5 DECISIONS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

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Introduction

If you were to write an autobiography, much of your life’s story would likely include the important decisions you have made. It is remarkable how one decision, sometimes made in a matter of moments, can affect the course of one’s life. And have you ever stopped to consider how much of your life has been shaped by the decisions of others? You can undoubtedly think of how the decisions of people near to you have brought you times of joy and happiness. You can also recall seasons of sorrow you have experienced because of other people’s choices.

In this unique and exciting Bible study, you will explore five of the most significant decisions in history. However, this study is far more than lessons about world-changing events of the past; it will help you discover how these events continually impact your life today. By the time you complete this study of 5 Decisions That Changed the World, you will recognize that you have some interesting decisions of your own to make!
Lesson 1

Adam and Eve

One interesting dimension of studying the past is called alternative history, which asks how things might have unfolded if a key decision had been different. Have you ever studied the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962? Your parents or grandparents may have clear memories of it. Back in those days, tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union were a constant threat to world peace. In the fall of 1962, President John F. Kennedy was informed that nuclear missile sites were being constructed in Cuba, just ninety miles from the coast of Florida. He decided that the Soviet Union must not be permitted to make those missile sites operational, no matter what the cost. On October 22, 1962, addressing the nation on television, the president announced that America was prepared to use force to prevent the Soviet Union from basing missiles in Cuba. This crisis was perhaps the closest the world has ever come to global nuclear war. Fortunately, the Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, decided to negotiate, and war was avoided. Had Khrushchev not backed down, we can only wonder what might have been. One thing is certain: had there been a war at that time, the world would be a very different place today.

In this lesson we will consider the most disastrous and devastating decision made in the history of the human race. Every aspect of your life has been deeply affected by a choice one person made. You and everyone you know and love have been deeply affected by that choice. Every human being who has died—from the beginning of history up to the present—and everyone who will die faces death because of the decision of one man, Adam.

The first book of the Bible is called Genesis, which means “origins” or “beginnings.” The first two chapters of Genesis explain that God created all that exists.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

Like everything else in the universe, we owe our existence to God. God created the first man and named him Adam (Genesis 1:26, 27). In a wonderful manner that reveals the special place of women and the beauty of marriage, God created Eve from one of Adam’s ribs. God intended that Adam and Eve would be partners. He gave them the capacity to love one another and to share their lives together.
1. Read Genesis 2:18–25. How does verse 24 describe the relationship of a husband and wife?

2. Read Genesis 2:8 and 9. Where specifically did God place Adam?

3. Two unique trees were located in the Garden. What were they called?

4. Read Genesis 2:16 and 17. What privilege did God grant to Adam and Eve?

5. Just as God gave Adam and Eve the capacity to love, He also gave them the capacity to rule and manage the created world. According to Genesis 1:28, what did God command Adam and Eve to do?

**KEY:** It is amazing how much of human behavior that we observe today traces its origins to Genesis. The human instinct to use, control, and manage the environment reflects something about how God has designed us. This instinct, like other human behaviors, no longer operates in perfect accordance with God’s original design.

God wanted Adam and Eve to enjoy what He had provided for them. Even the job He gave them, tending the Garden, was intended to bring them fulfillment and a joyful purpose (Genesis 2:15). The human ability to experience satisfaction over a job well done originated with Adam and Eve.

6. In the middle of all the blessings and privileges God gave Adam and Eve, He issued only one prohibition or restriction. What was the one thing Adam and Eve were commanded not to do?

God gave Adam and Eve the capacity to exercise their wills and to make moral decisions, whether obedient or disobedient. The Bible does not describe the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in detail. What matters is what that tree represented. That tree gave Adam and Eve the opportunity to honor God, obey His command, and enjoy
their relationship with Him—or to dishonor God and break their relationship with Him by disobeying His command.

7. According to Genesis 2:17, what consequence had God told Adam there would be for disobedience?

NOTE: When we get to Genesis 3, we will see that Eve was fully aware of all that God had commanded Adam (Genesis 2:15–17).

Read Genesis 1:26–28. The Garden of Eden truly was a paradise. Adam and Eve had been provided with all they needed. God had created them in His image, which meant they had the ability to deeply love and enjoy one another and to live purposeful, fulfilled, content lives. Perhaps most importantly, Adam and Eve could know and enjoy God without any fear or guilt.

One decision would change the world forever.

By the end of Genesis 2 we have met God, Adam, and Eve. In Genesis 3 we are introduced to Satan, who appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent. Read Genesis 3:1–13. It is important to understand that the Bible does not teach that Satan is an evil counterpart to God. Satan is evil, but he is not God’s equal. God alone is eternal, which means He has always existed. Satan is a creature, having once been a mighty angel before he rebelled against God. Satan is real, and he seeks to oppose and disobey God by deceiving humans and influencing them to reject God’s word.

8. How does Genesis 3:1 describe Satan (the serpent)?

Satan’s ability to attack, twist, and deny God’s word ultimately led to the disaster that befell Adam, Eve, and the whole human race.

9. According to Genesis 3:1, did Satan repeat God’s command with 100 percent accuracy?

10. What subtle change did he introduce?

11. According to Genesis 3:4, how did Satan explicitly deny God’s word?
12. In Genesis 3:5, how did Satan question God’s character and goodness?

Where was Adam when Eve was being deceived by the serpent? The Bible does not give all the details, but by verse 6 Adam was fully involved, and the Bible holds Adam as ultimately responsible for the choice to disobey God. Eve disobeyed because she had been deceived. Adam’s disobedience was willful and without excuse (1 Timothy 2:14).

Satan had deceived Eve by subtly twisting God’s word, then by denying its truthfulness, and finally by openly attacking God’s character. What we must not overlook is that Eve had started down the slippery slope the moment she accepted Satan’s premise that a person (a creature) has the right to put God’s word and God’s character on trial, as though we have that kind of authority over the Creator! This is a form of rebellion and unbelief. Yet again we see that a common behavior today had its origins in Genesis.

God had warned Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die “in the day that thou eatest thereof” (Genesis 2:17). The serpent told Eve, “Ye shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). After the events of Genesis 3, Adam and Eve lived many more years. Was Satan telling the truth after all? No! The basic meaning of death in the Bible is separation. In physical death the immaterial part of a person (the soul) is separated from the body and continues to exist even though the body has died. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve did eventually experience physical death. But the Bible also speaks of spiritual death. This, too, is a separation.

13. What separation is involved in spiritual death?

Separation from God, or spiritual death, means a horribly broken relationship that leaves people condemned and cut off from God.

14. According to Genesis 3:8–10, what did Adam and Eve do when they heard God approaching?

The fear that compelled Adam and Eve to hide from God shows they had already experienced spiritual death—exactly what God had warned about. Their decision to disobey God has done more to change the world, and to change us, than any other decision in history. As descendants of Adam, we have inherited a legacy of death, both physical and spiritual.
“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12).

At this very moment your body is moving toward death because of Adam’s sin. What we sometimes find hard to admit is that we are sinners just like Adam, and have made many of the same choices he did.

NOTE: A sin is any act, thought, or word that violates God’s righteous (holy, pure, morally perfect) standards. Sin can be by commission (what we do) or by omission (what we fail to do).

15. According to Genesis 3:7, what did Adam and Eve do after they sinned?

Adam and Eve’s attempt to cover themselves represents something every one of us has personally experienced—a sense of guilt! They attempted to provide their own remedy for sin by what they made. Here is the first attempt in history of trying to solve the problem of sin and a broken relationship with God by doing something. This is the impulse behind every human religion.

16. Review Genesis 3:8–13. When questioned by God, did Adam and Eve take moral responsibility for their sin?

Sadly, we see the origins of yet another deeply ingrained human behavior—shifting the blame for our actions to others. Adam managed to blame both God and Eve with his first five words: “The woman whom thou gavest.” What Adam said was factually true, but he was dodging his own responsibility. Eve needed only two words to shift the blame: “the serpent.”

17. Have you ever shifted the responsibility for your sin to someone else?

Read Genesis 3:14–19. God is too just and holy to ignore sin. He can’t sweep it under a rug and pretend it never happened, and He is not fooled by our blame shifting. God pronounced the penalty for sin. The curse that resulted from sin is the reason people die today; why there are diseases, famines, natural disasters, broken hearts, and ruined families. God is not the source of suffering and evil; human sin (Adam’s and ours) is to blame.
But Genesis 3 includes good news!

When God cursed the serpent (Satan) in Genesis 3:15, He promised that someday a Child would be born (Eve’s “seed”) who would crush the serpent’s head. This promise was fulfilled thousands of years later when Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins and then rose alive from the grave. We will learn more about this in lessons 2–5.

18. Read Genesis 3:21. With what did God cover Adam and Eve?

It is important to understand that God provided something innocent to die so that Adam and Eve could be covered. The animal skins were a picture of the death Jesus would someday experience in our place. God never even acknowledged the coverings Adam and Eve had made for themselves. The key to having our sins forgiven and to being restored to God is not in what we do, but in what God has done! Each of us must decide how we will respond to what Jesus has done. If you want to know how this choice can change your life, please turn to “The Gospel” on page 40.

**MEMORIZE:** “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

**TOMORROW:** Abraham and Isaac