

What Went Wrong

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[0 : 00] in your pew Bible. You can turn there with me. Genesis chapter three. Let me pray for us as we come to God's word.

Oh Lord Jesus, indeed you are worthy of all blessing and honor and glory. Thank you that you have not left us, Lord, to try to search for you and to grasp for you aimlessly and in the dark.

But you've given us your sure and good word written and preserved down through the ages that we might have a clear view of you so that you might speak to us and that we might know you and give you the praise that our hearts so long to pour out to you.

So visit us in these moments as we come to the book of Genesis again and reveal yourself to us, we pray. Amen. Genesis chapter three.

Let me read verses one through thirteen for us. Now, the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

[1 : 21] he said to the woman, did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

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.

And the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, where are you? And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself.

[2 : 46] He said, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? The man said, the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree and I ate.

Then the Lord God said to the woman, what is this that you have done? The woman said, the serpent deceived me and I ate. Well, for the last four weeks, we have been journeying together through Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

And what we've seen so far is God lovingly and powerfully creating all things and pronouncing them good. And we've seen humans made in God's image, male and female, created to steward and keep this creation so teeming with life and joy.

Anyway, chapter 2 ends, you'll remember, by saying that the man and the woman, husband and wife, were both naked and they were not ashamed. So the opening two chapters of Genesis picture God as a good king and we humans as rulers under God's good kingship full of life and potential and love.

It's quite a picture. But, that is not how we experience life today, is it? Rather than that order of Genesis 1, we so often see chaos.

[4 : 13] And rather than flourishing, we see pain and suffering. Rather than feeling naked and unashamed, most of us, if we're honest, are full of fears and underneath it all, we are quite ill at ease with ourselves.

things are not how they're supposed to be or at least how Genesis 1 and 2 say they're supposed to be. What went wrong?

How did we get from there to here? Now, that's an important question because if we misdiagnose the problem, then we will be misguided as to the solution.

When I was in middle school, my older brother, who was in high school at the time, was experiencing pretty frequent fatigue and some aches and pains. So we went to the doctor, we went to our pediatrician, and the doctor said it was probably just some growing pains, nothing too serious, watch your diet, get some sleep.

But for some reason, that didn't quite sit right with my mother, so we went and we got a second opinion. And it turns out my brother actually had stage 3 Hodgkin's disease.

[5 : 22] Now thankfully, that is a treatable form of cancer, and my brother's been in remission now for decades. But you see, that early misdiagnosis very, really, could have been fatal.

Could it be that spiritually, we humans have been misdiagnosing our problem and reaching for the wrong solutions and finding no real lasting help?

What went wrong? Genesis 3 is the biblical answer to that question. It's the account of the fall.

Humanity's willful rebellion against God in and through our first parents, Adam and Eve. Now we're going to take two weeks on this chapter of Genesis.

This morning we're just going to focus on those first 13 verses. And today I want to consider the fall under three big headings. I want us to think of the fall or consider the fall as first history, second as mystery, and third as reality.

[6 : 41] History, mystery, reality. So first let's take a look at this passage as history. And what I mean here is that the account of Genesis 3 is intended to communicate an actual event in space and time.

What we're dealing with here is not a mere myth. Now, of course, there are elements that initially feel that way, right?

I mean, come on. We got a talking snake and a forbidden tree. What could be more mythological than that? But the narrative of Genesis 3, if you keep reading the Bible, the narrative of Genesis 3 rolls directly on into chapter 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 and so on.

There's no literary break in the book to suggest that Genesis 3 is any less of a historical narrative than what's to come. Now, it's certainly possible that Genesis 3 could be using some figurative language to look back and describe these events, but the events are considered real events nonetheless, even if some figurative language is used in order to convey it.

Now, let's take this talking serpent for starters. Nearly all early interpreters of Genesis understood that this serpent, if it was a real serpent, was under the control of a much more sinister power, the one that the Bible calls Satan, a name that literally means the accuser.

[8 : 11] Satan was somehow using this serpent to undermine the first humans. Now, when it comes to thinking of Satan, of spiritual beings, of angels, of demons, I think we need to be aware and to beware of two equal and opposite dangers.

As C.S. Lewis put it so helpfully in the screw tape letters, one is to disbelieve in their existence and the other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

Now, of course, many of us today think that any talk of angels or fallen angels is sort of primitive and even irrational. But, you know, if one believes in God, the creator of all things seen and unseen, and there are very good reasons for believing in God, the creator of all things seen and unseen, then believing that God could create unseen spiritual personal beings to magnify him and to praise him is not irrational in the least.

And that some of those spiritual beings may rebel against God is also not illogical. But, haven't we grown past all that, you say?

I mean, come on. Even if you could possibly logically justify a belief in these things, it all still feels a bit medieval, doesn't it, a bit primitive? And yet, it is worth noting that the Bible's understanding of angels, of Satan, of demons, in other words, what I mean, the balanced biblical understanding of these things that avoids both the extremes of denial and obsession, that biblical understanding doesn't make our view of reality less sophisticated, but more.

[10 : 02] You see, according to the Bible, there are physical realities at work in the world. There are social realities at work in the world.

There are psychological realities. There are economic realities. There are structural realities. But there are also spiritual realities at work in our world.

When we look at the world through the lens of the Bible, we're not putting on a pair of blinders that excludes reality, we're actually putting on a pair of fine-tuned glasses that capture the whole of reality.

So when we come up against Genesis 3 with this talking serpent, which the rest of the Bible identifies with the activity of Satan, we're not in the region of myth, but we've got some fine-tuned glasses on, and we're talking about cold, hard realities.

And the same goes for this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as it's called in Genesis 2. Now keep in mind, this tree is not a magical tree.

[11 : 11] It's a symbolic one. It stands for something. And we know what that's like, don't we? After all, why is burning a flag, for instance, such a controversial action?

Not because a flag is magical, but because a flag stands for something. It's not magical, but meaningful. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil stood for God's sovereign kingship in his good creation.

Remember, in this context, to know good and evil meant something like to determine good and evil, to know enough, to claim to know enough, to be able to determine what's right and wrong, to decide what should and should not be.

And if Adam and Eve would trust God's goodness and let God be God, if they would let him be the one who knows, who determines good and evil, then the promises from the very first, then they would flourish.

And how would they express that glad, obedient trust in God as God? Through a symbolic, meaningful action.

[12 : 21] salvation. They would not eat from the one tree that God designated to represent his reign. So the fall is presented to us as history, a real event in space and time.

And the good news about that is it means something can be done about it. If the fall were merely a mythical description of how things always are, there could be little hope of undoing it.

But if, as Paul says in Romans 5, sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. In other words, if the fall was a real event, then perhaps another event could take place to rescue and to heal, to liberate and to transform.

If in Adam we all fell, then perhaps God could make a way through a new Adam to raise us up again. So history.

But also there is, if we're honest, much mystery here in Genesis 3. And by that I mean that there are many questions that are not answered here. How exactly did Satan communicate through this serpent?

[13 : 46] How much time passed between Genesis 2 and Genesis 3? And why did God pick a tree to represent his reign? And while we're at it, where did Satan come from? What would cause an angelic being to rebel against a good God?

And when did this angelic rebellion happen? Lots of really good questions. And yet here in Genesis 3, those questions are not answered.

And if that is frustrating, consider that it is also focusing. The camera angle has to point somewhere.

What is it that we see? To what does the narrator point our attention? Now we can always take a step back and look across the whole of scripture and try to answer some of these questions.

And that's a good thing to do. If in Genesis 1, God pronounces all of creation very good, then the rebellion of some angelic beings against God must have happened sometime between Genesis 1.31 and Genesis 3.1.

[14 : 53] But not much else is said. Sorry. And as the biblical story develops, we see Satan presented as the primary or principal one among those rebels.

Jesus himself will refer to Satan as a murderer from the beginning. And a liar and the father of lies. And in Revelation, the last book of the Bible, Satan will be called that ancient serpent who stands at the head of the spiritual rebellion against God and God's people.

But again, we don't find excessive descriptions. No long narratives. No epic poems about Satan's fall. No, you see, that's not the focus of the biblical story.

The Bible is very comfortable with mystery because the Bible wants us to focus. An event has happened that has changed the course of history.

The world is no longer the way it's supposed to be. And where does the camera point? To the relationship between God and humanity.

[16 : 02] God's image bearers are first human parents, rather than driving the serpent from the garden, listened to his voice. They considered a creature to be more trustworthy than the creator, and they disobeyed God's good word, putting themselves in the place of God so that they might know, so that they might decide good and evil and everything in between.

There's much left to mystery so that we might focus on the main thing. But now the third thing we need to see in Genesis 3 is that this isn't just an event in history long ago.

This is reality right now. The fall has affected each one of us. You know, in 1986, when the Chernobyl nuclear power plant melted down in Russia, it wasn't just a disaster for that day and for those present.

The fallout of that event affected generations of people as they lived in the aftermath. You see, because the fall in Genesis 3 is history, it is now our undeniable reality.

So what reality do we see here in Genesis 3? I'm going to point to three things. First, the reality of how Satan tempts us. The reality of how Satan tempts us.

[17 : 31] Verse 1 says the serpent is crafty or shrewd. Now that word doesn't have to have negative connotations in Hebrew, but in this context, it certainly is ominous, isn't it?

And there's actually a play on words here. In Hebrew, the word for crafty sounds a lot like the word for naked at the end of chapter 2. As if to say, what will happen when this pair of humans, innocent and free, meet the craftiness of the serpent?

Even Satan coming to the woman in the guise of a serpent is telling, right? It's deceptive. It's shrewd. Satan doesn't appear as a fallen rebel enemy of God, but a mere snake.

Sliding his way into the garden and asking a seemingly innocent question. temptation often comes this way to us. Not obvious, not big, bold declarations, but subtle, seemingly innocent.

But notice the trap that the serpent sets, even with this seemingly simple question. Did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

[18 : 41] First, Satan wants us to question God's word. To put yourself in a position of judge. Did God actually say?

What do you think? Now, of course, not all questions are bad. Questions are good. We have doubts. We need to ask questions. We need to search these things out. But you can tell from the start that this isn't that kind of question, is it?

Satan is misrepresenting God through this question, isn't he? If you look back at chapter two, what did God tell the first humans? God told them to eat of every tree in the garden.

Except one. They had total liberty with one condition. God reserves one tree for himself, that's all.

One symbolic place where they could give expression to their acknowledgement that God is God. And they are not. But Satan's question already makes God look like a divine killjoy.

[19 : 52] You can't eat of any of these trees, can you? And what begins with a question soon turns out to become a flat contradiction.

When the woman corrects the serpent, the serpent contradicts God. You shall not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God knowing good and evil.

Do you see what Satan is doing here? Portraying God as withholding something good from us. God, Satan says, cannot be trusted.

He doesn't want your best. He doesn't love you. He wants to keep you down. He's afraid you'll become like him. That one thing that he told you is off limits.

That's the one thing that's going to bring you real freedom and joy. But here's the irony.

[20 : 53] Satan tells them this tree will make them like God. But Adam and Eve were already like God. They were made in God's image.

They were as much like God as any created being could be. And so Satan wants the woman and the man not just to be doubtful about God's character, but about their own identity in relation to God as well.

And friends, this is the dynamic of temptation still today. Haven't you heard those same voices in your heart at times?

This can't be that bad. I mean, I'm not going to die. God's withholding something good from you.

You won't be happy if you don't have this and God is keeping it from you. Satan will always try through lies and half-truths to get us to doubt the goodness of God, to question the truthfulness of his word, and to become blind to the glory to which he's promised us and made us as humans.

- [22 : 12] You see, God had made Adam and Eve in his image, and he had promised them the tree of life if they obeyed his word. So in reality, what Satan is trying to get them to do is to shortcut the obedience and go straight for the goal.

Satan is in essence saying, the way to life isn't through being a servant of God, but through grasping the place of God for yourself. You know, it's the same when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness.

What was Satan trying to get Jesus to do in that reading we heard earlier? Satan was trying to convince Jesus to become a king without being a servant.

to get the crown without the cross. Don't experience hunger. Turn these stones into bread. Don't be rejected by the chief priest.

Do something so spectacular at the temple that they'll have to praise you. Don't suffer and die. Bow to me and I'll hand the kingdoms of this world over to you. Satan will always propose what seems like the easy way to happiness.

- [23 : 30] The tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes, just like all the other trees in the garden, according to chapter 2, verse 9. But then Eve starts thinking, this tree, well, it just might make me something I'm not.

Maybe it really does have the power to make one wise. That is, maybe I can be like God without having to serve God. So friend, can you recognize the voice of temptation when it comes?

Twisting God's word. Denying God's goodness and his love for you. These voices are not the voices of your liberation.

They are the voices of your ruin. And that's the second reality that we see here. The reality not just of how Satan tempts us, but of how sin defiles us.

What is the result of the woman and then the man eating the fruit? Ironically, what the serpent told them seems to come true. They don't die.

- [24 : 39] And their eyes are opened. But what do their eyes now see? As their consciences burn within them. And what sort of life do they now live?

What comes of their disobedience to God's word? First, sin brings shame. They knew that they were naked.

And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. Fig leaves, you see, are broad enough to actually make a covering. And so feeling now that their nakedness is a problem and not a gift to be enjoyed, they cover themselves and they hide from one another.

Satan promised that their eyes would be opened. And now all that they can see is their shame. Second, sin brings fear. God comes and they hide from him.

Why do they hide? God. Because they're afraid. No longer do they have a filial relationship with God. That is a relationship of sons and daughters to their loving maker.

- [25 : 49] But they're afraid. They're afraid to be seen. They're afraid to be known. They're afraid to come into the presence of their good creator. Satan promised them that they'd be like God and now they can't even stand to be in God's presence.

And third, sin brings blame. In response to God's questions, the man blames the woman and the woman blames the serpent.

And in effect, they both blame God. It's the woman you gave me. It's the serpent you made. That's the problem. Satan promised that they would know good and evil and now they can't even come to admit when they are wrong.

It's worth pausing here and considering. Do you see those dynamics in your own heart? We often think that if we were in Adam and Eve's shoes, we would have chosen differently.

But is that the case in your own life? Have you chosen differently? And what about your interior world?

[27 : 03] Is there not shame and fear and the blaming of others? Isn't it funny we don't have to try to do those things?

They just happen. Sin promises us freedom and life. But what does it deliver? Alienation from ourselves in shame.

Alienation from God in fear. And alienation from one another in blame. But there's a third reality here.

Not just how Satan tempts us. Not just how sin defiles us. But also how God approaches us. In the evening, God comes into his garden to meet with the man and the woman.

Now next week, we'll see that God pronounces a curse because of Adam and Eve's sin. And he exiles them from the garden. But here, before that, he comes asking questions. Where are you?

[28 : 13] Who told you? What have you done? God, of course, knows the answer to these questions, doesn't he? So why does he ask them?

To call them out of hiding and into the light.

You see, the way through the fall, the way through our sin, is not by denying it or by hiding it, but by confessing it.

To admit that we are rebels and to plead for mercy. But will God be merciful?

That's the question. Will God forgive his rebellious image bearers? And will he make things right again? You know, when Genesis 3 was originally compiled, Israel was on the verge of entering the promised land.

[29 : 21] God was putting his people back into his garden, as it were. And again, the choice was before them. Would they obey his voice, his word, his law?

Or would they obey the voice of the enemy? Would they listen to the voice of their creator? Or would they worship and serve a created thing instead? And the long, tragic history of Israel is really the story of all humanity.

Like a play within the play of the entire human drama, there are God's people, the Israelites, just like all of us.

Rather than keeping God's word, they listen to other voices, and they too rebel. And in rebellion, God gives them over to death.

And so by the end of the Old Testament, we see that Israel cannot undo the fall. They too are in Adam, part of this fallen human race, willingly listening to the voice of the serpent, needing themselves to be rescued.

[30 : 34] But that's not the end of the story. When we could not save ourselves, God comes to save us.

When Jesus begins his public ministry, he too faces the accuser, Satan. But this time, not in a garden, but in a wilderness.

With everything good stripped away, a great confrontation happens. A great confrontation happens. And Satan comes tempting, speaking half-truths and lies, getting Jesus to question his own identity.

Are you really the son of God? Couldn't the son of God just turn some of these stones into bread and fix this whole thing? Couldn't you show that you're the Messiah of Israel by going to the temple and doing something a little spectacular?

Wouldn't that prove that you're the son of God? And by the way, wasn't the son of God promised to reign over all the kingdoms of the world? We can fix this right now. Bow to me and I will hand them over to you and you'll prove that you are the son of God.

[31 : 51] But where Adam failed, and where Israel failed, and where we failed, Jesus conquered. The voice of the serpent was at last overcome by the word of God.

The incarnate word speaking the written word. And just as humanity fell into condemnation and guilt in Adam, so now in Christ there is justification and life for all who believe.

And united to Christ by faith, what happens? What happens when we are united to this better and last Adam who's blazed a new path through the human story?

Well, you know, united to Christ by faith, knowing that we have a champion who's overcome for us, one who succeeded where we have failed in our place, united to him, we can at last confess that we are sinners.

And we can come out of hiding and we can come into the light because we know that God's judgment has been met in his own son so that we might receive mercy.

[33 : 14] mercy. And we can move beyond shame and fear and blame before God and before one another. And we can resist the voice of the evil one now.

Not perfectly, but we can. Why? Not because we are strong, but because Christ has conquered for us.

And this obedience of Christ was so unrelenting, you see, that he was willing not just to face our enemy in the wilderness, but he was willing to take the form of a servant and become obedient to death, even death on a cross, as the apostles will say.

Listen, do you want to know how to stand against the scheme of the enemy? When the tempter gets you to question God's goodness and wonder whether God really loves you, friends, look to the last Adam, to Jesus, your Savior, who came and went into the wilderness for you and who died for you, how could God not love you?

And when the tempter tells you that God is withholding something good from you, again, look to Christ and know that God has given over his son for you. God was willing to lose what is most precious in all of eternity, that you might be reclaimed from the ruin of the fall.

[34 : 55] And when the tempter gets you to doubt that obedience to God will bring joy in the end, that these short-term acts of service and obedience are not going to bring the freedom and joy that you want, look at the risen Jesus.

See how he did not turn back from suffering so that we might enter into glory with him. See how the way to glory is the road of the cross.

And yet whatever we lose is nothing compared to what we gain in him. So the fall then is our reality.

But for those in Christ, it's not the last word. Christ has clothed us not with mere fig leaves, but with his own righteousness. And through his spirit living in us, we need no longer listen to the voice of the serpent, but we can obey the voice of our living God.

Amen. Isn't that good news? We're about to take the Lord's Supper together to continue to let these truths sink into our hearts. And isn't it wonderful that the very act that brought us such ruin, Adam and Eve took and ate, would now be the very act that symbolizes our redemption.

[36 : 19] We take and we eat. Adam and Eve stood before a tree and rebelled against God. Friends, we sit before a table and have been made friends of God because Christ was willing to be crucified on a tree, on the cross.

So let's take a moment and let's pray and let's prepare to commune with Christ at his table. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

I wonder if those who are helping to serve would come up. Thank you.