

GENESIS



*Biblical Commentary
Through Dialogue*

KYLE WOODRUFF

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For those who helped along the way

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GENESIS 1-3

ADAM & EVE

*The woman whom You gave to be with me,
she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.*

—Adam

“I’m just not buying it.”

“Buying what?”

“The whole universe being created in seven days thing,” said the boy. ‘Let there be light’ and all that jazz.”

“I didn’t know it was for sale,” said the old man, moving a pawn forward.

“You know what I mean,” said the boy, sliding a bishop across to take it. “Obviously the Bible has played a major role in shaping our culture, but the stories I’ve read seem like mythology people take as history.” Streaks of sunlight splashed through the trees as he placed the pawn with a small collection aside the board.

The man lifted his knight and placed it in the newly opened space. He whispered, “Check,” before saying, “Well, what do you think Genesis is about?”

The boy grumbled something under his breath while he looked over his mistake. “Well, I think it was made to explain our existence, before we had science to learn the earth wasn’t the center of the universe and all that. A lot of cultures have origin stories, but now there’s too much evidence for evolution for someone to convince me to drink the creationism Kool-Aid.”

The old man said nothing, just stared at the board, so the boy carried on.

“But I think the debate over historical accuracy takes away from the positive things the stories have to offer,” said the boy. “I’m pro-Bible, let’s put it that way. Not a fan of what organized religion did with it, but I’m willing to put that aside and talk about the book itself.”

“That’s fair,” said the man.

A warm summer breeze blew across the park and tousled hair into the boy’s eyes. He pursed his lips and blew it out again. “Go ahead. I cut you off.”

“Quite alright,” said the man, flipping back to the page he was on. “I prefer a dialogue over a lecture anyway. But I’ll skip to Adam and Eve. I’d like to hear your thoughts on that one.”

“Remind me where this supposedly took place again?” said the boy.

“Well, there’s mention of a river flowing from Eden that divides into four branches, so that’s our only clue. The Tigris and

the Euphrates we know of, so a few suggestions point to the head of the Persian Gulf. That would be southern Mesopotamia or modern-day Iraq. But the Pishon and the Gihon are unknown, so I guess we can't say for sure."

"Alright," said the boy, moving his king out of check, "go ahead. You were about to tell me how God rips out one of Adam's ribs to make a woman."

With a smirk, the old man said, "I think it's laid out a bit more tastefully than that, but that's the gist of it, yes."

"Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh, and she'll be called woman," said the boy, "or something like that, right?"

"Close enough. Then the next line is just beautiful," said the man, looking down at his Bible to read aloud:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.¹

"And the man and his wife were naked and not ashamed or whatever," said the boy. "But I never understood that line you just read, because at this point Adam doesn't *have* parents, so it doesn't make any sense, ya know?"

"You've got me there," said the man as he took his next move. "I won't pretend to understand everything the Good Book says. This line may allude to the rules of marriage coming down the line, signaling a shift in the ancient culture where the highest allegiance was to one's parents. This verse makes it clear that a

man's duty is to forsake his parents and shift loyalty to his wife. Anyway, I just think the description of marriage is beautiful."

"I take it you're married?"

"I was," said the man. "She passed a while ago now."

"Oof. Sorry I brought it up."

"Don't worry about it," said the man.

The boy gave a nod as he took his move and said, "I cut you off again. Go ahead."

So the man read on:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree in the garden?'"

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."²

"Right, right, right," said the boy. "So she sees it's good for food and takes a bite and gives some to Adam. Yada, yada, their eyes open and they realize they're naked." He reached for a piece and then stopped, rethinking his move as he carried on. "So I have a few thoughts here. First of all, you have to ask, why a snake?"

“You know,” said the man, “I never thought to question the serpent itself.”

“That’s because for someone who believes in creationism, you probably overlooked the evolutionary importance of snakes.”

“What do you mean?” said the man.

“Well, when we were still living in trees, snakes were one of the few things that were always a threat. We could hide from crocodiles in the water, lions on the ground, or birds in the sky, but when we were out of reach and hidden by leaves, one of the few things that could still sneak up on us were snakes. They were always a threat to be aware of, so it’s fitting one should open our eyes to being vulnerable.”

“So that’s your take on what being naked means?” said the man. “Being vulnerable?”

“Well, go ahead and read the first thing they do after they eat the fruit.”

So the old man read:

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.³

“Right,” said the boy, “they cover up their most vulnerable parts. But in reality, it wasn’t a piece of fruit that made us aware, it was the snakes climbing our trees that were around long before this story was ever written down. Think of it this way. The tale

of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ didn’t put wolves in the forest, the wolves were already there. The story was just used to warn us to go in the woods with caution.”

The man raised an eyebrow. “Interesting comparison. However, I always viewed being naked as the soul being stripped of its natural clothing, purity and holiness, so Adam could no longer stand before his Creator without feeling the need to hide from shame.”

“I see what you’re saying,” said the boy.

“And from the Christian point of view,” said the man, “the serpent is Satan, who baits his hook with the promise of intellectual delights, opposing what God told them about dying.”

“Right,” said the boy, “the snake is tricky because he doesn’t challenge God’s authority, but he does make them doubt whether or not God can be trusted. It also hints that God is jealous by implying He doesn’t want them to know what He knows. So if what the snake says turns out to be true, we know God’s a jealous liar.”

“Bold statement,” said the man.

“But no one ever *promised* not to eat the fruit,” said the boy. “They were merely *told* not to eat it. In fact, Eve wasn’t even around when God told Adam not to eat it. Technically, God never told Eve not to eat the fruit. She just heard a rumor after she poofed into existence.” The old man laughed as he moved a piece on the board. “But then she adds, ‘nor shall you touch it,’ which God never specifically said.” The boy scratched his head.

“What’s that called when you say something you were thinking about but didn’t mean to say?”

“A Freudian slip?”

“Yeah,” said the boy. “I think it’s one of those, expressing her desire to touch what she’s not supposed to.”

“I guess that could be true,” said the man, “but she could have also just misremembered, or added an extra layer to highlight God’s command. Whatever the reason, though, it allowed the serpent to play on her words and make God seem even more restrictive than He was.”

“Right,” said the boy. “Adam, though, what a piece of work he is. He doesn’t exactly put up a fight when Eve puts the fruit in his hands. He defies the Almighty almost immediately after God made him. Makes you wonder, was God not very convincing? Did He not come off as an authority? I mean, what reason did Adam have to go against His will? It wasn’t like he had a chip on his shoulder where he felt the need to stick it to the Man. He didn’t grow up in a bad neighborhood or have mommy issues. He didn’t even have the excuse of, ‘Oh, were you talking to me, God?’ It’s like, ‘Yeah, pal. You’re the only one *here*.’”

“Right,” said the man. “His passive behavior is as striking as her eagerness and excitability. Not only that, but the text makes it seem like Adam was nearby when Eve took the fruit, as she didn’t exactly have to go looking for him. This raises the question of whether or not he overheard the conversation with the serpent, and if so, why he didn’t jump in to stop it.”

“I guess we’ll never know,” said the boy, scanning over the board again.

“Some of us engage with temptation,” said the man, “and others follow those who make the decision for us.” Then he looked down at his Bible and read again:

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 he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”

He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”⁴

“First of all,” said the boy, “if God is all knowing or whatever, why would He have to ask these things? Wouldn’t He already know the answers?”

“I believe this is God’s way of giving Adam a chance to admit what he’s done,” said the man, “to repent.”

“Mmm,” said the boy, nodding his head. “That makes sense.”

“But instead, there’s an instinct to hide the truth from God,” said the man. “Adam mentions why he hid but doesn’t exactly mention the disobedience from which his sense of being naked arose.”

“Right,” said the boy. “Instead, he’s a real class act and says, ‘*She* made me do it!’” The old man laughed. “Rats her right out, the gutless prick. Not only that, but he throws it back in God’s face, if I recall. ‘The woman *You* gave me,’ or something like that, right?”

“That’s right,” said the old man with a smile. “Avoiding blame seems to be a natural instinct from the very beginning. Instead of taking responsibility for his sin by going back to our loving Creator, Adam lays the blame on someone else.”

“And then she blames the *snake*,” said the boy, advancing a pawn. “It’s like, come on, guys. What are we doing here?”

“And notice how the serpent remains quiet when Eve shifts the blame,” said the man. “I heard a preacher once say that a transference of blame is a transference of power. Adam blames his wife, and the dominion shifts when God turns to her. Then she blames the serpent, and the serpent accepts the allegation with silence.”

“And you said Christians see the snake as Satan, right?”

“That’s right,” said the man. “The preacher said this act was how the Devil gained his power in our world. Imagine how differently history could have unfolded had either of them owned up to what they’d done.”

“Yeah, that’s an interesting take,” said the boy. “Then they all get punished, right?”

“Right again,” said the man, running his fingers down the text to find his line:

The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field. On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. And 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.”

To the woman He said, “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children, and your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life, both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”⁵

“Seems like Eve got the short end of the stick on that one, doesn’t it?” said the boy.

“What do you mean?” said the man, taking his move.

“So the snake has to slither on his belly, boohoo. That’s more of an inconvenience, not to mention that’s what snakes *do*. And so the man has to sweat a bit as he feeds himself. That was his purpose in the garden anyway, wasn’t it? But Eve, man. ‘In pain you shall bring forth children’ and ‘your husband shall rule over you’? If I was Eve I would’ve pushed back here, like, ‘Woah, woah, woah, *God*. You made it clear that the day we ate

of the tree we would surely *die*. Pain and being ruled over weren't part of the deal!"

"There's a description I read once," said the man, scratching his temple, "but I can't for the life of me recall who said it. Anyway, it went something like, 'Eve was made from Adam's rib, pulled from his side to be an equal, not from his head to rule over him, nor from his feet to be trampled over, but from under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.'"

"There you go with that sappy marriage stuff again," said the boy.

"You'll understand one day," said the man.

"Doubt it. But what kind o—"

"Let me just say," said the man, "that when God made Eve as Adam's 'helper,' it wasn't in this bring-me-a-sandwich kind of way you kids throw around these days."

The boy laughed. "I can't even believe you know about that."

"You'd be surprised what your grandchildren let loose in front of their elders now," said the man. "But the term 'helper' wasn't meant to be a servant. From my understanding, it was supposed to mean something like 'strength' or 'power.' God gives man dominion over every beast in the land, but for man, there was not a matching *strength* or *power* to be his partner. And when God says, 'It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him a helper as his partner,' what is really being said is that He'll make him an *equal* to ease his loneliness."

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