

## ***Meeting Eve for the First Time***

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT  
August 10, 2025 – A Sermon for Sunday Morning Worship  
Text: Genesis 1:27 & 2:18, 21-24

As we begin our exploration of the women in the Bible, there is no one else with which to begin than Eve. In a very real way, she is the foundation of everyone and everything else that comes after her in the Scriptures – a pretty remarkable feat for a woman who is a mythical character. Eve looms large, especially in the Christian tradition where she is perpetually branded as the purveyor of original sin – the woman who gave into temptation put to her by a snake dangling in front of her the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had told Adam not to touch the fruit of that one tree but the serpent told Eve it would be okay. She would just gain the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 3:6 describes what happened:

*“So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked ...”*

Here we have the basics of Eve’s story. It’s simple and straight forward, or so it would seem. But is it, really? No. Just no.

I should clarify here that there are literally thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of pages about Eve in theological treatises and biblical scholarship in both Christianity and Judaism, conservative and progressive, evangelical and orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. In fact, there is so much information on Eve available for study that the real challenge is distilling it down to accessible information for folks who don’t have or want advanced degrees in theology or biblical studies. But this morning, we are going to give it a try. As a student and biblical scholar whose training is in the feminist and liberationist lenses for study, I also need to be aware, and to make you aware, of how thousands of years of patriarchal bias is implicit in so much of this scholarly work on Eve. What do I mean by that and why does it matter? Well, explained simply, it means that we need to bring what is called a “hermeneutic of suspicion” to every commentary or description we read about Eve because the male hegemonical bias is invisibly dominant in all of it. Put another way, we have to question every account we read about Eve, being careful to look for male bias that is so subtle

we don't even see it. But it's there and it therefore impacts how the information – in this case about Eve – is presented.

An example. I always check with Wikipedia for information on any topic I preach on because it usually provides basic background and important details in a summary form. When I went to do this on Eve, I found I couldn't search just for Eve. At least not on Google which would only let me search for *Adam and Eve*. The Microsoft search engine would show me a link to the Wikipedia listing for Eve, but it was not the first or even the second option. It was the 8<sup>th</sup>. Additionally, once I got to Eve's page on Wikipedia, the etymology section – the first section to come up after the introduction – spends a lot of time talking about the ancient linguistic roots of Eve's name being tied to the word for snake in whatever language. Really? That's what's important about her name? How it connects to snakes?

But the linguistic maneuvering around Eve's identity in the Wikipedia paragraphs doesn't end there. To its credit, Wikipedia does acknowledge that there are two separate Creation stories in Genesis and in one, Genesis 1:27, the text clearly says God created males and females *at the same time*. But Wikipedia then immediately notes that “later Jewish sources have interpreted this woman to be a different one from Eve by the name of Lilith.”<sup>1</sup> Yes, this is ONE explanation but it is in no way a prevailing interpretation that the woman created in Genesis 1 and the woman created in Genesis 2 are *two different women*. The more commonly accepted understanding held by biblical scholars of this anomaly between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 is that they are two different Creation myths being drawn from different Creation stories prevalent in the ancient cultures surrounding the Hebrew people at the time these stories were being written down. Put another way, it is two different stories about the same thing, written by different authors who had been influenced by different cultures to which they had been exposed.

I am keenly aware that this probably sounds like theological hair splitting. In a way it is, but in another way it's not. It's not because how we understand Eve – who she is and what she represents – is the foundation on which all of our understandings about how women generally are treated in the Bible is based. Simply put, Eve is depicted as inherently bad because she is a woman. She is bad because she tempted Adam to disobey God. For this, God punished her and all women for all eternity by making labor and childbirth so painful, sometimes

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eve>

even fatal. By the way, God also punished the snake by condemning it and all its progeny to slither along the earth (I guess they moved upright before?) and everyone would be afraid of them so they would never have any friends. Yikes. Adam? Adam got kicked out of Eden as his punishment. His need to work hard for everything is also seen as part of that punishment but this is more difficult to see as punishment since his role in the garden before this happened was to tend it and care for all the animals – of the land, the air and the sea. Seems like a lot of toil to me...

And yes, Eve did know what God had told Adam about not eating from the fruit of that one tree. Presumably Adam told her. But here's the thing, why did he take the fruit from her anyway? Why didn't he say something like, "Eve, what have you done!! I can't eat that! We need to find God and apologize, asking for mercy and a second chance!" But he didn't. Why? Well, once again it's inferred that Eve used her "feminine wiles" on Adam to convince him to sin too. That is nowhere in the text, by the way. It's not even implied. The text simply says "she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate." How is that her fault? Simple. It isn't. But it is a convenient and necessary way to spin this myth to make two things very clear: First that women are inherently sinful just by virtue of being women; and second, that women, and everything about them, especially their vital role in childbearing, must therefore be controlled. By men. Truly we need to understand Eve and the context from which she came if we are to understand how women are treated throughout the Scriptures and how too many conservative Christians treat women today.

The most important piece to understanding the story of Eve, the first woman of the Bible – of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Christian Scriptures and the Islamic Qur'an – is that it is not, nor was it ever intended, to be seen as historical fact. It was always intended to be read and understood as an etiology, "a narrative that explains the origin of a custom, ritual, geographical feature, name or other phenomena."<sup>2</sup> In the case of the Creation narratives in the first three chapters of Genesis, we are hearing from the ancients themselves their need to understand how the world they lived in, the lives they were living came to be as they are. They were looking for answers to basic questions like why is childbirth so painful and so dangerous when it is also so necessary? Or, why do we have to work so hard just to eke out a living? Or even, why are snakes so scary and slithery? These are basic questions these ancient people, who didn't

---

<sup>2</sup> Michal D. Coogan, *The Old Testament*. ©2011 Oxford University Press, p. 549.

have Google or electricity or anything much beyond a cave or a tent and an open fire, who lived in constant fear of crops failing or disease claiming themselves or their animals, needed answers to in order to make sense of their world.

So, they turned to the cosmos, the swirling and magnificent night sky which much surely be where God resided. They listened to the stories of other nomads they encountered and how they understood God and their own origins. They listened to their own elders as they sat around the fires talking. The knew all too well that some people were just plain evil and that didn't make sense. With all of these questions and hundreds more swirling in their brains they began to imagine their own origin stories, stories which probably started with some ancient equivalent of our word "maybe." Maybe the world as we know it came to be because God ordered it this way. Maybe childbirth is so painful because the first woman did something wrong. Maybe we have to work so hard because something went wrong with God's original plans for us. In other words, they were forming their own cosmology – their own version of how order was brought out of the chaos of the unformed universe by divine interpretation. They wanted to understand the most basic of all questions we still struggle with today – why do bad things happen to good people? Why is life so hard sometimes? How can life be so wonderful some days and awful the next? They needed answers so they turned to the divine as they were beginning to understand it.

These ancient peoples seeking to make sense of the universe through their own Creation myths gradually became the culture we now recognize as the ancient Hebrews. This we know. What we don't know, if we're not students of the Bible, is that our Creation stories contain within them the Creation myths of the other cultures which were their neighbors. We also don't fully appreciate that the Scriptures as we find them in the Bible were not originally written in the order in which our Bible presents them. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy were written down much later, probably during the Babylonian captivity in the late Bronze Age, the 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, BCE. The *Enuma Elish* is the ancient work of the Babylonian culture which is one reason why the Creation story of their god Marduk is remarkable similar to our stories of the Garden of Eden. So too are the stories of the ancient Flood associated with Noah in the Hebrew Scriptures and Gilgamesh of the Assyrian culture. The two things these stories from differing cultures all have in common is that 1) the deity, whatever people call it, is in charge of everything and always has been

since before the beginning of time; and 2) these Creation myths were always intended to be understood as myths. They were never to be taken literally.

And they never were until the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the United States when the concept of biblical fundamentalism began to take shape. Christian fundamentalism started “among British and American Protestants as a reaction to theological literalism and cultural modernism. ... [They] argued that 19<sup>th</sup> century modernist theologians had misunderstood or rejected certain doctrines, especially biblical inerrancy, which they considered”<sup>3</sup> foundational to the Christian faith. In other words, the Bible as it is written and read today is completely true, historically accurate and without error because it was the work of God accomplished through men who did the actual writing. Christian fundamentalists are alive and well in the United States today and are present in some mainline denominations as well as in more typically conservative groups like the Assemblies of God, the Free Baptists and churches with Christian Nationalist connections. There are many reasons why this is important to understand and one of the most significant is visible in the story of Eve. For people who take the Bible literally, their starting point for how they view the role of women in society begins with a view that insists women are “the daughters of Eve – inherently prone to sin.” They must therefore be carefully controlled by men so that they fulfill their God given purpose of birthing the next generation of children. This is why abortion is sin in all cases. This is why divorce is bad. This is why birth control and women’s reproductive health care is evil. This is why women should be staying at home and having more children. This is why professional women are “less than,” whether they have children or not. This is why the LGBTQIA+ community is inherently sinful because it is directly contrary to God’s stated truth that there are two genders and only two genders because the whole purpose of sex, the only purpose of sex, is procreation.

Let me clarify that I am not saying all conservative Christians hold all of these beliefs about women. I know conservative Christians who are professional women with demanding careers. As long as “family values” remain intact, this is apparently okay. The problems come in when we need to define just what “family values” means in every day life. The problem explodes when this theology is seen as a legitimate reason for the government to control women’s bodies and their access to health care, especially reproductive health care. This, dear ones, is where the way we read and understand the Bible can become

---

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_fundamentalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_fundamentalism)

dangerous if we accept the premise that the Bible is literally true, that Eve really existed, that she caused original sin to come into play for all of us. This is dangerous and, unfortunately, this is what some people in power in our government believe. Saying this is not a political statement, even though some might hear it that way. Saying this is what I must say as the rights of women and our brothers and sisters in the LGBTQIA+ community are systematically being challenged and, in some cases, ripped away.

Dear ones, understanding the Bible better is an important thing for any church to do, especially in these fraught days in our own country. It is vitally important to understand these stories of our faith and how easy it is to misuse them to conflate empowerment with disempowerment. Eve was the original empowered woman who dared to decide about the fruit for herself and was willing to pay the consequences. Eve was never the source of original sin. No one is because that human propensity to sin through arrogance and selfishness is in all of us, male, female and gender fluid. Dear ones, Eve was never the source of evil. The Bible celebrates her as the mother of all life, and a seeker after wisdom and true knowledge of God. If we let it, knowing her story and how it is being interpreted, often beneath our awareness, provides a bellwether for what a few think should be a much diminished role for women. Eve would expect us to be paying attention and to do something. Let's not disappoint her. Amen.