance in Genesis 2:1-3. Interestingly enough, according to Exodus 24:16 and following, Moses spent six days on the mountain with God, and God gave him the instructions to build the tabernacle on the seventh day.

These seven features of Eden show that Moses considered the Garden of Eden to be a holy place much like the tabernacle. It was the location of God's special presence in the world. And to be near that place was to near the blessings of God.

As we have already seen, Moses believed that Canaan was the location of Eden. As a result, in focusing on the holy character of Eden, Moses was also drawing attention to the holy character of Canaan. To be near Canaan was to be near the place God ordained from the beginning as his holy dwelling. One of the best passages for seeing Moses' teaching about this future holy place is Deuteronomy 12:10-11. There he wrote these words:

**You will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety. Then to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name — there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the Lord (Deuteronomy 12:10-11).**

This passage reveals one of the central features of Moses' vision of the land of Canaan. He emphasized that one day Canaan would be the location of the permanent dwelling for the presence of God — the temple for Yahweh.

To be sure, the land of Canaan in Moses' day was a mere shadow of what Eden had originally been. Even when Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, the Promised Land was still not entirely redeemed from sin nor restored to its original perfection. Yet, as Moses wrote about the holiness of Eden, he held before the Israelites the vision of what their land could be one day. To reach the Promised Land was to move into the vicinity of Eden, the place of God's holy presence on earth. Just as God placed Adam and Eve in the wonderful temple garden in the beginning, God was now bringing Israel to Canaan, and once they dwelled in that land, the nation would begin to experience the blessings of living in the special presence of God.

Now that we have seen how Moses set forth Adam and Eve's blessings in Eden as a prototype of the grace that awaited Israel in the Promised Land, we are in a position to look at a second topic in Genesis 2–3: God's test of Adam and Eve's loyalty. This motif plays a crucial role in Moses' presentation.

## LOYALTY

The theme of loyalty was crucial to Moses' story about Eden. Although Eden was a place of tremendous blessing, it was also the location which required moral responsibility. Moses emphasized this fact because he wanted the Israelites to remember that the Promised Land to which they were going also required Israel to be loyal to God's commands.

To understand why Moses emphasized this theme, we need to explore two issues: the requirement of loyalty in the Garden of Eden, and the requirement of loyalty in

Canaan. Let's look first at the loyalty God expected of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

### **In Eden**

The motif of loyalty in the garden appears very early in Genesis 2 and it reappears time and again throughout chapters 2 and 3. And in many respects, it is the central theme of these chapters. Listen to the way God challenged Adam to fidelity in Genesis 2:16-17:

**You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die (Genesis 2:16-17).**

Now, it is not altogether clear why God restricted our first parents from this particular tree; after all, knowing good and evil is prized in other parts of Scripture. Yet, despite this uncertainty, it is clear that God was testing Adam and Eve to see if they would be loyal to him. If Adam and Eve were obedient, they would receive even greater blessings from God. But if they proved defiant, they would suffer God's judgment. Eden was a holy place, and the people living there had to be holy as well.

### **In Canaan**

By focusing on the test of loyalty in the Garden of Eden, Moses stressed a parallel requirement of loyalty for the Israelites whom he led toward the Promised Land. As Moses led Israel toward the Promised Land, he frequently warned them that God required them to be faithful to him. Moses succinctly summarized his teaching on this matter in the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy. We read these words in Deuteronomy 8:1:

**Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers (Deuteronomy 8:1).**

From this passage it is clear that God required Israel to be loyal to him in order that they might enter and possess the land of Canaan. In fact, all through the wilderness wanderings of the nation, God tested the Israelites to teach them how to be holy. In Deuteronomy 8:2 we read these words:

**Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands (Deuteronomy 8:2).**

Beyond this, Moses also made it clear that once the nation of Israel came to the holy land, they had to remain loyal to God or they would lose this privilege. Listen to the way he put it in Deuteronomy 8:10-20:

**When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day... If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 8:10-20).**

Moses knew that the Israelites were prone to rebel against God's commands, just like Adam and Eve. And because of these tendencies, Moses focused on Adam and Eve's test in the garden to warn that God required loyalty of everyone who wished to dwell in Canaan. Of course, God did not require perfection from Israel, and it was only by God's grace that anyone was able to remain faithful. Yet, if Israel flagrantly violated the laws of God and turned away from him, like Adam and Eve did in the garden, they would not be able to enjoy the blessings of the Promised Land. As Moses encouraged Israel to move forward toward the Land of Promise, he was concerned that they remember this feature of life in the land.

With the teaching of Deuteronomy 8 in mind, we can see Moses' main reason for focusing on the loyalty required of Adam and Eve. He stressed this matter to inspire the Israelites to reverse what Adam and Eve had done by remaining faithful to the commands of God. Adam and Eve were tested in the garden and were driven out because they sinned. In Moses' day, Israel was still outside the Garden of Eden, but God tested them to prepare the nation to re-enter Eden and to dwell there in God's blessing.

So we see that Moses wrote about the test of loyalty in the Garden of Eden, he not only explained to Israel what had happened long ago in the primeval days of Adam and Eve. He also explained what was happening in his own day. God was offering to Israel the wonderful blessing of life in the Garden of Eden. Yet, just like with Adam and Eve, they could not enjoy these blessings unless they were loyal to God. Moses was calling Israel to live by faith as a holy people, fully devoted to the commands of God. Only then could they hope to enter the land and stay there in peace.

So far we have seen how Moses portrayed the land of Eden and the land of Canaan as the place of God's blessing on earth, and we have also seen how he conveyed the idea that both lands required loyal service from those who dwelled within them. Now we are going to focus on a third dimension of the original meaning of Genesis 2 and 3 for Israel: the consequences of Adam and Eve's disloyalty.

## CONSEQUENCES

To see the consequences of infidelity in the garden, we will look at three results of Adam and Eve's sin: death, pain, and exclusion.

## Death

In the first place, Moses explained that God threatened Adam and Eve with death as a consequence of sin. This motif first appears in God's warning to Adam in Genesis 2:17. There, God said:

**“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17).**

The words “you will surely die” comprise a phrase that indicates the certainty of the death to come. This grammatical construction is very similar to the way Moses' law threatened capital punishment. When Mosaic Law threatened capital punishment against perpetrators of serious crimes, Moses declared, “he will surely die,” or “they will surely die.” The legal context of these passages strongly suggests that these expressions were formulaic ways of declaring a death sentence. God was not saying that Adam and Eve would die immediately, but that death would certainly follow sin.

In this light we may understand God's threat to Adam in Genesis 2:17 as stating that Adam would come under a sentence of death. He would be condemned to die. Moses certainly wrote of this consequence of Adam's sin to explain how death came into the world, but his purpose was also more directly related to the experience of the Israelites to whom he wrote. They were well acquainted with death. Moses' readers had seen most of the first generation leaving Egypt die in the wilderness, because they rebelled against God. As Moses wrote in Numbers 26:65:

**The Lord had told those Israelites they would surely die in the desert, and not one of them was left except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun (Numbers 26:65).**

Once again, we see the language “they would surely die” which alludes to the law of Moses, and the account of Adam and Eve in the garden.

In this respect, the Israelites, hearing the story of Adam and Eve, could connect their experience of death in the wilderness with Adam and Eve's violation of God's command. The consequences of infidelity to the command of God in the garden had been a sentence of death on humanity's first parents. And the same sentence still stood over the Israelites who proved to be severely unfaithful to the commands of God in Moses' day.

## Pain

When we read the account of Genesis, it is clear that death did not come immediately to Adam and Eve. God first confined Adam and Eve to an existence characterized by pain. On the one hand, we read these words in Genesis 3:16:

**To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children” (Genesis 3:16).**

On the other hand, God also afflicted Adam with painful living. We read these words to Adam in Genesis 3:17:

**Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life (Genesis 3:17).**

Of all the things that Moses could have said about the consequences of sin in the garden, this twofold focus on human pain fit well with his purpose in writing this account to Israel. They had experienced the kinds of pain mentioned here as they remained outside the land of Canaan. But listen to the way Moses described life in the Promised Land. In Deuteronomy 11:10-12 we read these words:

**The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end (Deuteronomy 11:10-12).**

In short, Moses was taking Israel to a place where the pain they had experienced outside of Canaan would be relieved. Consequently, when Moses wrote of the pain that came to Adam and Eve, he called his Israelite readers to avoid infidelity, which resulted in pain, and to be faithful to the Lord, so they could return to Canaan and could experience the joy of life in the blessings of God.

## **Exclusion**

A third effect of Adam and Eve’s disloyalty appears in 3:22. Consider the words of Genesis 3:22:

**And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (Genesis 3:22).**

This passage makes it clear that the Tree of Life was able to make humanity “live forever.” It was the final answer to the problem of pain and death. Yet, God did not want Adam and Eve to eat at this time. They were excluded from the garden and its Tree of Life.

It is important for us to remember that access to the Tree of Life was not forbidden to humanity forever. The rest of Scripture makes it clear that those who are

faithful to God will eventually be able to eat from this tree. Listen to what the apostle John said about the Tree of Life in Revelation 2:7:

**To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).**

Now John spoke of the end of time when Christ returns to earth. Yet, his words explain why Moses wrote about this tree to Israel. When Adam and Eve had sinned, God had blocked the way to the Tree of Life, but in Moses' day, God was opening the way for Israel to receive at least a foretaste of the blessing of life as they returned to the land of Canaan. Listen to the way Moses put it in Deuteronomy 30:19-20:

**This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).**

If the Israelites would be faithful to God they would have the opportunity to receive long life and happiness in the land of Canaan.

Just as Adam and Eve lost access to the Tree of Life, in Moses' day, God was offering Israel a partial taste of the blessing of the life found there. This experience of life was not the full measure of the eternal life that we know when Christ returns. Yet, it would have been a partial foretaste of what was to come in Christ. Moses offered Israel the opportunity to enjoy the blessing of long life in the Land of Promise.

So we have seen that the story of Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden was much more than an account of the origin of sin in the world. By drawing connections between Eden and Canaan, Moses taught his Israelite readers about their own lives as well. They learned how wonderful the Land of Promise could be for them.

Now that we have seen the literary structure and the original meaning of Genesis 2-3, we are ready to ask a third question. How does the New Testament teach us to apply this passage today?

## **MODERN APPLICATION**

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It is clear to us that Moses wrote this passage to encourage his Israelite readers to avoid the mistakes of Adam and Eve, and to move back into paradise by entering Canaan. But what do these instructions to Israel have to do with us today? Put simply, just as Moses used the story of sin in the garden to encourage Israel to retrace and reverse the steps of Adam so that they could find the salvation of living in paradise once again, the writers of the New Testament taught that salvation in Christ is also a return to paradise.

We will explore the New Testament's use of Genesis 2–3 in relation to Christ in our usual fashion by focusing on the three phases of Christ's kingdom. We will begin by looking at how this passage is applied to the inauguration of the kingdom in the first coming of Christ, and then we will see how it speaks to our lives in the continuation of the kingdom of God today. And finally, we will see that the New Testament draws upon this passage as it teaches about the consummation of Christ's kingdom in his second coming. Let's look first at the inauguration of the kingdom.

## INAUGURATION

One way in which the New Testament speaks of the salvation Christ brings to the world is in his earthly ministry. In the inauguration of the kingdom Christ retraced and reversed what Adam and Eve had done in the Garden of Eden. In his earthly ministry, Christ fulfilled God's commands where Adam and Eve failed. We will investigate this aspect of New Testament teaching by looking first at how this theme appears in Paul's letters, and second, how it appears in the gospel of Matthew. Let's begin with Paul's outlook.

### Paul

Paul summarized his viewpoint succinctly in Romans 5:14. There he wrote:

**Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come (Romans 5:14).**

Notice that Paul said Adam was a type of one to come. The rest of Romans 5 makes it clear that "the one to come" was Christ. Listen to the way Paul summarized the matter in Romans 5:18-19:

**Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19).**

Notice how Paul put it here. Adam's one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, but Christ's one act of righteousness resulted in justification for all men. Why was this so? Because the disobedience of the one man, Adam, made us sinners. But the obedience of the one man, Christ, made us righteous.

This teaching is familiar to most Christians. As Moses taught in Genesis 2–3, Adam was just one man, but his actions had consequences for all who are identified with him. Adam's sin brought death to the entire human race because he was our federal or

covenant representative before God. As a result of Adam's sin, we are all born outside the paradise of God's blessing and under the curse of death. But at the same time, the New Testament teaches Christ is the federal or covenant representative of everyone who has faith in him. In contrast with Adam's disobedience, however, Christ's obedience to God brings righteousness and life to all who are counted in him.

From this teaching we learn something very important about applying the story of Adam's sin to our lives. The only way for paradise lost to be found again is through the righteous obedience of Christ. We cannot enter the paradise of salvation as individuals standing on our own merits before God. We need an absolutely perfect representative to enter paradise before us, and Christ is that representative. We find the salvation of eternal life in God's presence only because Christ was fully obedient to the Father. In his earthly ministry, Jesus earned the right to enter into paradise, and only those who place their faith in him may enter along with him.

Paul's correlation between Adam and Christ was shared by other New Testament writers as well. Let's consider how this theme appears in the gospel of Matthew.

## Matthew

Matthew in particular drew attention to the way Christ retraced and reversed Adam's sin in his account of Christ's temptation in Matthew 4:1-11 (the parallel passage of which is found in Luke 4:1-13).

In a number of different ways, the story of Christ's temptation parallels both the experience of Adam and Eve in the garden, and the challenge Moses brought to the Israelites as he wrote about Adam and Eve. In the first place, the location of Christ's temptation connects it with Israel as the Israelites followed Moses. According to Matthew 4:1, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert, just as God had led Israel into the desert. It was in the wilderness that God tested Israel to see if she would be obedient, and Christ was tested in the wilderness also.

Second, the length of time Jesus spent in the wilderness paralleled the experience of Israel. Just as Israel was in the wilderness for forty years, according to Matthew 4:2, Christ was in the wilderness for forty days.

Third, hunger was an important feature in Christ's temptation. In Matthew 4:3 Satan tempted Christ to turn the stones into bread. This dimension of Christ's temptation paralleled the testing of Israel over water and food in the wilderness.

Fourth, Jesus himself connected his experience with Israel's testing in the wilderness in the ways that he used the Scriptures. In Matthew 4:4 Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3. In Matthew 4:7 he quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, and in Matthew 4:10 he referred to Deuteronomy 6:13. These Old Testament passages come from portions of Deuteronomy where Moses described Israel's test in the wilderness. By quoting these passages, Jesus directly connected his experience of temptation with that of the testing of the nation of Israel.

So we see that Matthew's account of the temptation of Jesus connects to the message which Moses originally gave to Israel through Genesis 2-3. Through his active obedience, Jesus succeeded where Adam and Israel both failed. Christ was faithful to the commands of God. This is why Jesus said those well-known words found in Luke 23:43.

Just as Israel faced her trials in the wilderness to prepare her for entry into the paradise of Canaan, Luke 23:43 records that on the cross Jesus told the repentant thief these words:

**I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43).**

Christ's reward for his righteousness was eternal life in paradise.

So we see that the New Testament relates the temptation of Adam and Eve, as well as the testing of Israel in the wilderness to the inauguration of the kingdom in Christ's earthly ministry. Christ was the last Adam who succeeded where the first Adam failed. Moreover, Christ overcame temptation in the wilderness, reversing Israel's failure. And for this reason, he entered eternal paradise.

Now that we have seen how the New Testament relates Moses' account of Adam and Eve in the garden to the first coming of Christ, we should move to our second concern: How does the New Testament apply these principles to the continuation of the kingdom, the time in which we now live?

## CONTINUATION

Several passages in the New Testament stand out in this regard. But we will look at only two: first, Paul's focus on these chapters of Genesis, and second, the way James wrote about these issues.

### Paul

Let's look first at Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 11:3:

**But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3).**

As Paul continued in this chapter, he explained that he was deeply concerned that the Corinthians would turn to another gospel. We see here that Paul appealed to Eve's negative example to warn against the worst kind of disloyalty — turning from the true gospel of Christ. Just as Moses used the story of Eve's temptation to warn Israel to move faithfully toward the Promised Land, Paul used the same story to warn believers in his day about the basic loyalty required of all who follow Christ. During the continuation of the kingdom, many people in the visible church face the danger of turning away from essential truths of the gospel. The church must guard against this rank apostasy because the consequences are as horrible as they were for Adam and Eve.

## James

James took a posture similar to Paul's as he explained the role of testing and trials in the Christian life. In James 1:12-15 we read these words:

**Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him... each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death (James 1:12-15).**

It is clear that James alluded to Genesis 2–3. In 1:14 he focused on human “desire” as the power behind enticement to sin, and it was Eve’s desire for the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that caused her to sin.

Second, James explained that those who pass the test will “receive the crown of life.” By contrast the result of sin is that it “gives birth to death.” The contrast here between life and death parallels the contrast between life and death in the story of Adam and Eve.

Just as Moses encouraged faithfulness in Israel during the trials in the wilderness by appealing to the temptation of Adam and Eve, Paul and James encouraged us to fidelity during the trials of the continuation of the kingdom. Tests during the Christian life reveal our true character and prepare us for eternal life. By God’s grace, we must do all we can to remain faithful to Christ so that we may be honored with the gift of eternal life in paradise.

Having seen how the New Testament applies the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden to the inauguration and continuation of the kingdom, we should turn our attention to the final stage, the consummation of salvation in Christ at his second coming.

## CONSUMMATION

This theme also appears many places in the New Testament, but we will touch on only two passages: one in Romans and another in the book of Revelation.

## Romans

In the first place, listen to the way Paul gave hope to the believers in Rome as he closed his epistle to them. In Romans 16:20 he wrote these words:

**The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you (Romans 16:20).**

In these words, Paul reminded the Roman Christians of their great hope in the second coming of Christ. But he did so by referring back to the promise of salvation in Genesis 3.

As we have seen earlier in this lesson, in Genesis 3:15 God told the serpent that one day Eve's seed, the human race, would crush the head of the seed of the serpent. In this passage Paul said that Satan will be crushed under the feet of Christians when Christ returns. Christ himself will destroy Satan and our powerful enemy, death. Then we will reign with Christ in victory and glory.

## Revelation

Another place in the New Testament where the themes of Genesis 2–3 are related to the consummation of the kingdom is the book of Revelation. John referred to the Tree of Life on a number of occasions in this book. Listen to the way John put the matter in Revelation 2:7:

**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.  
To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life,  
which is in the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).**

The allusion to Genesis 3 here is obvious. We know that Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden precisely to keep them from eating of the Tree of Life. Yet, when Christ returns, God will give his people the right to eat from the Tree of Life. Notice also where this tree is located. John explicitly said that it is “in the paradise of God.” Just as Moses called Israel to enter Canaan because long life could be found there, Christians have as their hope entering an even greater, more fully restored paradise.

In the third place, we see another connection with Genesis in the identification of those who will eat from the tree. John said that the right will be given “to him who overcomes.” Just as Moses spoke of the Tree of Life to encourage Israel to be faithful to God, John explained that only the one who overcomes sin by remaining loyal will be able to eat from the Tree of Life.

Finally, we should look at Revelation 22:1-2. As John looked ahead to the new world, this is what he saw:

**Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1-2).**

The perspective of the New Testament is plain. When Christ returns to consummate his kingdom, those who trust Christ will enter the paradise of Eden. Satan will be crushed under our feet and we will eat from the Tree of Life and live forever in God's new creation.

## CONCLUSION

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We have seen in this lesson that Moses wrote about Adam and Eve in the garden to help the Israelites as they moved toward the Promised Land. He called the nation to retrace and to reverse the events in the Garden of Eden. In many respects, the message of this passage is very similar for us today. By hearing Moses' call to Israel to move forward toward the Promised Land, we can see how we too must retrace and reverse the steps of Adam and Eve. By trusting and remaining faithful to Christ, we will discover the salvation of paradise, lost and found.

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