



P.O. Box 66540
Albuquerque, NM 87193
505.890.6806
E-mail: lrn@liferesource.org
Website: www.liferesource.org

Presentation Transcript
Bible Stories for Adults, Part 4 – Garden of Eden
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Our title today is *The Garden of Eden*. It's the fourth part in our series, *Bible Stories for Adults*.

The story of the Garden of Eden challenges our rules for understanding the Bible and demonstrates how they work all at the same time. I gave these rules that we're going to be using in the first one of this series, and I repeated them in the last one again – episode 3. I'm not going to repeat them all in order here, but we will reference some of them today. If you want to look at all of them, you can go to our Website, liferesource.org and look them up – as a series, risking here being too repetitive, *Bible Stories for Adults*.

Let's start reading in Genesis 3:1. We're told:

Genesis 3:1 – *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say to you not to eat of any tree of the Garden?"*

Okay, let's stop right there. Can't you just hear the scoffing? And a talking snake? Give me a break! You'd have to be a fool to believe that actually happened. The whole thing is a myth. And I looked that up in Wikipedia, and that's where I got the term *myth*. That's what it calls it – the *myth* of the Garden of Eden. Now some Christians have wondered, since a snake is a stealthy animal, good at concealment, good at blending into their surroundings, and since some of them are poisonous, and many people have an aversion to snakes, that maybe this snake is a metaphor for the devil, and it was really him they were talking to. That would be instead of actually talking to the devil, disguised as a snake, as the story seems to present. Notice that Eve didn't even bat an eyelash when the snake began talking to her. Maybe the devil did transform himself into a snake, being a good shape shifter, since Eve may have never seen snakes before, and with her limited experience, be surprised by a talking snake. Or, maybe there is no devil, no snake, no Garden, no first people, and no God. I mean, it's all wide open, depending on your point of view.

So let's go to rule number 6 that we're using here to study the Bible. That rule is, What's the point? No matter for right now, is the account a real event or is it a myth – that is, it never happened – or is it a fable – a story that never happened, but one designed to make a point? It goes back to the question I was asked early in my ministry, “Is Jesus really going to ride a white horse to the battle of Armageddon?” Well, if we're intent on learning what God has for us in this chapter, we had better set aside all of that for the moment, and ask, “What is God teaching us here?” Let's ask all these questions again, after we've read elements of the chapter. Let's look again at Genesis, chapter 3, at the beginning,

Genesis 3:1 – *He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the Garden?’”* So you can hear that demeaning critical approach. It's interesting that this is much like the cynicism expressed today by non-believers who read this. But the snake's was more subtle. And we're told that he is *more* subtle than anybody else. So Genesis 3:2:

V-2-3 – *And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”*

So Eve had a really good memory, or God was really a good communicator, or both. And then in Genesis 3, verse 4:

V-4-5 – *The serpent said to the woman, “Come on now, you shall not surely die! For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil.*

So now he's directly opposing what God said, mixing truth with lie. The truth was, that if they ate of it, they would know good from evil. And the lie of it was, that that would *not* cause them to die. And actually, there was no need for them to die if they didn't eat of it. So his lie is directly opposite to what would happen. He's misdirecting them. And, of course, they ate of it, and they, then, would have to die. How do I know that? Well, we'll keep reading. Genesis 3:6 – we're talking now about the immediate response to what happened when they ate of that fruit:

V-6-7 – *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food – she learned that from the snake – and that it was a delight to the eyes – so, nice to look at – and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. And she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves loincloths.*

So their simple relationship with God was now complicated by learning about good and evil, and also by the guilt that came when they disobeyed God and didn't do what He said. So why is this a problem? Well, it doesn't actually say in so many words, but the account shows us next what happened as a result of following the devil's logic, instead of the direction of God. I've always thought about this as a matter of timing. Perhaps they just weren't ready for it.

I've worked with children who've been molested, and the way we think about it, in psychological terms, is that there's no place in a child's mind yet for such an experience. And so it causes confusion, shame, guilt, alienation, acting out and curiosity. Interestingly, we can see all that in this story, can't we?

All right, it's interesting to think about it this way, but is my surmising a part of the story? No. It's just my attempt to fill in the gaps. It's probably okay to surmise, but not to think of it as the truth of God as He presents it. Everything we *need* to know to learn what God has for us is already right there in the story. We need to stay on the track God has for us, instead of wandering off into the weeds of human reason. Now, I don't think it's wrong to try to fill in the gaps, but some people just go way off. We want to stick with what it says and try to learn about what it means.

So the first thing to think about is, what happened to their relationship with God? In Genesis 3:8, it says:

V-8-10 – *And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the Garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And the man said, "Well, I heard the sound of You in the Garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself."*

So right away, we see a huge difference in their relationship with God. In the beginning, they were wide open to Him, and now they're hiding from Him. They feel guilty for what they did and ashamed of what they are. So there's guilt and shame introduced because of their new way of thinking and doing. They covered themselves.

V-11 – *And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"*

Now, a friend of mine, who was also a counselor, once asked me, "Why did God ask this question?" He said, "It was like setting a child up to lie to the parent." Well, it is true that God already knew the answers to these questions. And it seems to me that He's here shining the light of truth on their behavior to help them understand what has happened to them. But again, that's my take on it. God doesn't tell us why He confronted them about it the way He did. If we read the rest of the Bible, most of the time, God doesn't give us a chance to lie. He usually tells us what we've done, and then He tells us what's going to happen. But here, in verse 12:

V-12 – *The man said, "The woman, whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."*

So what we learn here really is more about how Adam and Eve's minds are working now. If you read what Adam said, he did tell the truth, didn't he? He was with his wife, she gave him the fruit, and he ate it. And so he admitted that. But he also told where he got it – from Eve – and then he added that God was the one who gave her to him in the first place. He didn't actually say it was all God's fault – or Eve's – but it sounds like he's creating a buffer between himself and doing something God said not to do – using God Himself and his wife in an attempt to deflect guilt – or responsibility, I should say. Then verse 13:

V-13 – *Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

So she uses the same approach. She tells the truth, but she buffers the fact that she ate something she was forbidden to eat by explaining about how the devil deceived her. So she uses the old "The devil made me do it" argument. The problem here is, that they had free will. No one made anybody do anything. So those arguments fall to the ground, leaving them naked once again.

Now we come to the part about what happened to the snake. Genesis 3:14:

V-14-15 – *The LORD God said to the serpent, "The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field. On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."*

So now we're getting a little bit closer to the meaning of the account. These verses – we're told other places in the Bible – are the first prophecy in the Bible about the coming Savior. Her offspring was Jesus. And in Jesus' interactions with the devil, He was able to avoid the devil's temptation to which Adam and Eve had succumbed. That was definitely a head shot to the devil, for sure. And though the devil did succeed in inadvertently accomplishing God's plan once again – in causing Christ to be crucified – Jesus rose from the dead three days later to His former immortal state, and is now living as the Savior of humankind – saved by His life, it says.

Okay, next we come a new kind of life for Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:16 and 21.

V-16 – *To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."*

Notice that these are all things that were to happen because of what they did. It didn't have to be this way. When they were in the Garden together, it seemed like they were more harmonious – more of a team. Now verse 17:

V-17-19 – *And to Adam, He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree which I commanded you – and some people think that listening to your wife is what was wrong here, but that’s not it. It’s because he listened to the part about her doing something wrong and followed suit. You know, listening to the one that God gave you to be your partner is a good thing, if she’s doing good. So, because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you. In pain shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. They didn’t have that in the Garden, you see. And you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For you are dust and to dust you shall return.* Notice that one of the differences was that he was now going to die and return to the earth. If he’d made the right choice, this would not have had to happen. But, as Paul said, “As in Adam all die, so in Christ, shall all be made alive.” So verse 20:

V-20-21 – *The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was mother of all living. And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.*

While God was letting them suffer the consequences of their own actions, He also cared for them. He made some good clothes for them out of leather, instead of those pitiful, weak fig leaves. So, He loves them, and even though they’ve done something wrong, He hasn’t given up on them. So we can see here that He has a plan to redeem them from their sins. And we see next that He gets to work immediately on that plan.

How do we know that He has a plan? Well, because of the prophecy that we read about. Yeah, the devil did influence things in a negative way, but He has a plan to fix all that through Jesus Christ. Let’s look further then, in Genesis 3:22:

V-22-24 – Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

So, there again, we see that it’s not one God being who was there, but two, and their concern is that it would not be good for them to inherit – “good for them” being Adam and Eve – to inherit eternal life with the knowledge and the attitudes they now have, thanks to the devil. So they have to go out into a harsh world – a world of testing. And to insure this, God places one or two of His most powerful created spirits – cherubim – to make sure that they don’t get back in.

So what are to learn from this account? Well, remember our rule 5 – the Bible is one big story about salvation, and one of the sub-plots is how everything got the way it is and what God is

going to do to fix it. So this is the part of the story about how it got the way it is. In this story, we learn that God created human beings to live eternally in the end, but we are not equipped on our own to withstand the experience of testing. We need God to help us. God has a plan for the devil as much as He has for us. But His is vastly different from ours. We learn that He has control. We learn that He loves us and stays with us, even when we fail miserably. We learn that Jesus' death and resurrection was a part of the plan from the beginning. We learn why there is so much suffering in the world today and that God has a plan to take care of it. The world – or the many people in it – sort of like lemmings – all squawking about how terrible God is because He claims to be loving and yet allows so much evil. It's like a gigantic group think. They even use the same language over and over again to express their rage. If they would just read the book, using the rule – which is that we need to believe what God tells us, or else we are doomed to live thinking God is not good – then we would see that God allows us to make our own choices. And so we learn how that all works out – mainly, that His way works and ours doesn't.

And you might say, "But you never told us whether it was a real account or just a story with a point." Well, what do you think? Well, you might say, "I think God says it happened, so it did." Well, okay. Jesus told lots of fictitious with stories with points in order to help people understand what God is doing. Maybe He's doing that here. So what are you going to do? Well, I, personally, don't have any trouble believing it's a true story literally. All the squawking by those who don't agree doesn't bother me at all. But if we arrive at the wedding supper to meet Jesus in person, and He says, "It was a powerful parable of understanding," I'm just going to say, "Yes, Lord." So, for the purpose of this presentation, it's really irrelevant. It's what God is teaching us that matters the most. And He's teaching us that He's in control, and that He loves us, and that He has a plan to take care of all the evil in the world and all of us in His family – a way to get us all there.

So we have one more story about what happened after Adam and Eve left the Garden to fully understand what's going on in this world. And we will get to that in Genesis 4 next time. If you want, you can read it and see if you can apply all seven rules to it before listening to the presentation.

Now don't forget to comment on the Website, liferesource.org or Facebook or Twitter.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.