

Banishment from Eden...the Unwritten Story of What Happened Next

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The first Torah portion of the New Year is an appealing one. We have two stories about the creation of the world. The first is an orderly progression from chaos to order. The second is the one with the drama of a rib turning into person (although you'd be surprised at what that "rib" actually is), the snake and the banishment from Eden. Then we learn how Adam and Eve adjust to life outside the garden. But there's one verse that rarely gets much attention. That's what we're going to look into here.

You recall that God says, "Don't eat from the Tree." The snake suggests that the Tree's fruit might actually be good. Eve eats and then Adam does, too. God then decides to throw them out of the Garden. That's where things get interesting.

And the Lord God sent him out from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from where he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed Cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden, and a flaming sword, which turned every way, to guard the way of the tree of life. And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bore Cain, and said, I have acquired a man from the Lord.
(Genesis 3:22-4:1)

The text moves seamlessly from utter banishment, which is assured by the threatening angels and the fiery, turning sword to established domesticity. But what happened in between? The Torah is utterly silently on that score. But it seems impossible that Adam and Eve would just skip merrily along to a new, harmonious beginning, doesn't it?

So that's where our discussion questions begin.

Discussion Questions

1. How long did Adam and Eve stay there by the gate?
2. Did they try to talk to the angels or attempt to evade the fiery sword?
3. Did they mourn?
4. Did they argue?
5. Did they blame each other?
6. Did they blame themselves?
7. Did they cry out to God for another chance only to hear nothing in reply?
8. How long did it take them to come to terms with the fact that God had absolutely turned away from them?
9. Is that the point at which the Jewish people understood that some doors close forever and that it is possible to simply eliminate a problematic relationship by sending the "problem" away?
10. Does God's modus operandi of banishment show us in later biblical narratives, e.g., Abraham's banishment of Hagar and Ishmael?
11. And perhaps the most heretical question of all: how else could God have solved this problem?

As always, looking forward to your insights!