**“*In Adam’s Fall We Sinned All*”: Does Genesis 3 Teach the Fall of Man?**

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**Abstract**

*A historical Adam is vital to many areas of theology, such as the doctrine of the Fall, yet there is an increasing attack upon this doctrine. Many evangelical theologians deny that Gen 3 teaches the doctrine of the Fall of man and argue that it is not original to the text but is something that has been forced upon it. This article will look at why theologians reject the Fall of man and whether or not Gen 3 teaches it.*

**Introduction**

Critical scholars have long rejected Gen 3 as an accurate account of actual events, such as the Creation and Fall of man.[[1]](#footnote-1) However, in the recent debate over the historical Adam, many professing evangelicals, and once-professing evangelicals, who have adopted the methods and conclusions of critical secular scholarship, have pointedly argued that the doctrine of the Fall,[[2]](#footnote-2) which teaches original sin, is not original to the text of Gen 3.[[3]](#footnote-3) These scholars see the doctrine of the Fall and original sin as an invention the church Father Augustine of Hippo (354-430) read into the text.[[4]](#footnote-4) In the recent book *Adam and the Genome*, which rejects a historical Adam, theologian Scot McKnight argues:

What we call the “fall” story of Genesis 3 borrows a later Christian term and, more importantly, in borrowing a later category, reads the text in ways that miss what the text meant in the ancient Near East. . . . In fact, the whole of Genesis 1–3 barely—if ever—makes another appearance in the entire Old Testament; so while many would say Genesis 1–11 is the foundation for reading the whole Bible, that is certainly at least an exaggeration if not a serious error.[[5]](#footnote-5)

It has also been pointed out that because Gen 3 contains none of the language associated with disobedience, such as *sin*, *evil*, *rebellion*, *transgression*, and *guilt*, it therefore cannot be a passage that teaches the doctrine of the Fall.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Are these objections valid? Does Gen 3 say anything about the concept of a Fall? Have Christians read something into Gen 3 that is simply not there? I will argue that the doctrine of the Fall is a biblical concept and can be derived from the biblical text. It is important to defend the biblical concept of the Fall and original sin because “no doctrine is more crucial to our anthropology and soteriology.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Adam’s Original State**

Before we look at what Gen 3 teaches concerning the consequences of Adam’s disobedience toward God, we must first consider Adam’s original state. Having spoken the world into existence, God declared his finished creation to be “very good” ([Gen 1:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen%201.31)). This was a world without sin, corruption, death, or disease. Death of any kind[[8]](#footnote-8) had not yet entered creation since it was promised as the consequence of disobedience ([Gen 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen%202.17)).[[9]](#footnote-9) Adam’s original righteous state is confirmed in the OT by the author of Ecclesiastes who writes, “That God made man upright” (Ec 7:29).[[10]](#footnote-10) The fact that man was made “upright” or “just”[[11]](#footnote-11) is a reference to God creating man without “moral blemish.”[[12]](#footnote-12) This righteous state is characterized by Adam and Eve’s unashamed nakedness (Gen 2:25).

**Adam’s Fall**

It was in the garden that the serpent (Satan: 2Cor 11:3, [14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Corinthians%2011.14%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank); Rev 12:9) came to Eve and tempted her to eat from the tree that God had commanded Adam not to eat of (Gen 3:1-5). After disobeying God’s command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, both Adam and Eve’s “eyes were opened” (Gen 3:7), indicating that they now knew their prior created goodness was but a memory. This is seen in Adam and Eve’s realization that they were naked. Whereas before they were unashamed ([Gen 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen%202.25%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)), they now stood ashamed because of their nakedness. For the Hebrews, nakedness is shameful because it is related with guilt (Gen 9:22–23; c.f. Is 20:4; Mic 1:11).[[13]](#footnote-13) The couple’s shame led them to try to solve their own problem by clothing themselves (Gen 3:7), which is further “evidence of a change in their condition.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

When Adam previously heard the Lord’s voice, he was unafraid (Gen 2:17), but now there is fear when the Lord speaks (Gen 3:10), and he and Eve hide from his presence (Gen 3:8). Both Adam and Eve now fear the presence of the Lord with whom they had once had fellowship in the garden.

Adam’s guilt can also be seen by his violated conscience when God asks him the questions, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Gen 3:11). The second question God asks is linked to the tree that Adam was commanded not to eat from (Gen 2:16). Both of “these questions explain to the man that his sense of shame arose from his defiance of God’s command.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Although the words *guilt*, *disobedience*, *sin*, and *transgression* do not appear in Gen 3, this does not mean that the concepts are not there in the passage.[[16]](#footnote-16) Moreover, the existence of a concept is not linked to the presence of certain vocabulary.[[17]](#footnote-17) Adam’s guilt and disobedience are clearly expressed within the passage.

Adam was not a sinner when he was created, but he fell from a state of innocence and from the fellowship he had once enjoyed with God. Adam’s expulsion from Eden (Gen 3:24) also represents a loss of intimate fellowship with God. This was a fellowship that Adam enjoyed unclothed, which was something that the priests of Israel were forbidden to do in the presence of God (Ex 20:26, 28:42).

**Consequences of Adam’s Fall: The Reign of Death**

The punishment Adam received for his disobedience is seen in the fulfilment of God’s promise that he would die (both physically and spiritually) if Adam disobeyed his command (Gen 2:17, 3:7–8,19).[[18]](#footnote-18) Adam was told that he would return to the dust from which he was taken, a concept that is referenced by many of the OT writers. This demonstrates a mindfulness of the Curse and the one who brought this about, namely Adam (Job 10:9, 34:15; Ps 90:3, 104:29; Ec 3:20, 12:7). Adam disobeyed, and death came not only to him but also to his descendants. Cain killed Abel, the first human death, but death did not stop there, and it impacted everyone, as the genealogies reveal: “and he died” (Gen 5:5,8,[11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Genesis%205.11%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank),14,17,20,26,31). Which is why the Apostle Paul writes, “because of one man's trespass, death reigned” (Rom 5:17).

Peter Enns, who also does not read Gen 3 as an account of the Fall, objects to Adam’s disobedience as being the cause of our sinfulness. Enns is not questioning whether we are sinful but whether the OT says that Adam is the cause of our sinfulness. Concerning the account of Cain and Abel in Gen 4, he states,

Does this story imply that Cain’s murder of his brother, Abel, is a consequence of being born in a state of sin due to his father’s transgression? Or should Cain’s sin be understood, like the sin of his parents, as his own responsibility, his own choice to disobey? In other words, “like father, like son.” . . . We do not read that Adam’s disobedience is somehow causally linked to Cain’s act.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Enns’ objection, however, misunderstands the doctrine of original sin. Of course, Cain has a choice and bears the responsibility for the sinful choice he makes, just as we all do. Cain’s sin, however, did not come from outside of him but within him, the mention of his “anger” and “countenance” suggest this (see Gen 4:5).

The Bible teaches that our sin comes from the corrupt nature we have inherited from Adam (Rom 5:12–19; 1Cor 15:21–22). Also, it is important to understand that we “are not guilty for Adam’s sin; we are guilty as sinners in Adam.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Of course, the view that we are guilty sinners in Adam is repulsive to our self-serving, individualistic Western world. However, this overlooks the corporate dimension to human life and the biblical concept of federal headship (one individual representing an entire group—see Jos 7:10–26). Adam is our federal head. In the Garden in Eden, Adam was not simply acting for himself but for all those he represented. When we yield to temptation, we do not become sinners since we are already sinners. This is because we are descendants of Adam.

By thinking that there should be some theological statement in the narrative of Gen 3 or 4, which expresses that Adam’s disobedience is the cause of human sinfulness, Enns and others[[21]](#footnote-21) disregard how the narrative works. This objection to original sin overlooks the fact that the literature of Gen 1–50 is historical narrative; therefore, we should not expect the unfolding of the doctrine to look like a collection of theological propositions as we have in Rom 5:12–19.

Adam’s experience is not like Cain’s experience, or even our own, because Adam was not in a state of sin to start with. However, the similarities in the scenes of the condemnation of sin in the narratives of Gen 3 and 4 serve as a model of human sinfulness.

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| **Genesis 3** | **Genesis 4** |
| Where are you? 3:9 | Where is Abel your brother? 4:9 |
| What is this you have done? 3:13 | What have you done? 4:10 |
| Cursed is the ground for your sake 3:17 | You are cursed from the earth 4:11 |
| Drove out the man 3:24 | You have driven me out . . . from the . . . ground 4:14 |
| East of Eden 3:24 | East of Eden 4:16 |

OT theologian Gordon Wenham believes that these “similarities between Ch 3 and 4 confirm that the former should be read as a paradigm of human sin.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Gen 3 then provides us with an account of the consequences and effects of Adam’s disobedience in which humanity is now entrenched.

After Gen 3, the consequences of Adam’s disobedience on his offspring are felt throughout the remainder of Genesis. These can be seen in the account of Cain slaying his brother, Abel (Gen 4:9) and Lamech boasting of murder (Gen 4:23–24); Lamech’s (Noah’s father) comments in Gen 5:29 affirm that the curse of Gen 3 continued to bring the problem of “painful toil”;[[23]](#footnote-23) and the description of the wickedness of man’s heart before and after the Flood (Gen 6:5, 8:21). As the narrative continues to unfold, we read of Noah cursing Canaan (Gen 9:25)[[24]](#footnote-24) and the judgment on mankind’s pride and deliberate disobedience at Babel against the Lord’s command to increase greatly upon the earth (Gen 9:1, 7, 11:4). These examples show how things became progressively worse from Gen 3 onward and show how the universality of sin and its consequences affected the whole human race. These texts do not need to state that the reason for these things was Adam’s sin since the narrative has clearly shown this to be the case.

**Conclusion**

When we read Gen 3 in its context, it clearly implies the effects of the Fall. Because of Adam’s disobedience God’s very good creation became a place marked by death. The consequences of Adam’s disobedience in Genesis are felt throughout the OT from Gen 4 onward: the Flood, Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel’s scattering, and constant human failure are a testament to the consequences of Adam’s sin. While the exact words we use to describe the doctrine of the Fall and original sin are not in the text, the ideas are clearly presented from the very beginning and demonstrated in subsequent inspired writings.

<https://answersingenesis.org/bible-questions/does-genesis-3-teach-fall-of-man/>

1. Neo-orthodox theologian James Barr states that OT scholarship “has long known that the reading of the story [Gen 3] as the ‘Fall of Man’ in the traditional sense, though hallowed by St Paul’s use of it, cannot stand up to examination through a close reading of the text.” James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Theistic evolutionist Denis Alexander writes, “I sometimes wonder whether Christians do not take more of their doctrine of the fall from the pages of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* than they do from the pages of sacred Scripture. Indeed, the language of ‘fall’ is not at all scriptural, and the term is not used within the Genesis text or elsewhere.” Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford, UK: Monarch Books, 2014), 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In his book, *Saving the Original Sinner*, Karl Giberson argues, “The Hebrew scriptures suggest that Adam passed nothing on to his offspring. Subsequent sin—Cain’s murder of Abel, the wickedness of Noah’s generation, or the folly at the tower of Babel—is never described as inevitable. Adam’s sin is never mentioned again in the Hebrew scriptures. Paul . . . embellishes the Adam story in ways that certainly stretch the authorial intent of the writer(s) of Genesis, but Paul nowhere suggests that Adam’s unfortunate choice was made by a ‘pre-Fall’ human.” Karl Giberson, *Saving the Original Sinner: How Christians Have Used the Bible’s First Man to Oppress, Inspire, and Make Sense of the World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This is a common misconception. Augustine did not invent the doctrine of original sin since there is an outline of the teaching in the Patristic theology of Irenaeus (AD 130–202), Basil (AD 329–379), and Ambrose (AD 340–397). See Peter Sanlon, “Original Sin in Patristic Theology,” in *Adam, The Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 85–107. Also, the Jewish people of the Second Temple period (530 BC–70 AD) shared the view that human sin was derived from Adam (see 4Ezra 3:7; Sifre Dt 3:23; 2Esdras 3:21–22,26). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dennis R. Venema and Scot McKnight, *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science*(Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2017), 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The lack of these terms in the text of Gen 3 are one of the reasons Barr rejects it as an account of the Fall. He states, “It is not without importance that the term ‘sin’ is not used anywhere in the story . . . nor do we find any of the terms usually understood as ‘evil’, ‘rebellion,’ ‘transgression,’ or ‘guilt.’” Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan), 423. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. While texts such as Rom 5:12 and 1Cor 15:21–22 show that human death came about as a result of the Fall, there are a number of biblical texts which reference no death of any kind before the Fall: Gen 1:29–31, 3:1–24; Rom 8:19–22; Rev 21:4, 22:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. To further understand why Gen 2:17 is not saying Adam would die immediately, see Terry Mortenson, “Gen 2:17—‘You Shall Surely Die,’” *Answers* in Genesis, May 2, 2007, https://answersingenesis.org/death-before-sin/genesis-2-17-you-shall-surely-die/. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Clemens argues that Ec 7:29 is a clear reference to Adam. See D.M. Clemens, “The Law of Sin and Death: Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1–3,” *Themelios* 19, no. 3 (1994): [http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/19.3\_Clemens.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/19.3_Clemens.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 449. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26: The New American Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishers, 1996), 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. C.J. Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2006), 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The Apostle Paul clearly understood what the author of Genesis was describing as he spoke of Eve as being a transgressor in 1Tim 2:14 and Adam as being disobedient in Rom 5:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For example, the word trinity is not used in the Bible, but the doctrine is clearly taught within Scripture (see [Act 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%205.4%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank); Rom 9:5; 1Cor 8:6). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. After disobeying God’s command, Adam and Eve were immediately separated from God (Gen 3:7–9). Yet in Gen 3:17–19, God placed a curse on the ground and told Adam he would return to it (i.e., a physical death). The Apostle Paul’s interpretation of this passage had physical death in view (Rom 5:12, [14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Romans%205.14%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank); 1Cor 15:21–22). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn’t Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press:, 2012), 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Horton, *Systematic Theology*, 426. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For example, Karl Giberson states, “If Adam’s sin has such dramatic consequences, why is it not mentioned when God punishes a sinful humanity by drowning almost all of them? Or confounding their languages at Babel? Or raining fire and brimstone on their heads at Sodom and Gomorrah? If these things are all Adam’s fault, why is that never mentioned?” Karl Giberson, *Saving the Original Sinner*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Gordon Wenham, “Original Sin in Genesis 1–11”, *Churchman* 104, no. 4 (1990), 319. [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/104-04\_309.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/104-04_309.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The Hebrew term עִצָּבוֹן translated “painful toil” in Gen 5:29, is the same word used in Gen 3:17 when God pronounced judgement on Adam: “Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. In Gen 3:14, as part of his judgment, God spoke the words “Cursed are you” to the serpent. In Gen 4 God said to Cain after he killed Abel, “You are cursed” (Gen 4:11). Before Gen 3, there is only blessing (Gen 1:22,28, 2:3), but the curse came because of Adam’s disobedience. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)