

Education *in the Garden of Eden*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:7–23; Gen. 3:1–6; 2 Pet. 1:3–11; 2 Pet. 2:1–17; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24.*

Memory Text: “Behold, God is exalted by His power; who teaches like Him?” (*Job 36:22, NKJV*).

Most Bible students know the story of Genesis 1–3 and its cast of characters: God, Adam, Eve, the angels, the serpent. The setting is a splendid garden in a paradise called “Eden.” The plotline seems to follow a logical series of events. God creates. God instructs Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve sin. Adam and Eve are banished from Eden. However, a closer look at the first few chapters of Genesis, especially through the lens of education, will uncover insights into the cast, the setting, and the story.

“The system of education instituted at the beginning of the world was to be a model for man throughout all aftertime. As an illustration of its principles a model school was established in Eden, the home of our first parents. The Garden of Eden was the schoolroom, nature was the lesson book, the Creator Himself was the instructor, and the parents of the human family were the students.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 20.

The Lord was founder, principal, and teacher of this first school. But as we know, Adam and Eve ultimately chose another teacher and learned the wrong lessons. What happened, why, and what can we learn from this early account of education that can help us today?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 3.

The First School

Though we don't think of a garden as a classroom, it makes perfect sense, especially one like Eden, filled with the unspoiled riches of God's creation. It is hard to imagine, from our perspective today, how much these unfallen beings, in an unfallen world and being directly taught by their Creator, must have been learning in that "classroom."

Read Genesis 2:7–23. What do you notice about God's purposefulness in creating, placing, and employing Adam?

God made the man and the woman in His image and gave them a home and meaningful work. When you consider teacher-student dynamics, this is an ideal relationship. God knew Adam's abilities because He had created Adam. He could teach Adam, knowing that Adam could realize his full potential.

God gave the man responsibility, but He also wanted happiness for him, as well. And perhaps part of the means of giving him happiness was giving him responsibilities. After all, who doesn't get satisfaction—happiness, even—from being given responsibilities and then faithfully fulfilling them? God knew the heart of Adam and what he would need to thrive; so, He gave Adam the task of taking care of the Garden. "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it" (*Gen. 2:15, NKJV*). It's hard for us to imagine, knowing only a world of sin and death as we do, what the work must have entailed and the lessons that, no doubt, Adam learned as he worked and kept their garden home.

In Genesis 2:19–23, God created animal companions for Adam, and He also created Eve as Adam's wife. God knew that Adam needed the companionship and help of a peer; so, He created woman.

God also knew that man needed to be in close relationship with Him; so, He created an intimate space in Eden within the confines of the Garden. All of this attests to God's purposefulness in Creation and His love for humanity. Again, from the great distance between us and Eden, it's hard to imagine what it must have been like—though it is fun to try to imagine, isn't it?

Though we are far removed from Eden, we can still learn lessons from nature. What are some of those lessons, and how can we benefit from them as we interpret them through the lens of Scripture?

Intrusion

One of the great joys for many teachers is assembling their classrooms: hanging bulletin boards, organizing supplies, and arranging the rooms in the most desirable way. When we look at God's vision for the classroom that was the Garden of Eden, we see the care He took in preparing a learning environment for Adam and Eve. He desired beauty to surround them. We can imagine that every flower, bird, animal, and tree offered an opportunity for Adam and Eve to learn more about their world and about their Creator.

Yet, there is an abrupt shift from Genesis 2 to Genesis 3. We have taken inventory of all the good that God created with divine intention. But in Genesis 3:1 we also awaken to God's provision for free will. The presence of the serpent as "more subtil than any beast of the field" is a departure from the language heretofore used. Such words as "very good" and "not ashamed" and "pleasant" are adjectives used to describe God's creation in the prior chapters. Now, however, with the serpent, there is a change of tone. The word "subtil" also is translated in some versions as "cunning." Suddenly a negative element is introduced in what, so far, has been only perfection.

In contrast, Genesis presents God as the opposite of "cunning." God is emphatically clear about His expectations of the pair in the Garden. We know from God's command in Genesis 2:16, 17 that He has established one key rule that they must obey, and that was not to eat from the forbidden tree.

Whatever else we can take from this story, one thing stands out: Adam and Eve were created as free moral beings, beings who were able to choose between obedience and disobedience. Hence, right from the start, even in an unfallen world, we can see the reality of human free will.

In Genesis 3:1–6, examine the descriptions the serpent used and that Eve then repeated. What do you notice about the information that the serpent offers Eve? What do you notice about how Eve then regards the tree of knowledge of good and evil?

In Genesis 2:17, the Lord told Adam that if he ate from the tree he would "surely die" (*emphasis supplied*). When Eve, in Genesis 3:3, repeated the command, she did not express it as strongly, leaving out the word "surely." In Genesis 3:4, the serpent puts the word back in but in an utter contradiction of what God had said. It seems that though Eve was taught of God in the Garden, she didn't take what she learned as seriously as she should have, as we can see by the very language she used.

Missing the Message

As we saw yesterday, Eve—even in her language—watered down what she had been taught despite God’s clear command.

Though she didn’t misinterpret what the Lord said to her, she obviously didn’t take it seriously enough. One can hardly exaggerate the consequences of her actions.

Thus, when Eve encountered the serpent, she repeated (but not exactly) to the serpent what God had said regarding the trees in the Garden (*Gen. 3:2, 3*). Of course, this message wasn’t news to the serpent. The serpent was familiar with the command and was therefore well-prepared to twist it, thus preying upon Eve’s innocence.

Examine Genesis 3:4–6. Besides directly denying exactly what God had said, what else did the serpent say that, obviously, succeeded with Eve? What principles did he take advantage of?

When the serpent told her that part of the message was incorrect, Eve could have gone to confer with God. This is the beauty of Eden’s education: the access the students had to their Mighty Teacher was surely beyond anything we can now fathom on earth. However, instead of fleeing, instead of seeking divine aid, Eve accepts the serpent’s message. Her acceptance of the serpent’s revision to the message requires some doubt on Eve’s part about God and what He had told them.

Meanwhile, Adam wanders into a difficult situation himself. “Adam understood that his companion had transgressed the command of God, disregarded the only prohibition laid upon them as a test of their fidelity and love. There was a terrible struggle in his mind. He mourned that he had permitted Eve to wander from his side. But now the deed was done; he must be separated from her whose society had been his joy. How could he have it thus?”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 56. Unfortunately, though knowing right from wrong, he also chose wrongly.

Think of the deceptive irony here: the serpent said that if they ate of the tree, they would “be like God” (*Gen. 3:5, NKJV*). But didn’t Genesis 1:27 say that they were already like God? What can this teach us about how easily we can be deceived and why faith and obedience are our only protection, even when we have been given the best of educations, as had Adam and Eve?

Regaining What Was Lost

When Adam and Eve chose to follow the serpent's message, they faced, among many other consequences, banishment from God's classroom. Think about what Adam and Eve lost because of their sin. When we understand their fall, we can better understand the purpose of education for us in the present age. In spite of their banishment, life in an imperfect world ushered in a new purpose for education.

If education before the Fall was God's way of acquainting Adam and Eve with Him, His character, His goodness, and His love, then after their banishment the work of education must be to help reacquaint humanity with those things, as well as re-create the image of God in us. In spite of their physical removal from God's presence, God's children still can come to know Him, His goodness, and His love. Through prayer, service, and studying His Word, we can draw close to our God as did Adam and Eve in Eden.

The good news is that because of Jesus and the plan of redemption, all is not lost. We have hope of salvation and of restoration. And much of Christian education should be pointing students toward Jesus and what He has done for us and the restoration that He offers.

Read 2 Peter 1:3–11. In light of all that was lost when human beings left the Garden, these verses come as encouragement that much can be regained. What does Peter write that we must do in order to seek restoration of God's image in our lives?

Through Jesus, we have been given "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (*NKJV*). What a promise! What might some of those things be? Well, Peter gives us a list: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, and so on. Notice, too, that knowledge is one of the things Peter mentions. This idea, of course, leads to the notion of education. True education will lead to true knowledge, the knowledge of Christ, and thus not only will we become more like Him, but we also may stand to share our knowledge of Him with others.

Think for a moment about the fact that the forbidden tree was the tree of "the knowledge of good and evil" (*Gen. 2:17, emphasis supplied*). What should that tell us about why not all knowledge is good? How do we know the difference between good and bad knowledge?

The Despisers of Authority

Some people are considered “natural students” in the classroom. They barely need to study to make excellent grades. They absorb material easily. Their knowledge seems to “stick.” Second Peter 1 and 2, however, make it evident that our education in Christ is an equal-opportunity experience for those who will dedicate themselves to Him.

The encouraging words of 2 Peter 1 contrast with the sobering warning in 2 Peter 2.

Read 2 Peter 2:1–17. What powerful and condemning words is Peter saying here? At the same time, amid this sharp warning and condemnation, what great hope is promised to us?

Notice what Peter writes in verse 10 about those who despise authority. What a sharp rebuke for what is a reality in our day, as well. We as a church body must work on the assumption of certain levels of authority (*see Heb. 13:7, 17, 24*), and we are called to submit to and obey them, at least to the degree that they are being faithful to the Lord themselves.

However, amid this harsh condemnation, Peter offers a counterpoint. He says that although God is mighty to cast out those who chose deception, “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (*2 Pet. 2:9, NKJV*). Is it possible that part of our education in Christianity is not only avoiding temptation but also learning the many ways that God can and does deliver us from it, as well as help guard us against those, Peter warns, who will “secretly bring in destructive heresies” (*2 Pet. 2:1, NKJV*)? And, since the despising of authority is so condemned, shouldn’t our Christian education also consist of learning the right way to understand, submit, and obey “those who rule over you” (*Heb. 13:7, NKJV*)?

Though one could not say that Adam and Eve *despised* authority, in the end they chose to disobey that authority. And what made their transgression so bad was that they did it in response to a blatant contradiction of what that authority, God Himself, had told them, and who had done so for their own good, as well.

Dwell more on this question of authority, not just in the church or in the family, but in life in general. Why is authority, both the proper exercise of authority and the proper submission to it, so important? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.

Further Thought: “The holy pair were not only children under the fatherly care of God but students receiving instruction from the all-wise Creator. They were visited by angels, and were granted communion with their Maker, with no obscuring veil between. They were full of the vigor imparted by the tree of life, and their intellectual power was but little less than that of the angels. The mysteries of the visible universe—‘the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge’ (*Job 37:16*)—afforded them an exhaustless source of instruction and delight. The laws and operations of nature, which have engaged men’s study for six thousand years, were opened to their minds by the infinite Framer and Upholder of all. They held converse with leaf and flower and tree, gathering from each the secrets of its life. With every living creature, from the mighty leviathan that playeth among the waters to the insect mote that floats in the sunbeam, Adam was familiar. He had given to each its name, and he was acquainted with the nature and habits of all. God’s glory in the heavens, the innumerable worlds in their orderly revolutions, ‘the balancings of the clouds,’ the mysteries of light and sound, of day and night—all were open to the study of our first parents. On every leaf of the forest or stone of the mountains, in every shining star, in earth and air and sky, God’s name was written. The order and harmony of creation spoke to them of infinite wisdom and power. They were ever discovering some attraction that filled their hearts with deeper love and called forth fresh expressions of gratitude.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 50, 51.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 If God originally intended for school/work to be an opportunity for humans to encounter Him and His creation, are we still in keeping with God’s intention in our work today? How can we become better acquainted with God through our work (paid, educational, voluntary, ministerial, etc.)?
- 2 When we consider the craftiness of Satan in the Garden of Eden, it is easy to become frustrated with our own human weakness. Adam and Eve knew God was close, and yet they accepted the serpent’s half-truth. How can we, who are removed from such close physical proximity to God, still find power from Him to help us to overcome temptation?
- 3 Discuss the question of authority and why it is so important to obey that authority. What happens when the lines of authority become blurred? How can authority be abused, and how do we respond when it is?

Helping a Distressed Priest

By GABRIEL GOLEA

The Romanian priest came to me with a problem.

“Can you convince the commission members that I have a good job and a good level of education so I can start my doctoral studies?” he asked.

The priest had enrolled to study theology at the University of Strasbourg in France, but the doctoral commission had decided that he first needed to repeat a year of undergraduate studies. I was a second-year doctoral student, and he and I struck up a friendship when we realized that we both were from Romania.

“Do you believe in God?” I asked the priest, smiling.

He was shocked. “Of course, I do!” he said.

“Do you believe in the power of prayer?” I said.

“I believe that God can do miracles,” the priest said.

“I’m not talking about a ritual or some other religious ceremony,” I said. “God can answer our prayers if we pray directly to Him.”

Several days later, I invited the priest to pray with me. “Before I ask the professors, we should make this a matter of prayer,” I said. The priest agreed.

I decided not to try to convince the professors to change the rules for the priest but instead to show them that Romania’s education system met French standards. I met with each of the seven professors who sat on the commission. Each promised to review the matter at the next commission meeting. The professors ended up testing the priest’s knowledge in a special interview and accepting him into the doctoral program. We thanked God for the miracle!

Our friendship flourished over the next two years. The priest often visited my home to talk, eat, and worship with my family. But during his third year, the priest announced that he would leave the program. “I have a new job,” he said. “I have been appointed as Romania’s secretary of state for religious affairs.”

He had become the Romanian government’s top religion official.

You never know the far-reaching influence of your words and actions.

Upon hearing that a priest had taken office, some Adventists in Romania feared restrictions on religious freedom, especially against members of smaller religious denominations like the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But no crack-down materialized. In fact, the priest turned government minister was exceedingly fair and objective with people of all faiths.



After he settled into his job, I jokingly asked to visit his office for a photo. “I want to show my children that I know someone famous,” I said.

He laughed. “Come anytime you want,” he said.

We remain friends to this day.

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Part I: Overview

In the beginning, there were no schools or universities. But even without books, lecture halls, or internet-saturated electronics, knowledge—rich with wisdom and virtue—was still communicated. Through an irrigating mist (*Gen. 2:6*), one can just discern the form of God, a garden classroom, and two fresh clay pupils, recently animated by His life-giving breath (*Gen. 2:7*). One doesn't often think of the Garden of Eden as a classroom in which God sits as Instructor, but this week's lesson guides us in that direction.

Two layers of instruction emerge from the beginning of Genesis. First, Genesis permits us to walk in Adam's and Eve's sandals (or, rather, in the prints of their bare feet) and listen in on the master classes that God likely held on the history of Creation, the purpose and responsibilities of the human family (*Gen. 1:26–28*), lessons from nature, meditations on marriage (*Gen. 2:18*), and warnings about an enemy and the forbidden tree (*Gen. 2:17*). Second, we can learn from the Genesis narrative as we would from a textbook. Insights into the nature of the serpent's temptation, consequences of distrust and disobedience, God's character challenged and vindicated, and the provisions for salvation emerge as themes for instruction and contemplation.

Knowing the historical foundations of any branch of academia always brings greater perspective and nuanced understanding. Just as there is no substitute for knowing Euclid's axioms in studying geometry, understanding the initial chapters of Genesis is essential for comprehending the rest of the Bible and the full story of Redemption.

Part II: Commentary

Innocence Versus Cunning

In Genesis 3, the opening description of the serpent as “shrewd,” “crafty,” and “subtil” (*NET, ESV, KJV*) highlights an important contrast between the snake and the *adam* and his *ishsha*, the man and his wife. The Hebrew word translated “shrewd” (*'arum*) contains the same consonantal root and similar vowel sounds as the Hebrew word translated “naked” (*'arom*), which is used to describe the condition of Adam and Eve in the previous verse. When reading the Hebrew aloud, this *'arom/'arum* is spoken virtually back-to-back and alerts the reader that a

word play (*paronomasia*) is in use. We are about to see an innocent Eve step into the arena of a seasoned, cunning deceiver. She and Adam eat the fruit, and nothing has been the same since.

But how did the serpent do it? How was he able to leverage 26 words to cause a sinless being, completely content and cared for, to rebel against a God whose essence is pure love (*1 John 4:8*)? Whatever the serpent did, it was effective. By a careful dissection of the conversation between the serpent and Eve, you as the teacher can show just how shrewd Satan's strategy was—and how effective it still is, millennia later.

The School of Eden and the Test of Obedience

Eden was not simply a garden; it was an education:

“The system of education instituted at the beginning of the world was to be a model for man throughout all aftertime. As an illustration of its principles a model school was established in Eden, the home of our first parents. The Garden of Eden was the schoolroom, nature was the lesson book, the Creator Himself was the Instructor.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 20.

But the continuance of Adam's and Eve's education was conditional upon their unswerving loyalty to all the precepts and commands of their divine Teacher. “So long as they remained loyal to the divine law, their capacity to know, to enjoy, and to love would continually increase. They would be constantly gaining new treasures of knowledge, discovering fresh springs of happiness, and obtaining clearer and yet clearer conceptions of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 51.

Thus, to ensure their loyalty, God would test their obedience. “Like the angels, the dwellers in Eden had been placed upon probation; their happy estate could be retained only on condition of fidelity to the Creator's law. They could obey and live, or disobey and perish. God had made them the recipients of rich blessings; but should they disregard His will, He who spared not the angels that sinned, could not spare them; transgression would forfeit His gifts and bring upon them misery and ruin.”—Page 53.

The final exam involved a tree and a prohibition. “In the midst of the garden, near the tree of life, stood the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This tree was especially designed of God to be the pledge of their obedience, faith, and love to Him. Of this tree the Lord commanded our first parents not to eat, neither to touch it, lest they die. He told them that they might freely eat of all the trees in the garden except one, but if they ate of that tree they should surely die.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 24.

God did more than simply instruct Adam and Eve not to touch or taste the fruit. He sent angels to give the pair additional instruction, telling them that they would be stronger together against temptation than apart. “The angels had cautioned Eve to beware of separating herself from her husband while occupied in their daily labor in the garden; with him she would be in less danger from temptation than if she were alone. But absorbed in her pleasing task, she unconsciously wandered from his side. On perceiving that she was alone, she felt an apprehension of danger, but dismissed her fears, deciding that she had sufficient wisdom and strength to discern evil and to withstand it. Unmindful of the angels’ caution, she soon found herself gazing with mingled curiosity and admiration upon the forbidden tree.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 53, 54.

Eve does not subordinate her curiosity to the cautionary instruction of her angel instructors, and to God, her Master Teacher. “Eve found herself gazing with mingled curiosity and admiration upon the fruit of the forbidden tree. She saw it was very lovely, and was reasoning with herself why God had so decidedly prohibited their eating or touching it. Now was Satan’s opportunity. He addressed her as though he was able to divine her thought: ‘Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 32.

The serpent’s opening question is the wedge that will eventually erode Eve’s worldview and undermine much of what she had been taught to cherish and had held to be true. “To the tempter’s ensnaring question she replied: ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.’

“By partaking of this tree, he declared, they would attain to a more exalted sphere of existence and enter a broader field of knowledge. He himself had eaten of the forbidden fruit, and as a result had acquired the power of speech. And he insinuated that the Lord jealously desired to withhold it from them, lest they should be exalted to equality with Himself. It was because of its wonderful properties, imparting wisdom and power, that He had prohibited them from tasting or even touching it.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 54.

This narrative showcases an education in worldviews. Eve’s worldview before the Fall was grounded in the knowledge of a Creator God who abundantly provided for His creation, motivated only by unselfish love. The forbidden tree stood as a test and a symbol that Adam

and Eve, though free, were not to live autonomously apart from the God who made them. But the serpent inscribed a different picture on the impressionable and innocent Eve. Using the same data all around them, he reinterpreted the dynamics of the garden in a way that painted God as (1) maximally restrictive of that which is good, (2) threatened by those who partake of the knowledge-imparting powers of the forbidden tree, and (3) misinformed/deceptive as to the lethal consequences of the tree. One would be compelled to doubt the love of such a God. Once love is undermined, then the person questions the reliability of God's words, and it is a short step from there to reject His authority. Adam and Eve did this, and we have all followed suit. It is the mission of Seventh-day Adventist education to reverse this initial twisting of God's character in the minds of His creation and to replace it with the truth of who God is. Being created as God's image bearers uniquely fits us for this task.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. The trio of shame, nakedness, and fear comprises a key motif in the temptation narrative. Nakedness and the absence of shame are the introductory descriptions of the first human pair before they succumb to temptation (*Gen. 2:25*). Realization of their nakedness and implied shame are the first results of disobedience (*Gen. 3:7*). Again, it is fear and shame that cause them to hide when they hear the voice of Adonai Elohim, the LORD God (*Gen. 3:9, 10*). The Lord even inquires as to how they know they are naked (*Gen. 3:11*). There is no use of the Hebrew words for *sin*, *rebellion*, or *iniquity* in the narrative. Why do you think that is? In what ways are shame and fear fundamental to humanity? How does knowing God and His salvation address these issues?**

2. People still see the Christian God as restrictive. How often have we heard, “What’s wrong with doing” this or that? What is the most effective way to dispel this millennia-old smear on the reputation of God? One strategy is to show that God still restricts only one thing from His creation: sin. The fact that the one tree bears a thousand different fruits doesn’t mean that God restricts us from a thousand different things.

Notes


