

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG page 23**, to the writer's humorous story about playing Monopoly. Encourage group members to share their favorite games.

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 22** and ask **Question #1: What are some rules you've had trouble following?**

SAY: "Today, we will discover the consequences of not playing by the rules."

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 23: We ruined a perfect relationship with God through our sin.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to help us see what happens when we choose to make decisions that are not in keeping with His commands.

SESSION 2

WHY ARE WE IN THIS MESS?



The Point

We ruined a perfect relationship with God through our sin.

The Bible Meets Life

No one would deny that we live in a messed-up world. We are surrounded by adversity and tragedy. From the beginning, this was not God's design for us.

So what went wrong? We can try to assign blame, but it falls back on our own heads. When Adam and Eve first sinned, God pronounced that sin has consequences and brings a curse. We are sinners living with the consequences of a sinful, fallen world.

The Passages

Genesis 3:1-7,14-19

The Setting

God created the first man and woman and placed them in the garden of Eden. There the two enjoyed perfect fellowship with God, experiencing life as God intended. However, the man and the woman were not robots; they could obey God's commands and continue to experience life in paradise or they could reject God's commands and suffer the consequences. Genesis 3 describes the interaction of the man and the woman with the serpent, a created being who raised questions about God's intentions and encouraged the man and woman to disobey God's command.

Genesis 3:1-7

- 1 Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’”
- 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden.
- 3 But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.’”
- 4 “No! You will not die,” the serpent said to the woman.
- 5 “In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”
- 6 The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.
- 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

KEY WORDS: Knowing good and evil (v. 5)—This phrase refers to the ability to discern between right and wrong.

Verse 1. The first two chapters of Genesis describe the perfection of God’s creation. In the third chapter, however, paradise was marred when the first couple disobeyed God’s command and sin entered the world.

1 ▶ **The serpent** was one of the **wild animals** created by **the LORD God**, all of which God declared were “good” (Gen. 1:25). The text provides few details about this being; however, we do know he was **the most cunning** of all the animals God created. The Hebrew word for “cunning” (*arum*) is a neutral word. At times the term is used positively (as in Prov. 12:16; 14:8; 22:3) where it is translated “sensible.” In other instances it is used in the negative sense (Job 5:12; 15:5), as it is here, where it means crafty, sly, or shrewd.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Genesis 3:1-7



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 28.

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Genesis 3:1-7.

GUIDE: Refer members to **DIGGING DEEPER** on **PSG page 25** to provide information about the *serpent*.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** on this page and page 30 to provide further background information about the serpent:

- *He was “the most cunning” of all of the animals, meaning he was crafty, sly or shrewd.*
- *Link the serpent to Satan, the adversary or opponent of God.*
- *Refer to Revelation 12:19, “the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan.”*

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 24-25**, and ask a volunteer to read the paragraph where the writer talks about how musical scores are used in movies to create a sense of suspense that indicates something dramatic is about to happen (*Jaws* is the primary example).

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 2** to give more details about the question the serpent asked Eve:

- “Did God really say . . .?”
- Note his deceitful intention; to create confusion and doubt in Eve’s mind.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** to show Eve’s response to the serpent in verses 2-3:

- Ask a volunteer to read *Genesis 2:16-17*.
- Note that the first couple could eat from every other tree in the garden.

Nothing in Genesis 3 specifically identifies this serpent as anything other than an animal, but from his questions and comments it is obvious the serpent was opposed to God. The Hebrew word *satan* is not mentioned in this verse, but it is definitely applicable to the serpent. The word means *adversary* or *opponent*, which is the picture of the serpent seen in Genesis 3. The Book of Revelation links the serpent with God’s adversary Satan when it refers to “the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan” (Rev. 12:9). Satan stands in opposition to God, His Word, and those who have (or might have) a relationship with God. Satan continues to operate in our world, seeking “to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10) and attempting to keep people separated from the life God desires for everyone available through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. ◀

2 ▶ While it seems very unusual that the serpent could talk, **the woman** was not surprised. She should have been on guard when she heard the serpent’s question to her: “**Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’**” Apparently, the serpent was fully aware of God’s instructions to the humans about what they could eat. The serpent wasn’t simply asking a question. His use of the word **really** provides a clue to the serpent’s deceitful intention: he wanted to create confusion and doubt in the woman’s mind. Ultimately the serpent wanted her not only to doubt God but also to experience the consequences of disobeying Him. ◀

3 ▶ **Verses 2-3.** The woman noted they could **eat the fruit from the trees in the garden**. While this was the truth, her words did not reflect the liberality and generosity of God’s instructions when He told them, “You are free to eat from any tree of the garden” (Gen. 2:16). The woman then mentioned the only prohibition God had made—not eating **the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden**. This was “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (v. 17).

There was nothing wrong with this tree; it was part of God’s good creation. While the woman correctly noted they could not eat from that tree, she added something God had not said: she told the serpent that they weren’t even allowed to **touch** the tree or its fruit.

God had specifically stated the dire consequences of eating the prohibited fruit: “on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die” (v. 17). In responding to the serpent, however, the woman reduced the penalty as she added, **or you will die**. ◀

4 ▶ **Verses 4-5.** The serpent was no longer subtle, he deliberately disputed her words (or at least her understanding of God’s words). **“No! You will not die”** is a direct contradiction of what God had said. While the serpent may have wanted the woman to think the penalty wouldn’t be that dire (certain death), he definitely wanted her to believe that disobedience to God’s command was not really a problem and perhaps wouldn’t really be punished by God. The serpent then countered with an alternative to death, impugning God’s character in the process: **“In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”** This was a half-truth; since distinguishing between good and evil was a characteristic of God, the result of eating the fruit from the tree would be that the couple would indeed be like Him. God Himself acknowledged this in Genesis 3:22. This special insight was something the man and the woman did not possess, so the serpent’s words made eating the fruit sound desirable to the woman for acquiring this knowledge. However, the serpent said nothing of the real consequences. His ultimate motive was to get the woman to doubt the goodness of God, to think He was holding out on them, and thereby to get the woman to disobey what God had said. ◀

Verses 6-7. As a result of the serpent’s words the woman gave in to the temptation to eat the fruit. **The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom.** The Hebrew term translated **good** can mean both that which is beautiful and that which is morally right. It is also the same term used by God in Genesis 1 to pronounce the goodness of His creation. Here the woman put herself in the place of God, going against His command and choosing to do what she thought was “good,” seeking wisdom apart from God.¹

The woman took the fruit and ate it. She gave some to the man, who apparently had been present with her during the conversation with the serpent. True to the serpent’s words, their eyes were opened; they gained a knowledge they had not previously possessed. But because of their disobedience they lost much more than they gained. The knowledge they gained led to the realization they were naked. It also brought embarrassment and shame. In an effort to cover their shame, the man and woman made garments from fig leaves. However, while they could cover their nakedness, in the end they could not cover their sin.

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on page 29 (**PSG, p. 24**) for insight on the phrase *knowing good and evil*.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** to provide more insight into the serpent’s schemes:

- *He lied and contradicted what God had said.*
- *He offered an enticing alternative to Eve, “your eyes will be opened and you will be like God.”*
- *His ultimate motive was to cause Eve to doubt the goodness of God.*

DISCUSS: Question #2 (**PSG, p. 26**): **How does Satan use the same tactics today?**

(Alternate: Why do we continue falling for Satan’s same old tricks and lies?)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we will see the result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and God’s judgment on the serpent.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

Genesis 3:14-15



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Genesis 3:14-15.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 27**, to “the blame game”:

- Adam blamed Eve for their sin (Gen. 3:12).
- Adam blamed God for giving him Eve in the first place (v. 12).
- Eve blamed the serpent for deceiving her (v. 13).

DISCUSS: Question #3

(PSG, p. 27): **Why do we tend to blame others rather than taking responsibility for wrongdoing?**

GUIDE: Refer members to **PSG page 27** to the author’s story about his dog, Jack.

SAY: “There’s no hiding from God when you are guilty.”

Genesis 3:14-15

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent:

Because you have done this,
you are cursed more than any livestock
and more than any wild animal.
You will move on your belly
and eat dust all the days of your life.

15 I will put hostility between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring.
He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.

Verse 14. When the man and the woman heard God walking in the garden, they attempted to hide from Him. Their words betrayed the truth that they had disobeyed Him and eaten of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:8-11). When confronted, the man blamed the woman and God for what had happened, and the woman blamed the serpent (vv. 12-13). In spite of their feeble attempts to shift blame, God was aware of their sin and of the serpent’s words and intent. God will not dismiss disobedience.

The name **LORD God** first appeared in Genesis 2:4. It is a combination of the names *Yahweh* (LORD) and *Elohim* (God). The creation account only used the word *Elohim* for God as Creator, which highlighted His majesty and power. The account of God’s relationship with the first humans added *Yahweh*. This name emphasizes that God is the One who has always existed and causes all that is to exist. This is also the covenant name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush. The use of LORD God in Genesis 2–3 indicates God’s intent in regards to humanity. Even as the majestic and powerful Creator, God desired a personal relationship with humans, who were the pinnacle of His creation. The use of the dual title for God in verse 14 reflects the loving, personal nature of the mighty Creator. Even when pronouncing judgment against sinful humans, He would not fully abandon them.

5 ▶ The LORD God issued His initial judgment against **the serpent**—the instigator of the humans’ disobedience. The

use of the term translated **cursed** carries the idea of condemnation that results in suffering and despair. The serpent would be relegated to moving on his **belly**, which may indicate that the serpent was not originally a crawling creature. God also cursed the serpent to **eat dust** all the days of his life referring to the humiliating nature of where the serpent would eat—on the ground. In light of the future pronouncement of death to the man, the serpent’s curse also may have served as an ongoing reminder of his sin in his being forced to exist in the realm where human bodies would be placed to decompose after death. God’s mention of **all the days of your life** may have been a certain promise of the serpent’s eventual death, in contrast to his false promise to the woman that she would not die (v. 4).² ◀

6 ▶ Verse 15. God’s judgment on the serpent was in fact a judgment on Satan, the true adversary who prompted the humans’ sin. God noted there would be **hostility between the serpent and the woman**. The Hebrew term translated *hostility* is often used of conflicts between nations and reflects an ongoing battle in which death is the ultimate objective. This struggle would extend through the ages, to the **offspring** of both the woman and the serpent. In Hebrew, the term translated *offspring* is ambiguous. It can refer to either a single individual or a group. This term captures the ongoing hostility between Satan and humanity throughout history. But it also speaks of the ultimate defeat of Satan.

“**He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.**” In this description, **he** and **his** are both singular pronouns. God noted that a certain male individual would **strike** (or crush) the **head** of the serpent even as the serpent fought back by striking **his heel**. Many see this as the first prophetic promise of Satan’s defeat (known as the *protoevangelium*), since it likely refers to the ultimate battle between Jesus and Satan. In Galatians 3:16 Paul clarified that Abraham’s “seed” (not “seeds”) was a reference to Christ.

As noted previously, the Book of Revelation identifies Satan as the “ancient serpent” (Rev. 12:9; 20:2) and describes his ongoing efforts to wage war against God and His people. Even though Jesus has won the victory over Satan at the cross, there will be ongoing hostility between Satan and the forces of evil on one side and Jesus and His church on the other. This strife will continue until God brings a decisive end to the conflict when Satan and all those who oppose God are judged and consigned to the lake of fire, where they will suffer torment and everlasting separation from God (20:10-15). ◀

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 5** on page 32 and this page to explain God’s judgment on the serpent.

GUIDE: Refer members to **PSG page 28** to paragraph that starts with: “Many consider verse 15 to be the first prophetic verse in the Bible,” and ask a volunteer to read the paragraph.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 6** to provide more information about the hostility between the serpent and the woman. Be sure to explain the *protoevangelium*, the ultimate battle between Jesus and Satan.

DISCUSS: Question #4
(PSG, p. 28): **How do we try to justify or cover up the things we do wrong?**

(Alternate: *Why is it important to own up to our sin and take responsibility without shifting blame?*)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we will see the eternal consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

Genesis 3:16-19



15 minutes

READ: Read Genesis 3:16-19.

GUIDE: Refer members to **PSG page 29** to the two-fold punishment of Eve:

1. *The pain of childbearing would increase greatly.*
2. *Eve's desire would be for her husband, "and he will rule over you."*

Encourage group members to review this section for explanation of possible interpretations of this statement.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 7** to provide further explanation about God's judgment on Eve.

Genesis 3:16-19

16 He said to the woman:

I will intensify your labor pains;
you will bear children with painful effort.
Your desire will be for your husband,
yet he will rule over you.

17 And he said to the man, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it':

The ground is cursed because of you.
You will eat from it by means of painful labor
all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

19 You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow
until you return to the ground,
since you were taken from it.

For you are dust,
and you will return to dust."

7 ▶ **Verse 16.** Sin brings consequences, thus the woman and the man were next to hear God's pronouncement of judgment on their disobedience. God first addressed **the woman**, highlighting the suffering she would experience in childbirth—God would **intensify** her **labor pains** and she would **bear children with painful effort**.

Another part of God's judgment of the woman dealt with her relationship to her husband. "**Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you.**" Interpreters debate the meaning of the term **desire** in this verse. Some argue that it reflects either the sexual desire the woman has for her husband or the desire to be a mother despite

the intensified pain that comes at the delivery of the baby. But taken in the context of the rest of the verse, another interpretation seems to refer to the woman's desire to dominate her husband. As a result of the fall, she would possess the desire to be the leader over her husband. God noted, however, that her husband would **rule over** her. This reflects the submission of the wife to her husband. God's original intention had not changed; her husband would be the one to exercise leadership in the relationship with the expectation that she would exercise submission. A husband's loving leadership and a wife's willing submission would be further counseled and clarified by the apostles in the New Testament (Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Pet. 3:1,7). ◀

8 ▶ Verses 17-18. God turned His judgment to **the man**. The man should have exercised his leadership responsibility by obeying God and encouraging the woman to obey God as well. But as God pointed out, the man listened to his wife and ate the fruit, deliberately doing exactly what God had commanded him not to do. As a consequence of the man's sin, the ground was **cursed**. It would no longer effortlessly yield a harvest as a result of the man's labor. While the task of working and caring for the ground which God had given him may have initially been easy (Gen. 2:15), from this point on the man's work would be **painful labor**. The land would no longer yield only a bountiful harvest, but would produce **thorns** and **thistles** as well. This would bring the man pain, frustration, and exhaustion. The severity of the man's sin is brought out by the permanence of this curse. This painful labor would continue **all the days** of the man's **life**.

Verse 19. Man's work would be difficult—his **bread** (food) would only come from **the sweat of his brow**. His sin had brought a curse on the land that would make life difficult for him. His sin also meant that one day he would **return to the ground**—he would die and be buried in it. Just as God created him from the **dust** of the ground, the man's body would become dust again after his death. ◀

The sin of the first man (Adam) and woman (Eve) brought tragic consequences not only for them but also for all of creation. That was not the end of the story, however. The same gracious God who created humans out of His desire for a relationship with them did not abandon them nor did He leave them alone to endure the consequences of their sin without any hope. Before God created the world He had the solution in mind (Eph. 1:3-6).

GUIDE: Refer members to **PSG page 29** to the paragraph that describes God's judgment on Adam.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 8** to provide further explanation about God's judgment on Adam.

DISCUSS: Question #5 (PSG, p. 30): How do the consequences of sin make your life harder?

(Alternate: Where do you see the consequences of sin prevalent in our culture?)

DO: Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity "**Help!!!**" on **PSG page 30**.

1. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, vol. 1a in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 238.
2. *Ibid.*, 244–45.

LIVE IT OUT

5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point: We ruined a perfect relationship with God through our sin.**

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 31)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Encourage group members to reflect on the consequences of the Fall. Remind group members that we continue to live with the results of Adam's and Eve's sin.

PRAY: "Father, thank You for Your grace and forgiveness for our sins through Your Son, Jesus. Thank you for making a way for us to be in right relationship with you."

LIVE IT OUT

We're in a mess because we chose to sin instead of following God's way. We can point fingers, or we can point to solutions.

- ▶ **Memorize 1 John 1:9.** Our sins can be forgiven if we confess them to God. Memorize 1 John 1:9—"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"—as a promise and source of encouragement as you confess your sins to God.
- ▶ **Seek forgiveness.** If your sin involves someone else, ask their forgiveness. Seek to make amends for your part in hurting another person or harming your relationship.
- ▶ **Avoid sin.** If certain sins are a constant struggle for you, determine what makes it easy for you to give in to the temptation. Make a plan for removing those things from your life. If certain individuals encourage or enable your sin, stop associating with them.

We're in this mess because we put ourselves here. God created a paradise for us to enjoy, but we allowed sin to enter the world. Rejoice that God is forgiving and gracious, and He has a plan to deal with our rebellion against Him.



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/BRENT BRUCE/BRITISH MUSEUM/LONDON

"Temptation seal" from Mesopotamia; 23rd cent. BC. Depicts figures holding out hands on either side of a date palm tree. A serpent is behind one figure. Though similar to the Genesis 3:1-13 account, the seal shows figures seated and fully clothed.

In the Old Testament, to *curse* or to *bless* carried much weight. The overarching context of all curses and blessings in the Old Testament was the covenant relationship between the Lord and Israel. In essence, a curse was a word of malediction uttered against anyone who would violate the stipulations of the covenant agreement between the Lord and the people of Israel. Conversely, a blessing was a word of empowerment whereby those loyal to the Lord and to His covenant received divine help in their endeavors.

Two important Hebrew terms for "curse" are *'arar* and *qalal*. The first, *'arar*, means "to bind (with a spell, hem in with obstacles, render powerless to resist." The first appearance of this word is in Genesis 3:14, where the Lord pronounced the serpent "cursed."

The second word for curse, *qalal*, means "to take lightly," "to esteem lightly," or "to render as insignificant or trivial." One of the best texts that demonstrates the difference between *'arar* and *qalal* is Genesis 12:3. When the Lord established His covenant relationship with Abram, He promised "whoever curses you I will curse." The first appearance of "curse" renders the Hebrew word *qalal*, "to take lightly" or "to slight." The second appearance renders the term *'arar*, meaning "to bind" or "to hem in." Thus the Lord was promising to bind up or to thwart anyone who slighted him.

The primary Hebrew term for "bless" is *barak*, meaning "to empower and enable" when used to express the actions of superiors toward subordinates, or "to express gratitude of a gift or blessing" when used to express the actions of subordinates toward superiors.

Another Hebrew word for bless is *'ashar*, meaning "to go straight" or "to be happy." The idea is that people who go in the way of the Lord are blessed or happy. Psalm 1 begins, "Blessed" (KJV) or "Happy is the man" (CSB)

To be cursed is to be hindered and thwarted in every way. To be blessed means to be empowered to succeed in any endeavor. The serpent received a perpetual curse that ultimately resulted in his destruction along with all who follow his rebellious ways. People, on the other hand, can face the prospect of God's blessings because of Jesus' work on the cross.

The excerpt above is from the article "Blessings and Curses in the Old Testament" (Winter 2006-2007), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the [Groups Ministry blog](#).

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry