



Eve: The First Theologian Outside the Garden

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For centuries, women have existed under the specter of "Eve's failure." Though both Adam and Eve failed in the garden, history has treated her particularly harshly. Her actions are thought to taint every female human. No matter how hard women have worked, no matter how faithful, educated, wise, intelligent, gentle, godly, or well-spoken, they will always be considered "daughters of Eve."

Accused alone, as if Adam wasn't even there, Eve is often portrayed as foolish, easily deceivable, the bringer of sin into the world, the increaser of pain in childbearing. As women's foremother, Eve's sin became viewed by many as women's generational inheritance and curse. It's time that we return to a vision of Eve that sees beyond her failure to her faith.¹

The Diminishment of Women

I was just a teenager when I asked my pastor about 1 Timothy 2:14: "And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."

"Does this mean women are more easily deceived?"

He replied, "Yes, they likely are," and used an example of how crooked salesmen specifically target older women for their schemes because "they fall for lies."

Case closed. Men are more trustworthy; women are easily deceived.

Though today I could answer my childhood pastor with a clear, articulate explanation of why his teaching was steadfastly wrong, the plight of women in our churches has unquestioningly been harmed by this view of Eve.

When Eve's failure is over-applied and her theological legacy is ignored, women are diminished.

This horrendous (yet historical) take on Eve's story only considers one moment of her life. My then-pastor and so many other theologians act as though Eve's influence ended in the garden. Few see her faith as it held fast through the most heart-wrenching event a mother can imagine.

Though Scripture treats her more honestly and graciously, scholars throughout all of church history have placed the burden for the fall of humanity on Eve's back and used her failure as an excuse to oppress women.² When Christian tradition is not blaming her for all that has gone wrong in the world, they steadfastly ignore the faith of the first mother of humanity.

Verses like 1 Timothy 2:14 are used to say that, by their very nature, *all* women are more easily deceived than men. Many preachers and teachers see Eve's actions in Genesis 3 not as a singular event by a specific person, but as an ontological truth applied to all women everywhere for all time!

This belief system creates a gender-based hierarchy where the words of men are readily believed while the voices of women are ignored. You can imagine how damaging this is, especially in cases where women are wounded and the men in power refuse to heed their words.

When Eve's failure is over-applied and her theological legacy is ignored, women are diminished. Rather than being brought close as equal image bearers and priestly representatives before God, women are cast to the side. Wounded. Silenced. Abused.

The Aloneness of Men

Women aren't the only victims. Eating the fruit in the garden brought not only spiritual and physical death, but also relational death between men and women. We were created for unity, needing the spiritual fullness and wisdom that both sexes provide. But this truth has been lost in many of our churches and in most of our world.

Unity between men and women has been home-wrecked by lies peddling the intellectual superiority of men and a male pride that refuses to listen to women's perspectives. One only needs to open any social media platform for a few minutes to find modern renditions of ancient misogyny³ weaponized against women and poisoning the hearts of men.

Now, and throughout all of history, some men silo themselves away from feminine influence. They refuse to learn from spiritual mothers and sisters. They are left with only male thoughts and voices.⁴ This is antithetical not only to the creation of humanity, but also Jesus's creation of his church (Matt. 28:5–8; Luke 1:39–45; Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 12:12–26; 14:31–39).

God declared this spiritual aloneness to be “not good,” (Gen. 2:18) then created woman specifically to partner with man in priestly duties.⁵ Men need women's voices, wisdom, and insight in their spiritual spaces. Their souls have been damaged—their wholeness fractured—by spiritual systems that ignore women.

Eve's True Legacy

Though many use the story of Eve and her failure as an excuse to deny women a voice in theological spaces, her legacy actually does the opposite.

The heart of God for women in the story of Eve is far greater than what we have collectively imagined. Contrary to the usual rendering—where Eve is the brunt of the joke, the enemy, the failure, and an easily deceived buffoon—God ends her story in Genesis 4 by showcasing her steadfast endurance and faith in the face of suffering.

The First Theologian Outside the Garden

Genesis 4 begins with Eve's faith. Adam has no recorded dialogue after the Fall; once they are expelled from the

It was not good for Adam to be alone; he needed a counterpart, a partner. He needed a theologian to point him back to God.

garden, he fades off the scene. His last registered act is impregnating his wife (Gen. 4:1); God gives the final words in their story to Eve (Gen. 4:25).

Eve. The one who answered the serpent, misquoted God, and was deceived—she is the first theologian outside the garden.⁶ In an uncertain place, surrounded by the threat of death, Eve interprets the promise of the Lord (Gen. 3:15), declaring hope for their future. She names her firstborn “Acquired” (Cain) as a recognition of the aid of the Lord on her behalf:⁷ “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man” (Gen. 4:1).

The passage goes on to outline how Cain murders Abel without remorse or concern. The two babies she bore and raised, the sons in whom she delighted: one dead, the other a murderer. As a mother, my sanctified imagination allows my body to feel just a hint of Eve’s deep sorrow.

Eve remembers their first steps, their first words, the sounds of their childlike laughter and joy. Now, one of her babies lies in a pool of his own blood.

Every mother fears something happening to their children and especially being the cause of the harm. As Eve considers the murder of her child, she has to uniquely wrestle with self-blame.

She first ate the fruit. She and Adam brought sin into the world. Together, they opened the door to death. Perhaps Eve felt that this tragedy really was her fault.

Scripture does not describe Eve’s journey through grief. We do not see her grapple with disillusionment, anger, or despair. Yet, as she walks through the pain of death, she reaches back out to God for hope.⁸

Weaving theology into her motherhood, Eve names her last recorded son “Granted” (Seth) because “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him” (Gen. 4:25). This name functions as a prayer of thanksgiving and a recognition of God’s actions.

As Jesus’s female disciples would do later, Eve heard the words of the Lord and worked out her theology accordingly. Eve’s utterances of faith echo through the chapter, opening and closing this traumatic episode with eyes lifted up to God.

Her Location Matters

Eve speaks these words as the first theologian outside the holy-of-holies of the cosmic temple of God.⁹ This location and timeline are necessary for us to consider as we evaluate Eve’s legacy. Adam named her “Eve” (Living) after God pronounced the curses on the serpent and the ground. While they were still in the garden, Adam thought about God’s actions and promises and recognized the particular part his wife would have in the future hope for humanity.

Many of us can make theologically astute observations when we are surrounded by holy things in the presence of God. Yet when life falls apart and pain is our only companion—few are able to build theology then.

However, here, outside the garden, outside the holy place, away from God’s full presence, when all seems lost and Adam is silent—Eve speaks truth and hope for the future. She clings to God’s promise and points others to do the same. Perhaps Eve’s teaching about God and her faith is why Seth and Enosh could call upon the name of the Lord in Genesis 4:26. As a woman, theologian,



and mother, Eve instigated movements of faith in the new reality of post-Fall creation as she interpreted the actions of God according to his promise.

Conclusion

Eve's story begins with glory and ends with hope (Gen. 2, 4). She was created as the final piece of God's beautiful world. She was not built to be a subservient helper, housekeeper, or incubator, but rather an equal ruler, image-bearer, voice, and presence.

Though her story ushers in the darkness that consumes all of humanity, necessitating the coming of Jesus, it ends with the same hope that we carry forth today: hope that God provides and that God is faithful. Hope that the one who crushed the serpent will come again and make all things new.

Eve's true legacy is not her failure in the garden, but her faith outside of it. Jesus's uplifting of all women began with the first woman. Though she participated with the man in bringing sin into the world, she chose to live, mourn, and hope through faith, clinging to her God.

We have an opportunity to reclaim Eve's legacy for her daughters. Eve, who failed—as we all do—yet who resolutely walked forward by faith, nurturing her family, and teaching them about her God. Women do bear her likeness. She was the first theologian outside the garden, and we today can walk in her footsteps. God is with us in all our suffering and exhaustion; As he was with Eve in her darkest moments, so he will be with us.

Notes

1. I have also written about Eve more thoroughly here: <https://wewhothirst.com/transforming-eves-legacy-in-genesis/>, and spoken about Eve's legacy here: <https://womenofthebible.buzzsprout.com/2384822/episodes/15418594-001-women-in-context-eve-genesis-2-4>.
2. Ben Sirach claimed: "From a woman was sin's beginning, and because of her, we all die" (Sir. 25:24). Tertullian said this regarding Eve, "You are the one who opened the door to the Devil. You are the one who first plucked the fruit of the forbidden tree, you are the first who deserted the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the Devil was not strong enough to attack. All too easily you destroyed the image of God, namely, man" (*Cult. fem.* 1.1). Modern writers Rebecca McLaughlin in her book *Confronting Christianity*, claim that women will be in a "power struggle" against their husbands because their desire will be "to possess and master" (134).
3. Aristotle claimed that women were ontologically inferior to men. He even went so far as to describe women as "mutilated" males.

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Whereas men are rational beings, women "lacked the capacity for true knowledge and, consequently, wisdom" (Katie McCoy, "Recovering the Communion of Persons," *eikon*, issue 2, 44–59, see Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, II.1 P732a; II.3 P25–29; IV. P15–26: IV.3 P5–24; *Politics* I.13 P7). The claim that women do not have the capacity for wisdom is a stark contrast to the book of Proverbs, where wisdom is personified as a woman.

4. Consider Augustine's words "One can also posit that the reason for her creation as helper had to do with the companionship she could provide for the man, if perhaps he got bored with his solitude. Yet for company and conversation, how much more agreeable it is for two male friends to dwell together than for a man and a woman! . . . I cannot think of any reason for woman's being made as man's helper, if we dismiss the reason of procreation. . . . Woman who was of small intelligence and who perhaps still lives more in accordance with the promptings of the inferior flesh than by the superior reason." (*Literal Commentary on Genesis*, quoted in Judy Wu Domick, "How Some of the Early Church Fathers' View of Women Affect Us Today," *Life Reconsidered*, February 12, 2020, <https://lifereconsidered.com/2020/02/12/how-some-of-the-early-church-fathers-views-on-women-affect-us-today/>).
5. See John Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* and Ingrid Faro, *Redeeming Eden* for more on the topic of the priestly duties in the garden.
6. Ingrid Faro also discusses Eve's faith and renewed legacy in her new book *Redeeming Eden*.
7. K. A. Mathews, vol. 1A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 265.
8. Jessica L.M. Jenkins, "001 Women in Context: Eve (Genesis 2-4)," in *Women of the Bible in Context: Her God, Her Story, Her Voice*, July 16, 2024, 45 min, 55 sec, <https://womenofthebible.buzzsprout.com/2384822/episodes/15418594-001-women-in-context-eve-genesis-2-4>.
9. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 127, 197; Heiser, Michael S. 2019. *Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*. S.L.: Lexham Pr. 46-47; Johnson, "Genesis 1," 190; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 104.



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