

Takers

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

1st in a four-week study

October 22, 2017

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Genesis 3:1–9 (CEB)

The snake was the most intelligent of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say that you shouldn’t eat from any tree in the garden?”

²The woman said to the snake, “We may eat the fruit of the garden’s trees ³but not the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. God said, ‘Don’t eat from it, and don’t touch it, or you will die.’”

⁴The snake said to the woman, “You won’t die! ⁵God knows that on the day you eat from it , you will see clearly and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶The woman saw that the tree was beautiful with delicious food and that the tree would provide wisdom, so she took some of its fruit and ate it, and also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then they both saw clearly and knew that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made garments for themselves.

⁸During that day’s cool evening breeze, they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God in the middle of the garden’s trees. ⁹The LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”

1 Samuel 15:1–3, 7–9 (CEB)

Samuel said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel. Listen now to the LORD’s words! ³So go! Attack the Amalekites; put everything that belongs to them under the ban. Spare no one.”

⁷Then Saul attacked the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is near Egypt. . . . ⁹Saul and the troops spared Agag along with the best sheep, cattle, fattened calves, lambs, and everything of value. They weren’t willing to put them under the ban; but anything that was despised or of no value they placed under the ban.

Acts 5:1–4 (CEB)

However, a man named Ananias, along with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property.

²With his wife’s knowledge, he withheld some of the proceeds from the sale. He brought the rest and placed it in the care and under the authority of the apostles. ³Peter asked, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has influenced you to lie to the Holy Spirit by withholding some of the proceeds from the sale of your land? ⁴Wasn’t that property yours to keep? After you sold it, wasn’t the money yours to do with whatever you wanted? What made you think of such a thing? You haven’t lied to other people but to God!”

Givers or takers? Our choice.

It all started out so well.

God creates everything there is – yes, everything. And God pronounces it all *good*. All of it. Every corner, every last bit and particle – good. And of all the creatures that God creates, one creature is made in God’s image – the humans. And God gives the humans the responsibility for God’s good creation (Gen 1:26).

This good God then creates a beautiful place for the humans, where they can live and work and love. In beautifully evocative imagery, we’re told that God comes to walk with them in the evenings. There is even a tree in the garden from which the humans will eat so they will live in eternity with God. The humans are free to enjoy God, one another, and this garden with one exception. There is one tree from which they are not to eat. If they do, God tells them, they will die, not live.

And then it turned bad . . . very bad.

One thing. There is just one thing that the humans are supposed to leave untouched. But they can't. A serpent approaches Eve and tells her what she most wants to hear, that by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she can know what God knows; i.e., she can be like a god herself. Who among us could resist such a promise? So Eve *takes* the forbidden fruit, eats it, then Adam does the same . . . and it all plunges into ruin.

Adam and Eve ("humanity" and "life" in the Hebrew) are given a garden of delight in which to live, work, and thrive but they insist upon *taking* the one thing not given them by their Maker.

Torn apart

This act of rebellion, doing the one thing God asked them not to do, tears everything apart, beginning with the humans' relationship with God. They have defied God, refusing to do as their Maker had instructed. It is a bit like a child who defies their parent; such defiance has been known to wreck many a familial relationship. Adam and Eve don't trust God, it is as simple and as tragic as that.

It is impossible to overstate the significance of their rebellion and the consequences. First, their own relationship with God is wrecked. When God comes to walk with them in the evening, Adam and Eve even hide from God. All the rest of the Bible is the story of God's work to put things right, to reconcile the humans to himself, to put back together what was torn apart in the Garden.

But that isn't all. Adam and Eve are quickly at each other's throats, each ready to blame the other for their sinful choice. Further, Eve is told that her husband will "rule over her." This is not how God intended things to be nor was it God's hope for husband and wife. Such "ruling" is another corner of the darkness brought on by human defiance of God. And in a profoundly sad capstone to all this, the humans are told that they must leave the garden and, hence, will die.

After Adam and Eve are forced to leave the Garden, they begin to have children. And in the space of only a few verses, one brother, Cain, is overcome by anger and *takes* the life of his brother, just as their parents took from God what was not theirs to take.

The Truth about Sin

If Christians are anything, we are realists. Rose-colored glasses have no place in our pockets. Sin is real and its presence explains a great deal about ourselves and our world. The problem when we begin to talk about sin is that it is commonly misunderstood.

We tend to think of sin only as the breaking of a rule, as if we might look back over our day and count the sins we committed. But this is not the best way to go about understanding sin.

Sin is whatever separates us from God. Sin is whatever diminishes the image of God in us all. Sin is whatever keeps us from functioning as God intended. Sin is our brokenness . . . and we are all broken . . . and we are often too blind to even know it.

Adam and Eve, giving in to their pride and desiring to be like gods themselves, chose to follow their own way rather than God's way. And the result was that when God came to walk with them in the evening, Adam actually hid from God. The biblical story is about God's work to put back together what was torn apart that day in the garden.

In the biblical worldview, Adam and Eve's choice is still with us. They ran from God, causing a tragic rip in the relationship between God and humanity. It is as if their bad choice passed on to us a flaw in our moral DNA, a flaw that we cannot fully heal ourselves, but must be healed by God. It is this flaw, shared by us all, that we can call Sin.

Thus, the stain of human sin spreads further and further, and nowhere is the darkness experienced more personally than in close relationships. Esau and Jacob hate one another. Their mother connives and lies to *take* the blessing meant for Esau and give it to Jacob. Delilah *takes* Samson's strength. David, the idealized king of Israel, *takes* Bathsheba in an act of royal privilege and power. His son, Absalom, *takes* the life of his brother Amnon, who has *taken* (yes, raped) his half-sister. . . . takers one and all.

Taking becomes a fundamental manifestation of human sinfulness. Take, take, take. We try to teach our children to become givers, but we fail to heed the lessons ourselves. One of my favorite examples is from the book of Samuel, when the prophet warns the people about their wish for a human king like their neighbors have – kings are takers, Samuel tells them:

“He will *take* your sons, and will use them for his chariots and his cavalry and as runners for his chariot.¹² He will use them as his commanders of troops of one thousand and troops of fifty, or to do his plowing and his harvesting, or to make his weapons or parts for his chariots.¹³ He will *take* your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, or bakers.¹⁴ He will *take* your best fields, vineyards, and olive groves and give them to his servants.¹⁵ He will give one-tenth of your grain and your vineyards to his officials and servants.¹⁶ He will *take* your male and female servants, along with the best of your cattle and donkeys, and make them do his work.¹⁷ He will *take* one-tenth of your flocks, and then you yourselves will become his slaves!¹⁸ When that day comes, you will cry out because of the king you chose for yourselves, but on that day the LORD won’t answer you.” (1 Samuel 8:10–18, emphasis added).

But the people didn’t listen; they persisted and God relented, granting their wish. And what does Saul, the first king of the united tribes, do? He *takes* the plunder from a military victory despite God’s instruction that Saul was to destroy it all (see the 1 Samuel passage above).¹ When David, Saul’s successor, *takes* Bathsheba and then *takes* her husband’s life, the prophet Nathan tells David that he has become the *taker* that God had foreseen. . . . and indeed, haven’t we all.

Sadly, takers can be found among God’s people even after the Holy Spirit arrives on Pentecost. For in the first years after Jesus’ resurrection, the believers lived in community in Jerusalem, sharing their possessions. They would sell property and give the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. Two of the believers were a married couple, Ananias and his wife, Sapphira. They sold some property and agreed to keep some of the money for themselves. There was no problem with this, as the apostles didn’t demand that people turn over 100% of such proceeds. But when Ananias brought the money, he evidently told Peter that it was all that they had received for the property, for Peter immediately accused Ananias of lying, not only to Peter but to God, to the Holy Spirit. Ananias was perfectly in his rights to keep some of the money – but not to lie about it. Well . . . when the weight of all this fell on Ananias, he dropped dead on the spot. Then it is revealed that Sapphira too has been part of the lie. She too drops dead! These two schemers conspired to take from their fellowships by withholding their gifts and lying about it. No one was going to make them give. But Ananias and Sapphira wanted the recognition of being a generous giver but all the while holding on to all their stuff with their grubby little hands. *Takers!*

One last example. When I was a younger man and so very Christian-ish, I went to church every Sunday but never gave much. “There are others who were ready to step up,” I told myself. Looking back, I’m deeply ashamed. For, I too was a *taker*.

¹ Why does God want all the plunder to be destroyed? Perhaps so his people might learn that even though violence may be necessary in a fallen world, we are never to profit from its use. As Jesus famously said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Takers. I guess we'd all agree that for too many of us, taking comes far easier than giving. What are some occasions when you've seen a "taker" in action? When have you been a taker?
2. The Bible has seemingly countless stories of lousy, even murderous, relationships. Does it seem odd to you that God's Word has so many stories of human wreckage? Why do you think it does? What might God be trying to say to us?
3. Do you think we really accept that we must choose God's path rather than our own? Can't they just peacefully coexist? If not, why not? Can't life just be a matter of give and take? What, if anything, threatens every step we take without God?

Daily Bible Readings

This week: *More on the takers*

Monday, Genesis 4 Cain takes the life of his brother Abel.

Tuesday, Genesis 27 Rebekah and Jacob conspire to *take* the blessing meant for Esau.

Wednesday, 1 Samuel 11 David *takes* Bathsheba and the life of her husband.

Thursday, 1 Samuel 12:1-15 The prophet Nathan accuses David of being a *taker*.

Friday, 2 Samuel 13:1-22 Amnon *takes* his half-sister, Tamar.

Saturday, 2 Samuel 13:23-39 Absalom *takes* the life of Amnon.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Exodus. Next up: The gospel of John

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Samuel

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series: *The Old Testament: Sacred and Strange*