



### “Mankind requires salvation.”

This may be the most controlling of all “The Most Insidious Lies,” as it takes all power away from the individual and gives it to the church/priest. Essentially, it says that all people were born defective in the eyes of their Creator, and there is nothing they can do on their own to make up for their deficiencies, except to beg forgiveness and do whatever their religion dictates.

Even though it is preposterous on its surface, this lie is so ingrained in our society that its negative influence has continued unabated for many millennia.

The text below should shed some light on the origins of “original sin.”

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Every culture has a creation myth, except the Judeo-Christian culture ... it has two creation myths. The earliest is told in Genesis 2 through 4. The other was picked up later and tacked on to the front of the Old Testament, as Genesis 1.

Some claim, and the ignorant sometimes believe, that the two stories can be reconciled one to the other, but that is impossible. Consider that in the first account God made the animals before he made humans (both male and female simultaneously), [Gen 1:24-27] while in the second account God is said to have made man (male only) first, then the animals, and then woman. [Gen 2:7, 19-22]

Both stories contain many outrages to astronomy, biology, and common sense. Nevertheless, the story of Eden in Genesis 2 and 3 is critical to the theme of this book because it provides the basis for what, in later philosophies, would be called “original sin,” and original sin is indispensable to politicians, for without it we mortals would not be in need of salvation.

Of course, you've known this story since you were a child: Adam and Eve, the only two people on earth, are living in a beautiful garden that God had planted for them in Eden. Satan lies to Eve and gets her to disobey God by eating an apple and sharing it with Adam; God retaliates by kicking them both out of the garden, thus

revoking their immortality and introducing pain, suffering, and death into the world. Right?

Well, sort of right. Let's go over it again, just to clear up a few misconceptions.

After God has made woman and placed her in the garden with man, we are told that “the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” To many people today—certainly to the millions of practicing nudists—this seems a pretty silly statement; why should they be ashamed? But to the ancient Jews who wrote this account, being seen naked was a terrible violation. This is evident in their numerous and strict laws on the subject and is vividly illustrated in the reaction of Noah when he realizes that his adult son has seen him naked. These nomadic people lived in tents with little privacy and nothing between them and the vast deserts but their robes, being naked meant being uncivilized—no better than animals. Therefore, to state that the first humans were not ashamed of being seen naked was the strongest possible way for a Jewish writer to emphasize that the first people on Earth were completely uncivilized, like animals, with no sense of right and wrong.

Next, we are introduced to the serpent, a symbol of wisdom throughout many cultures. Note, that there is no reference to an evil entity; Satan was not invented by the Jews until relatively recent times. (If there were terrible things

to be done, God was perfectly capable of handling the job Himself.)

The serpent asks the woman if God has told her not to eat of any of the trees in the garden. She replies that God told her not to eat of the tree in the middle of the garden, "lest you die." (Another note: the word "apple" does not appear anywhere in the story.) The serpent replies: "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The serpent has gotten a lot of bad press for making this statement, and perhaps he deserves some of it, but, in fact, everything he said was true! Neither the man nor the woman died, their eyes were opened, and they did come to know good and evil.

God becomes very angry when He finds out about this infraction and He hands out curses all around. The serpent must thereafter crawl on its belly and eat dust. God says He will "greatly multiply" the woman's pain in childbirth. And He tells the man that he will have to work for a living "until you return to the ground."

And then God says, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" [Gen 3:22] He sends Adam and Eve out of the garden. Note here, that there is no indication that Adam and Eve were going to live forever in the garden (and lost their immortality when they got kicked out). In fact, it seems that they were forced to leave precisely to prevent them from becoming immortal (by eating from the tree of life).

There is much high strangeness in this story. What kind of God can't see the man and woman hiding in the garden and has to call out "Where are you?"? How could the pain of childbirth be multiplied when it hadn't been experienced up to that moment? And, most strange, indeed, what is meant by the phrase "become like one of us"? This is carrying the "editorial we" or the

"royal we" much too far. Clearly, the reader is to understand that God is speaking to His peers, whoever they might be.

As interesting as such puzzles are, the over-riding question is: What does it mean to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

Many people, especially puritanical preachers, have muddied the issue with references to sexuality. This is understandable; if you can't (or don't want to) explain something, just imply that it involves sex and most people won't question you any further on the subject.

But sex is never mentioned in the story. Neither is lust. Or even love. There is no talk about bodily functions or emotional urges at all.

In essence, the story of the Garden of Eden is saying that when humans learn to distinguish between good and evil (that is, when they gain the mental capacity to foresee and evaluate the future impact of their actions), they lose their ability to live as the animals do, free of responsibility, duty, and the burdensome knowledge of their own mortality. In other words, wisdom brings painful awareness of vulnerability (i.e. nakedness) and of death.

Once upon a time, we lived in paradise, blissfully unaware of moral choices, ethical dilemmas, free radicals, and cholesterol. Then we got bitten by the wisdom snake, and we opened our eyes to see the often-troubling consequences of our actions, so we started worrying, and we stopped smelling the roses, and went out to work for our bread.

And what of the pain of childbirth? There is a direct physical link here. Wisdom requires more developed brains, which necessitate larger heads, which stretch the birth canal beyond its design specifications.

Some say this world of trouble is an illusion, caused by our hysterical reaction to the serpent's venomous view of things. Maybe we can achieve paradise once again; maybe we can't. But the point to remember is that the story of the Garden

does *not* talk about a “fall of man” or about “original sin”; the politicians didn’t think of that concept until centuries later.

Without a generalized, inherent sin, mankind is in no need of universal salvation. It may

well be that we can improve our heavenly lot by following the teaching of this or that master; but Adam and Eve’s legacy does not burden us with the need to be “saved,” by Jesus or anyone else.

## A Sumer Garden

Some 4,000 years ago, civilization sprang up in Sumer, on the plains where the Euphrates and Tigris rivers meet in what is now Iraq. Seemingly from nowhere, great cities appeared with the first known planned streets, irrigation systems, and lush public gardens. When the Sumerians lost their cities to the Akkadians 500 years later, they must have lamented the loss of their glorious gardens on the plain.

In the Sumerian language, the word for "plain" was "eden."

When the Jews of 900 B.C.E. speculated about the origin of mankind ("adam" is Hebrew for "mankind") they wrote that it occurred about 3,000 years previously in a "garden eastward in Eden." In other words, about 600 miles due east of Jerusalem on the plains of Sumer.

Coincidentally, the word "eden" also happens to be a Hebrew word that means "delight."

So, the birthplace of civilized man naturally came to be thought of as a "garden of delight."

— adapted from *Asimov's Guide to the Bible*, pp 21-30.

## Strange Serpent

What, do you suppose, did the serpent look like *before* it was cursed to crawl on its belly? Did it have legs like a lizard? Wings, like a dragon?

Noting the serpent's wisdom and its ability to talk, some claim that its image is based on a tribal memory of reptilian extra-terrestrials who first brought wisdom to primitive man. If several modern authors are to be believed, these beings are still visiting Earth rather frequently, perhaps to check up on their "children." An outrageous idea, but not any stranger that many of the stories in the Bible.

We'll try to keep an open mind.

