

Genesis Chapter 3 is, in my opinion, one of the most important books in the Old Testament—arguably one of the most important chapters in the bible itself. It introduces two basic themes: subduing one's instincts and the condoning of ignorance as a way into Heaven; these themes are also manifested later in the New Testament.

It begins with a serpent, a creature that is “created by God, but used by Satan.” Satan (the serpent) chooses to talk to Eve, cunningly asking her which trees are allowed to be eaten according to God. The serpent then reminds Eve that if she eats of the forbidden tree, “ye shall be like gods, knowing good and evil.”

Gen. 3:6 reads: “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also under her husband with her; and he did eat.” From here on out, humans were damned by God for their disobedience.

Gen. 3:16-17 says “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over you.” So, Eve is the reason, according to Christianity, that we have pain during childbirth. She is also the reason that men are allowed (by God) to control our thoughts and actions.

And for Adam: “And unto Adam...in sorrow thou shalt eat of [the tree of knowledge] all the days of thy life.” God goes on to punish Adam by making him work for food. Essentially, Adam has made it so that knowledge (the truth) hurts to hear, and why we must work in order to get food.

Why does this matter to secular children?

People of faith attribute earthly pain and suffering to man's unwillingness to listen to God's word; it's important to know why this is so. If only Eve wouldn't have done that! Eve has been blamed for the fall of man since the story was written, poor girl! Adam admits to knowing what Eve gave him in Gen. 3:12, and says that “he did eat.” No one ever says, “ok, well since he knew what it was, he's just as much at fault as she is! This points to the larger theme of demeaning women in the Bible (I'm working on a more thorough article that discusses misogyny in the Bible...look for it this summer).

What's more interesting to discuss with your child, however, is why God would not want man to know things. This goes contrary to everything we have learned about the human mind. From infancy, our mind is grasping for knowledge. Why is knowledge a sin?

This can be further discussed in terms of American Christians in general. There exists in the Christian faith an unabashed dislike of any information that goes contrary to the Bible. My daughter once had a boy tell her, “God put the baby in my mom's stomach and it's growing.” My daughter tried to explain that a uterus holds a baby, and that stomachs 'squish' food. His response: “God is right, and God put the baby in my mom's

stomach!” Add about 30 years, and the cute little boy is now the junior senator from Tennessee, and he’s introducing a bill that would kill any gains made by same sex couples because he’s been taught (falsely) that this is a Christian Nation and God is against same-sex marriage.

Whether it is irrefutable fact, or a logical conclusion based on what we know to be true: knowledge is easily discarded by your average Christian, young and old. Now, not ALL Christians have this reaction, but I think it is fair to say that a large number of Christians do. That can be directly traced to the punishment of Adam and Eve for the sin of wanting to know. Talking about chapter 3 of Genesis with your child might help explain why their friends refuse to hear facts and only stick to what they’ve been taught in the Bible.

As we move into Genesis Chapter 4, we meet Cain, and his brother Abel. The world’s first children, these two boys give us a story that has been repeated so many times throughout literature in various forms, that your child simply must know who these people are!

The story itself is simple: both boys came from Adam and Eve, both made offerings to God, and for some unknown reason, God didn’t like Cain’s offering. Now, any child will undoubtedly inquire: why did God not like Cain’s offering? This is good! Take some time to talk about some possible reasons—as well as that the writers of the story may have simply been trying to prove a moral point, so they didn’t consider that people might stop to think about it.

Now Cain, having been slighted by God, unleashed his ‘baser’ instinct and slew his brother Abel. Cain’s famous last words: “Am I not my brother’s keeper?” In other words, aren’t I supposed to look out for those I care about? The idea of taking care of one another was ingrained in my brother and me—and whenever we didn’t, pain ensued. This is one of those rare gems in the Bible: a motto that can be followed no matter who you are. Basically, family sticks together and that’s that.

Gen. 4:17 gives us one of the most glaring contradictions that exist in the Bible. “And Cain knew his wife...” If Adam and Eve were the only two people created by God, Cain and Abel their only children, who gave birth to Cain’s wife? This is an opportunity to discuss inconsistencies in the Bible, and why those inconsistencies lead people to question the validity of the the parables in Genesis, and to a larger degree, in the Bible itself.

In the end, freethinking children need a base level of understanding about these most basic of Bible stories. As a society heavily influenced by the Bible, children will no doubt be questioned on their knowledge of them. How will they respond?

Without this knowledge, they may be tempted to mistake a person’s religious tradition for actual fact. By spending time with your child, reading and discussing these and other

stories in the Bible, your child can adequately discuss religion with confidence. And when they come across something from the Bible that they can't adequately discuss, they can legitimately say, "I'll tell my dad about that the next time we read the Bible, or my mom said we're reading Matthew next Sunday, so I'm going to ask her about that."

Next week we'll talk about The Ark, Noah and Ham, and what we know to be true about the flood.