
Eve

Mother of the Living

Have you ever wondered why there is so much evil in the world if God is so good? I recently inquired about the state of orphanages in modern day Russia. As a mother and a human being, I was absolutely horrified as I read a Human Rights Watch report on the conditions Russian children are forced to endure. The stories of child abuse in every form and the likelihood of a very grim future for the orphans (most will ultimately turn to prostitution, the Mafia, or suicide) are appalling. Knowing that Russia's orphans are only one of the many groups of people who endure great suffering and injustice is disturbing and sobering.

As I discussed the Russian orphans with my husband, I was reminded that atheists use occurrences such as these to attempt to disprove the existence of God. In fact, the problem of evil is the most powerful argument atheists can offer. After all, if God is all loving, why does He allow such painful atrocities in the world? Why is the world full of injustice?

More pointedly, we don't even have to look to extreme cases on the other side of the world to wonder about evil. Why do women suffer miscarriages, infertility, and even the loss of children? Why do we all seem to know someone who is a victim of incest or some other form of abuse? Why is divorce rampant and drug abuse an epidemic?

Yet, the human suffering in Russia's orphanages (as well as all other human suffering) is not a proof of God's abandonment of the world, as the deist would suggest, nor is it a proof that God does not exist, as the atheist proposes. The fact of the matter

is that God has not abandoned the world. He has promised, “I will not leave you orphans” (Jn. 14:18, Douay Rheims Version), and He has kept His promise. The problem of evil starts back at the beginning of the world with the first man and woman.

Simple Story

The story of Adam and Eve and the eating of the forbidden fruit is an all-too-familiar story—so familiar that its meaning is taken as seriously as that of a childhood fable. All of us know it, much as we know the story of George Washington chopping down the cherry tree, and Jack and Jill tumbling down a hill. However, the truth conveyed in this story is much more than a mere moral lesson of human folly.

The story of the Creation and Fall of Adam and Eve tells us the fundamental truths of Who God is and of what His Creation is about. In this story, inspired by the Holy Spirit to inform God’s children about their Maker and themselves, we learn about the dignity of human beings, the reason for our suffering, and the inexhaustible love our heavenly Father has for us. Furthermore, and more specifically, we learn about the equal dignity and interdependence of man and woman, the mission of man, and his rebellion against God. With this explanation, at once simple and complex, of the beginning of everything, we begin studying salvation history—the countless years in which God has sought out His children, and His children have rebelled and repented.

The Mother of All the Physically Living and the Spiritually Dead

In this women’s Bible study, we will focus on the women of salvation history, and in this chapter, that means Eve. It is difficult to underestimate the significance of Eve in salvation history. From her, we learn about who we are as women and

about our place in the Creation. Because of her, we suffer, for her actions have affected all of mankind for thousands of years. To this day, we wrestle with the consequences of her behavior as we struggle with our own.

In order to understand Eve, and consequently ourselves, properly, we have to reread and study those familiar passages of Creation and bliss, Fall and misery. Therefore, before starting the study questions, refresh your memory of the whole story by reading Genesis chapters 1-3. Prepare yourself for a little soul-searching, because, unfortunately, in Eve we see too much of our own weakness portrayed.

One final note of importance on the story of Creation: In the first two chapters of Genesis, we find what are known as two separate accounts of Creation. I will refer to them as such for simplicity's sake. However, it is important to notice that these accounts appear to be two ways of expressing the same truth, but with different emphases. This is similar to what we find when we read the Gospels; each author gives us a different take, or angle, on the same events.

1. I want first to zero in on what is known as the first Creation story and the creation of man on the sixth day. Look again at Genesis 1:26-31. In verse 26, we learn that God intends to make man “in our image, after our likeness.” It is interesting that the plural form of the personal pronoun is used here, hinting at the plurality of Persons in the Blessed Trinity.

a. What does it mean to be made in the image and likeness of God? For more help with this question, read Catechism, nos. 356-58.

b. Reflect on the importance of the distinction made by God between people and the rest of visible creation. How should this distinction help to direct our moral and social priorities?

2. Look closely at Genesis 1:27. In this first account of Creation, we read that “male and female he created them.” This seems to be the abridged Creation account—no ribs, dirt, or deep sleep. However, we learn some very basic truths about human persons in this account.

a. What do you think we are to understand about who man and woman are in relation to one another and to God from this verse?

b. How should this understanding be applied in our own lives?

3. Let’s now turn our attention to a part of the second Creation account. Read Genesis 2:15-25. In verse 17, we learn of God’s prohibition of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why did God issue this command?

4. Genesis 2:18-23 describes the sequence of events that led to and included the creation of the first woman.

a. What is the explanation given for the creation of woman in verse 18?

b. What is different about the way in which woman was created from the way in which all the other creatures were made, including man? What is the significance of this difference?

5. In Genesis 1:27-31 and 2:15, we learn about the duty and place of “male and female.” What did God commission them to do, and what were their resources?

6. The story of the Fall is like a terrible nightmare, except this one is real. Read Genesis 3:1-7. Examine the words of the serpent.

a. What is he trying to do to Eve?

b. Is what he says true?

c. How did Eve respond to the words of Satan, and what should have been her response?

d. How is what the Devil says to Eve similar to what he “says” to us, and what should be our response?

e. What was the temptation for Eve?

f. Why do you think she gave in to the temptation and ate the fruit?

g. What was the fruit of her sin?

7. Read the curse in Genesis 3:16 that Eve, and all generations of women thereafter, have received for her disobedience.

a. What was the curse, and how have we, as women, experienced it?

b. How is the curse of the woman related to the mission of women (cf. Gen. 2:18)?

Why did the serpent not attack the man, rather than the woman? You say he went after her because she was the weaker of the two. On the contrary. In the transgression of the commandment, she showed herself to be the stronger. . . . For she alone stood up to the serpent. She ate from the tree, but with resistance and dissent and after being dealt with perfidiously. But Adam partook of the fruit given by the woman, without even beginning to make a fight, without a word of contradiction—a perfect demonstration of consummate weakness and a cowardly soul. The woman, moreover, can be excused; she wrestled with a demon and was thrown. But Adam will not be able to find an excuse . . . he had personally received the commandment from God.¹

The end of the story of the Fall contains many fascinating details for further meditation. First (and quite ironically) *following* their Fall and spiritual death, Adam named his wife Eve, “because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

Second, God’s mercy is displayed fully as He expels Adam and Eve from the garden, “lest he [Adam] put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever” (Gen. 3:22). In addition, God places cherubim, with flaming swords, to guard the way to the tree of life. God’s provisions to protect us from eating from the tree of life are merciful, for the consequences of eating it would be eternal damnation. Why? Had Adam and Eve eaten from the tree of life, we would have remained forever in the state of separation from God. He had a

¹ Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, bk. 1, chap. 10, in Scott Hahn, *A Father Who Keeps His Promises* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Publications, 1998), 65.

plan to save us from the beginning, and He did not want us to be expelled from His sanctuary forever.

Finally, we read that the cherubim were placed “at the east of the garden” (Gen. 3:24). It might at first seem like an insignificant detail, but often in the small details of Scripture we gain beautiful insights into the details and the depth of God’s love. The Garden of Eden is considered God’s primordial sanctuary, and Adam and Eve were expelled east of the garden, and out of the sanctuary, after their Fall. This movement eastward continues in the family of Adam and Eve. After Cain murders his brother Abel, he moves further eastward, further away from the sanctuary of God, to the land of Nod (cf. Gen. 4:8-16). When God’s People, under the direction of God Himself, built the Temple, it was a three-part structure that faced west, beginning with the inner sanctuary, or most holy place, in which was placed the ark of the covenant. Farther east was the sanctuary or holy place, and farther east still was the vestibule or outermost court of the Temple. The Temple was designed so that as the people entered God’s house they would be facing west, and when they left, they would be going east.

Physical distance is a sign of spiritual separation, so the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden was symbolic of their exile from their friendship and intimacy with God. Here, we begin to learn of God’s pedagogy, which He still uses with us through the Church’s sacraments. Even from the very beginning, God has chosen to use physical means to express spiritual realities. And in this instance, God is teaching us that sin drives us away from His presence.

The story of Adam and Eve after the garden is brief and limited to their starting a family. We do not hear anymore from Adam, but two more phrases from Eve are recorded. Let’s examine them.

8. Read Genesis 4:1. What do Eve's words tell us about her understanding of children?

9. In Genesis 4, we learn of the first murder—sibling rivalry at its worst. Cain killed his brother Abel because he was angry at and envious of him. The truth of the matter is that when the two made an offering to the Lord from the fruit of their labors, Abel brought what was of the utmost value and therefore a true sacrifice of gratitude to God, while Cain simply brought an offering (cf. Gen. 4:2-4). God had “no regard” for Cain’s offering (Gen. 4:5), and Cain, instead of repenting and mastering sin, as God counseled, gave in to his anger and envy and killed his brother. Later, in Genesis 4:25, Eve speaks of the killing after the birth of Seth. Eve states simply and matter-of-factly that Abel died because “Cain slew him.” She did not try to cover up for Cain or make excuses for him. What can we learn from Eve’s handling of Cain’s sin, and how should we treat the sin of our own children or others close to us?

10. When tempted by the Devil, Eve succumbed to temptation, and a few of her weaknesses were displayed.

a. List a few of Eve’s weaknesses.

b. How did she succumb to these weaknesses?

c. Write a strategy for how she could have combated her weaknesses.

d. Develop a strategy for how we can build the virtues that will help us overcome weaknesses like hers.

11. Why does evil exist in the world?

The course of history was forever changed when Adam and Eve failed to pass the test God had allowed them to endure. With the deception of Eve and the cowardice of Adam, the Devil had successfully orchestrated the Fall of the entire human race. Generations hence would be born “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), spiritually separated from the Father they were created to love, our only Source of everlasting peace. Thankfully, God is a merciful and forgiving Father who had a plan to get His children home—and that is what the rest of the story is about.

Memory Verse

“So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.”

Genesis 1:27