

## Chapter 4

### The Fall of Man

#### *The Reason For The Fall of Man*

**Table 4.1: The Early Church Fathers Understanding of the Reasons for the Fall of Man**

<b>Church Father</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Reason For The Fall</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Justin Martyr	c.100-c.165	Adam & Eve broke the first commandment by acknowledging the existence of other gods.	<i>Hortatory</i> , 21
Irenaeus of Lyons	c.115-202	Being mere children Adam and Eve were easily deceived by the Devil	<i>Heresies</i> 5.16.2; 4.40.3
Clement of Alexandria	c.150 - c.215	Lust	<i>Miscellanies</i> 3.17.103
Tertullian	c.160-c.225	Adam obtained wisdom before he was given permission to do so by God.	<i>Pallium</i> , 3
John Chrysostom	374-407	Gluttony	<i>Matthew, Homily</i> 13.2
Jerome	347-419/420	Gluttony	<i>Jovinian</i> 2.15

The early church was far from unanimous in its understanding of how the fall of man came about as Table 4.1 shows. Somewhat anachronistically Justin taught that Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise because they failed to keep the first commandment (Exodus 20:3), that is, they acknowledged the existence of other gods.(1) Irenaeus held that Adam and Eve, being mere children(2) they were not truly responsible for the fall, the blame for which is laid

at the Devil's door.(3) By claiming that it was Adam who was deceived by the serpent Irenaeus ignored the statement by the apostle Paul that it was Eve who was deceived, not Adam in 1 Timothy 2:14. He also added to the account by informing us that the angel fell when he tempted man. Adam's "disobedience is the source of the general sinfulness and mortality of mankind, as also of their enslavement to the Devil".(4) Ephrem the Syrian later rejected the idea that Adam and Eve were created as children as a pagan belief.(5) According to Clement of Alexandria, Adam fell because of lust, possibly because Adam and Eve "anticipated the time fixed by God for their marriage".(6)

Commenting on the absence of the words "and God saw that it was good" from the account of the second day of creation (Gen. 1: 6-8) Jerome took this to mean:

...that there is something not good in the number two, separating us as it does from unity, and prefiguring the marriage tie. Just as in the account of Noah's ark all the animals that enter by twos are unclean, but those of which are uneven numbers is taken are clean.(7)

What other explanation is possible, Jerome continues, given that all the Hebrew texts and Greek translations agree that the words are missing?(8) Sexual activity, if not actually the cause of the Fall, was certainly a result of it.(9) The actual cause of the Fall also receives an ascetic interpretation: it was because by gluttony!(10) In this Jerome succeeds in making the results of Adam's sin sound like the consequences of expulsion from a monastery. It need hardly be said that Jerome considered the monastic life was the ideal that God had intended for man since the beginning.

I will first point out that Adam first received a command in paradise to abstain from one tree though he might eat the other fruit. The blessedness of paradise could not be consecrated without abstinence from food. So long as he fasted, he remained in paradise; he ate, and was cast out; he was no sooner cast out than he married a wife.(11)

Taking the ascetic interpretation of the fall to an extreme John Chrysostom argued that gluttony, as evidenced by a neglect of fasting, lay behind not only the fall of Adam, but also brought about the flood and the destruction of Sodom.(12)

## *Human Death and the Fall of Adam*

**Table 4.2: The Early Church Fathers View of the Original State of Adam and Eve.†**

Church Father	Date	Was Man Mortal before the Fall?		Reference
		Yes	No	
Justin Martyr	c.100-c.165		X	<i>Dialogue</i> 124.
Tatian	110-180		X	<i>Address</i> 7.
Theophilus of Antioch	c.180	X		<i>Autolytus</i> 2.27

Irenaeus of Lyons	c.115-202		X	<i>Demonstration</i> 15
Clement of Alexandria	c.150-c.215	X		<i>Miscellanies</i> 3.9
Tertullian	c.160-c.225		X	<i>Testimony</i> 3
Methodius	d. 311		X	<i>Chastity</i> , 3.7; 9.2
Athanasius	c.300-373		X	<i>Incarnation</i> 3, 4.
Gregory of Nyssa	300-394		X	<i>Moses</i> 44.397; cf. 45.33
John Chrysostom	374-407		X	<i>Genesis</i> 8.4; 15.4; 16.6.
Theodore of Mopseustia	c.350-428	X		<i>Galatians</i> 2.15, 16.
Augustine of Hippo	354-430	X		<i>Literal</i> 8.4.8-8.5.11; 9.10.16-18; 11.18.23-24

Key: X indicates agreement with view

† F.R. Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 273-342.

Table 4.2 gives an summary of the opinions of the early church fathers regarding the original state of Adam and Eve. However, the situation is more complicated than this might indicate. By the time of Augustine there were at least three views evident in the literature of the Church:

1. **Adam was created immortal.** This was the majority view, held by Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom.
2. **Adam and Eve were created mortal and were to become immortal after a period of probation in the garden.** This view was held by Theophilus of Antioch. Augustine held to a variation of this view in which the bodies of Adam and Eve, though created mortal, were preserved from decay and lustful desires by being able to feed on the Tree of Life. Exclusion from the Tree of Life after the Fall therefore

resulted in human death. Had Adam and Eve not fallen they would have received what we know as resurrection bodies.

3. **Mortality is part of God's plan and is not a direct result of the Fall.** This view was held by Clement of Alexandria and Theodore of Mopseustia.

Inasmuch as Origen believed that the taking on of physical bodies was the result of a souls falling away from God it is not possible to fit his theology into the above classifications. Of the remainder only Clement of Alexandria and Theodore of Mopseustia held that human death was part of God's plan before the Fall. F.R. Tennant notes that by the fourth century the belief that Adam's sin was the cause of human mortality was "practically universal."<sup>(13)</sup> Although Davis A. Young presents Augustine's view, that man was created mortal, as one that modern Christians should emulate (in order to accommodate the theory of evolution),<sup>(14)</sup> on the basis of the above survey there seems to be little support for this in the writings of the other church fathers.

## *Adams' Salvation*

Jewish writers held that Adam was saved after the Fall.<sup>(15)</sup> Christian writers have little to say about the subject, except for Irenaeus of Lyons, Hippolytus and Epiphanius of Salamis. Writing about the alleged "heresies" of Tatian Irenaeus accuses him of denying that Adam was saved - a "heresy" which Tatian seems to have coined.<sup>(16)</sup> (Hippolytus and Epiphanius seem to have relied on Irenaeus for their information in making the same claims.<sup>(17)</sup>) The obvious inference from this is that the orthodox position from fairly early in the history of the Church must have been that Adam *was* saved after the fall. Otherwise Irenaeus would have been unable to class the denial of Adam's salvation as heresy because there is no direct scriptural support for either position. It may well be that this doctrine was considered important because it countered Gnostic teaching to the contrary.

## *Human Longevity*

According to Lactantius Adam lost his immortality when he disobeyed in Eden,<sup>(18)</sup> after which his life span was reduced to a thousand years. Lactantius points out that the Roman scholar Varro (116-27 BC) knew that in ancient times men were said to have lived for this span. To get around the difficulty Varro had attempted to argue that a 'year' in ancient Egypt is equal to a month in first century BC. Lactantius shows that such reasoning is flawed by means of a simple calculation. In the Scriptures men lived for over a thousand years, yet if a 'year' equals a 1st century month, then even a man who lived only 100 years lives for 1 200 months, and in Lactantius' time some men lived up to 120 years! Lactantius explains Varro's shortening of the year to a month as being because of his ignorance of the cause of man's reduced life span - namely the account of the Fall in Genesis 3.<sup>(19)</sup> Jerome also accepted that Adam lived for over 900 literal years, as did many people before the Flood.<sup>(20)</sup>

For Augustine antediluvian longevity recorded in Scripture served a useful apologetic purpose. It explained how the human population could rise so quickly.<sup>(21)</sup> He notes the

ingenious ways in which some attempted to explain away the long life spans, suggesting years of different lengths or dividing the spans by ten. No, he writes, the years were for the antediluvians the same as they are for us (the time of one revolution of the sun),(22) as are lunar months and 24 hour days.(23) Some also questioned the age at which the antediluvians were recorded as having their first child. Augustine suggests two explanations:

Either sexual development was then later, in proportion to the greater length of the whole life, or (and this, in my view, is more probable) it is not the first-born children who are mentioned here, but those needed for the order of succession to arrive at Noah.(24)

## *Cain & Abel*

Some Jewish writers held that Cain was the offspring of Eve and Satan (in the guise of the Serpent).(25) This view is described by early Christian writers as one of the teachings held by a number of sects that they regarded as heretical and utterly rejected it.(26) Today it persists still in certain occult and Satanist circles as well as amongst the followers of William Marrison Branham (1909-1965),(27) who taught it as an advanced revelation from God.(28)

## *Where Did Cain Get His Wife?*

Most of the what we consider to be the difficult texts of the Bible proved to be problems for the ancients as well. We are not the first Christians to have faced with the question of where Cain got his wife from (cf. Gen. 4:17). John Chrysostom answered the question over 1,600 years ago:

But perhaps someone will say: How is it that Cain had a wife when Sacred Scripture nowhere makes mention of another woman? Don't be surprised at this dearly beloved: it has so far given no list of women anywhere in a precise manner; instead, Sacred Scripture while avoiding superfluous details mentions the males in turn, though not even all of them, telling us about them in rather summary fashion when it says that so-and-so had sons and daughters and then he died. So it is likely in this case too that Eve gave birth to a daughter after Cain and Abel, and Cain took her for her wife. You see, since it was in the beginning and the human race had to increase from them on, it was permissible to marry their own sisters.(29)

Answering the old chestnut about how the descendants of Adam found wives he writes:

After the first sexual union between the man, created from dust, and his wife, created from the man's side, the human race needed, for its reproduction and increase, the conjunction of males and females, and the only human beings in existence were those who had been born from those two parents. Therefore, men took their sisters as wives. This was, of course, a completely decent procedure under the pressure of necessity, it became completely reprehensible in later times, when it was forbidden by religion.(30)

Although he does not mention the issue of Cain's wife specifically Methodius also notes that brother-sister marriages were permissible before the time of Moses.(31)

Commenting on Cain's city (Gen. 4:17) Augustine answers those who question how one man could achieve such a task, as, according to Scripture, only three men were alive when he

established it. The solution is straightforward: Scripture does not give a complete list of all those born.(32)

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## References

- (1) Justin, *Hortatory*, 21 (*ANF*, Vol. 1, 282-283).
- (2) "The man was a babe. He had not yet the perfect use of his faculties. Hence he was easily deceived by the seducer." Irenaeus, *Demonstration*, 12; cf. *Heresies* 3.22.4, 4.38.1-4; 4.39.1 (*ANF*, Vol. 1, 455, 521-522, 522); Theophilus of Antioch, *Autolycus* 2.2 (*ANF*, Vol. 2, 94).
- (3) Irenaeus, *Heresies* 5.16.2; 4.40.3 (*ANF*, Vol. 1, 544, 524).
- (4) J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev., 1960. (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 171.
- (5) Ephrem the Syrian, *Genesis*, 2.14.1 (Mathews, Amar & McVey, 106).
- (6) Bigg, *Christian Platonists*, 112, n.1; Stromateis 3.17.103 (*ANF*, Vol. 2, 383-385) untranslated Latin text. Cf. Philo, *Creation* 152 (C.D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo*. [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993], 21).
- (7) Jerome, *Jovinian*, 1.16; 2.15; *Letter* 22.19; 48.19; 123.12; (*NPNF*, 2nd series, Vol. 6, 360; 399; 29; 77; 234).
- (8) Jerome, *Letter*, 48.19 (*NPNF*, 2nd series, Vol. 6, 77-78).
- (9) Jerome, *Jovinian* 1.16 (*NPNF*, 2nd series, Vol. 6, 359): "And as regards Adam and Eve we must maintain that before the fall they were virgins in Paradise: but after they sinned, and were cast out of Paradise, they were immediately married."
- (10) He owed this idea to Tertullian, *Fasting*, 3 (*ANF*, Vol. 4, 103). Kelly, *Jerome*, 184.
- (11) Jerome, *Jovinian*., 2.15; cf. 1.4 (*NPNF*, 2nd series, Vol. 6, 398, 348).
- (12) John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, *Homily* 13.2 (*NPNF*, 1st series, Vol 10, 80).
- (13) F.R. Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 327.
- (14) Davis A. Young, "The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, Vol. 40 (1988): 44-45.
- (15) Ginzberg, 99-100.
- (16) Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 1.28.1 (*ANF*, Series 1, Vol. 1, 353).
- (17) Hippolytus, *Heresies* 8.9 (*ANF*, Vol. 5, 122); Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 46.2.1 [Frank Williams, Translator, "The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis," *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies*, Vol. 35. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 349.]
- (18) Lactantius, *Institutes*, 2.14 (*ANF*, Vol. 7, 62).
- (19) Lactantius, *Institutes*, 2.13 (*ANF*, Vol. 7, 62-63).
- (20) Jerome, *Letter* 10.1; 60.14 (*NPNF*, 2nd series, Vol. 6, 11,129).

- (21) Augustine, *City*, 15.9 (Bettenson, 609).
- (22) Augustine believed that the earth was stationary and that the sun and the planets orbited it.
- (23) Augustine, *City*, 15.14 (Bettenson, 618-620).
- (24) Augustine, *City*, 15.15 (Bettenson, 620); cf. also 15.20 (Bettenson, 631-632).
- (25) Ginzberg, 105.
- (26) Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 1.30.7 (*ANF*, Vol. 1, 356); Hippolytus, *Heresies* 5.21 (*ANF*, Vol. 5, 710); Epiphanius, *Heresies* 40.5.3 (Williams, 265).
- (27) George A. Mather & Larry A. Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 44.
- (28) William Branham, *Satan's Eden*, 1967. (Jefferson: Voice of God Recordings, 1990 reprint.), 18.
- (29) John Chrysostom, *Genesis*, 20.3 (Hill, 37).
- (30) Augustine, *City*, 15.16 (Bettenson, 623).
- (31) Methodius, *Chastity* 2.1 (Musurillo, 49): "Certainly, Theophila, I think that you have clearly and adequately discussed these points, working with a sure grasp on the words of the sacred text as they stand. For it is a precarious procedure to disregard utterly the actual meaning of the text as written, particularly in the book of Genesis which contains God's immutable decrees on the constitution of the universe." See also *Chastity* 3.4 (Musurillo, 61).
- (32) Augustine, *City*, 15.8 (Bettenson, 607).
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