

1

A Tale of Two Sinners

Adam and Eve



Genesis 3:11-12

Adam and Eve are called ‘our first parents’. We certainly take after them, in many respects.

Their initial state was truly heaven on earth, in the paradise of Eden. They had one another, and they walked with God in the cool of the evening.

Then came the serpent, intent on spoiling everything. They were off guard and listened to his clever voice – twisting the truth to raise doubt in their minds as to God’s goodwill towards them. And at that instant they were lost.

The first symptom was an uneasiness and concealment from God. When He challenged them, they began the blame game, with Adam taking the lead. Then God pronounced judgment. They were to be driven from Eden. Adam was to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, Eve was to suffer pain in childbirth, and both were to return to the dust whence they came. A promise was given, however, that one of their offspring would take revenge on the serpent.

So they comforted each other by raising a family. But they lost a son to fratricide, and another to exile and alienation. Then Eve had a third son, whom she named Seth, meaning ‘granted’, which reinforces our belief that Adam and Eve remained faithful worshippers of God, after their fatal lapse.

We do not know how long Eve lived. She certainly had other sons and daughters. Adam lived on for another 800 years, and then, we are told, he died – fulfilling God’s sentence passed many centuries before.

2

A Tale of Two Brothers (1)

Cain and Abel



Genesis 4:9

This pair constitute the first family in sacred history, and also the first conflict. It is a sad outcome of the eating of the forbidden fruit and the evil that inevitably followed from that.

Cain was the firstborn and presumably well instructed by his parents in the fear of God, with whom they had a real, if distant, relationship. He would know the essentials of worship and making an offering. When Abel was born and came to make his offering, it is clear that it was not a live animal but one that had been killed in order to be sacrificed. Cain's offering was of grain and therefore not in the same order of significance or quality. It therefore seems not to have been the kind of sacrifice that God required. And while the core of sacrifice lay not in the thing itself but in the heart-attitude of the worshipper which it betokened, it seems that God, in not accepting Cain's

offering, was rejecting his whole approach to divine worship.

Cain at once recognised the futility of his offering, but instead of mending his ways, as God encouraged him to do, he moved immediately into resentment and jealousy of his brother. There is no evidence of a quarrel, but every indication of a hot-blooded murder.

Events after that took a bewildering course. First of all, Cain snapped his fingers at the all-seeing God, showing no shame at his crime as his parents had done. Then God, while exposing the awfulness of his deed, did not call down a thunderbolt on the miscreant but sentenced him to a lesser punishment. Third, when Cain whined and grumbled under this lesser punishment, God appeared to relent and grant him a measure of protection which enabled him to survive and found a dynasty. Meanwhile, we read, the blood of Abel continued to cry out for vengeance, which it did not get.

What do we make of all this? First, that the ways of God are past finding out. Next, that God is merciful and patient, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Third, that God values the creative arts, in which some of Cain's family excelled. And fourthly, that God will work His will in some way that He has planned, in this case through the Sethite clan, which was the ancestor of Abraham and, ultimately, of Jesus.

3

A TALE OF TWO SHEPHERDS

ABRAHAM AND LOT



Genesis 13:11-12

This pair were pastoralists, with large flocks grazing in the arid Negev of Palestine. They had emigrated in a family group from Ur in southern Iraq, first to Haran in NW Iraq, where most of the clan settled, then on to Palestine. Abraham was Lot's uncle, and guardian, because his father had died. Abraham was getting on in years, prosperous but childless. Lot was as yet unmarried.

Grazing land was short at the time, and quarrels began to break out between the two sets of herdsmen. Abraham, a man of peace, suggested to Lot that the two go off in different directions. Magnanimously, he left the choice to his nephew. Lot looked to the east, down into the Jordan valley and the Salt Sea, which appeared greener and more fertile. Abraham remained on the high plateau.

Lot pitched his tent near Sodom, a large town on the plain, which had a bad reputation. He became involved in the affairs of the town, although the townsmen were

not too friendly. Trouble was brewing for the town, because along with other towns in the Jordan valley, Sodom had rebelled against paying tribute to the king of Elam, their overlord. There was a battle, which the valley towns lost, and the Elamites plundered and carried off everything they could lay their hands on, including Lot and his household.

When Abraham heard of this, he acted at once. Mustering his family servants and securing the help of friendly neighbours, he marched northward into Syria, overtook the raiders and recovered a large amount of plunder as well as the prisoners. The king of Sodom in gratitude invited Abraham to keep the plunder, but he refused, not wishing to be beholden to Sodom in any way.

One day Abraham had visitors. Three travellers approached his tent and, in the tradition of eastern hospitality, he invited them in. They accepted, although they appeared anxious to move on. After the meal, Abraham accompanied them on their way for a while, and one of the three seemed to want to talk with him. He had grim news for Abraham. He was a divine person, and informed him that his errand was to check up on the wickedness of Sodom, which had become notorious. Abraham at once feared for the fate of Lot if judgment were to fall on the town. He reasoned with his visitor about the justice of a wholesale destruction, 'sweeping away the righteous along with the wicked', and secured a promise that if as few as ten righteous were found Sodom would be spared.

The other two travellers (who were angels) carried on into Sodom, where they were not offered hospitality until Lot took them in. This did not

please the other inhabitants, who threatened sexual violence against the travellers. Lot tried to defend them by offering to give his own daughters to the mob. The angels then ordered Lot to leave the town, taking with him whoever wished to escape destruction. No one was interested, and even Lot and his wife and daughters had to be dragged out of the town by the angels. As they neared a place of safety, a huge volcanic eruption began, wiping Sodom from the map. Lot's wife, evidently hanging back, was overtaken by the volcanic debris and was turned into a 'pillar of salt'.

When Abraham, from the heights above, surveyed the scene the next morning, all he could see was smoke rising from the plain like the smoke of a furnace. He would have trembled for Lot who, although his life was saved, was undone by the conduct of his daughters. They had brought out from the devastation nothing but the morals of Sodom. Lot himself, we are assured from Scripture, was a redeemed soul. But he must have recognised with bitterness the evil consequences of his selfish choice made long before.