

IT'S ONLY NATURAL

GENESIS 3:1-24 JULY 21, 2021

In most disaster movies, the opening scenes are spent establishing characters and showing them going about their regular lives. And then there is some catastrophe that changes the whole world around them. Usually, the disaster doesn't come without warning. Instead, characters *have* been warned, but they shrug off the suggestions that something might go wrong, and proceed as if there's no danger at all. By the end of the runtime, there's been a lot of death and destruction. Usually our main characters are mostly alive, but nothing will ever be the same.

We've come to a great disaster in Genesis. When we left off things were great. Everyone was happy. But once this chapter comes to a close, everything will have been changed. Man's relationship to God, man and woman's relationship, human relationships to the world around us, our very biology, the course of history - everything is dramatically changed for the worse.

As the story unfolds, we'll watch a small cast of characters. There's Adam and Eve, the serpent and the Lord God. As we look at the heart and behavior of each we'll be able to learn something about each of their natures. Knowing more about these natures will assist us as we live in this world that has been changed so dramatically by sin.

Genesis 3:1 - Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden'?"

Even if you weren't raised in church you probably associate this serpent with the Devil. That's because we're told in Revelation 12 and 20 that the "serpent of old" is the Devil. We're also told in Ezekiel 28 that the Devil was in the Garden of God.¹ At the same time, we see here that he is described as a "wild animal." And so, it would seem that this was a real animal that was being possessed by Satan so he could come and try to con Eve.

We're told that he was the "most cunning" of creatures. Your version may say subtle or crafty. Derek Kidner calls it, "malevolent brilliance."² Another resources describes it as: "willing to do anything."³

Already we are learning something about the nature of our enemy, the Devil. He is willing to do *anything* to destroy your life, your testimony and your relationships (both with God and others). His victory in the Garden was only the beginning of his long career. He still spends his time, prowling around, looking for someone he can devour.

But why, oh why would God allow him to hang out in the Garden? Isn't that a dangerous, unfair thing to do? As we've touched upon before, God wanted a loving, personal relationship with human beings. Such a relationship would *have* to be based on free and genuine choice.

Also, as Dr. J. Vernon McGee points out, at this point in time Adam and Eve were *innocent*, but not *righteous*. To be righteous, their obedience would have to be put to the test through temptation. But

¹ Ezekiel 28:13

² Derek Kidner *Genesis*

³ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

God does not tempt anyone.⁴ So, God allowed the Devil to come and have this talk with Eve, offering her door number 2.

He asks her a simple question: “Did God really say?” We can find many parallels between this moment of temptation and Jesus’ 40 days of temptation in the Gospels. In both situations Satan attacks the word of God. That is his nature. And we’ll see that Eve’s first error is that she does not have a firm grasp on what God has said. God’s word matters and it is specific. It’s been given as it is so that we might be shielded and strengthened and know the difference between truth and lie. As Christians and as a church we must always keep the study and application of God’s word primary.

Genesis 3:2-3 - ²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. ³But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.’ ”

We learn a few things about human nature from Eve. First of all, some scholars believe the language indicates that she interrupted the serpent mid sentence.⁵ Certainly she doesn’t take time to weigh or prepare her response. Humans, by nature, are somewhat hasty when it comes to spiritual things. We’re prone to knee-jerk reactions before pausing, reflecting, reviewing what God has actually said.

Second, we see that Eve underestimates both the generosity of God and His judgment against sin. The Lord had used very strong language to warn Adam about death, but Eve strips away some of its seriousness. We also see a subtle difference between what God said about eating and what Eve reports. God had said, “eat freely of ANY of the trees.” Eve has shrunk that down to a “well, you *MAY* eat, I suppose.” One resource points out that Eve has removed the idea that she and Adam could eat any time to their hearts’ content.⁶

It is human nature to think of God as miserly and withholding. But it isn’t true. We’ve seen in previous studies just how extravagantly generous He is. God *only* wants what is best for you.

Third, we see that Eve *adds* a restriction to the word of God. “You must not *touch* it.” God never said that. Was Eve exaggerating? Had Adam placed this as a sort of safe guard to keep them away from sin? We don’t know. But we’ll find that this extra layer of legalism *probably* backfired and contributed to their defeat, rather than keeping them spiritually safe. Robert Bergen writes, “*the sad truth is that when people add to the word of God, they create confusion and trouble.*”⁷

Genesis 3:4-5 - ⁴“No! You will certainly not die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵“In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Now the serpent is outright lying. He’s been a liar all along. That’s his nature. And we see that he’s all about jealousy. That’s what caused all his trouble at the beginning and it led to his ruin. So, he’s using the same bait with Eve.

Now, Eve was *innocent*, but she wasn’t *stupid*. Had she thought this through she might’ve asked, “If God is afraid of us becoming like Him, why did He put this tree in the Garden in the first place?”

⁴ James 1:13

⁵ Alter, Speiser

⁶ NET Study Bible Notes

⁷ CSB Study Bible Notes

She's being deceived, but we have to come to the conclusion that there's a *willingness* in her heart to be deceived. After all, she *wants* the fruit. It's beautiful to look at. It's appealing. She has a tiny whisper in her heart that says, "God doesn't want you to be happy. He wants to keep you down." So she allows the serpent to deceive her, to lead her astray.

It's interesting - he offered a way that they might "open their eyes," right? But let's remember what God had already said. Remember how He had invited them to come, behold, *LOOK!* in chapter 1. He had given them this wonderful commission to *watch* over the Garden. Their eyes *were* open in every good way. Not to the horrors of evil, but who would want that? Well, the Devil wanted that for them.

Here's another thing about Satan's nature: He is a student of God's word. How did he know what God had said? Look at his conversation with Jesus during the wilderness temptation. Satan knows the Scripture. It doesn't seem like he *understands* all of it. And, of course, he doesn't obey it. But he's all about using God's word in perverse ways to devour lives. Look at the false teachings that have crept into the church for the last 2,000 years. Look at the cults. *We* need to be equipped with the knowledge of God to avoid those dangers and be careful in our study of it.

Genesis 3:6 - ⁶The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

This isn't just about a piece of fruit. It's about whether they were going to trust God or not. Here, through their choice, they're saying, "We don't need God to get wisdom. We can find it elsewhere."

Now here's where their legalism backfired: She had said, "Oh if we touch that fruit, we'll die." But then, inevitably, she reached out, grabbed one of those figs and plucked it down and then...nothing happened! Nobody died. Now, what she had ascribed to God (this extra command) seemed to be untrue. Why? Because they had made it up. But it would've *emboldened* them to take a bite.

We get a bombshell here: Adam was there by Eve's side the whole time! Why wasn't he protecting his wife? Why wasn't he intervening? We don't know. Actually, it's worse than that. It seems that he was maybe allowing Eve to be the *guinea pig*, the royal food taster.⁸ He lets her eat before he takes a bite, maybe to see if she drops dead! Humans, by nature, are deeply selfish. God had designed them to live in total harmony and mutual dependence - that they would complete one another. But now, we see they have their own desires in mind, at the *expense* of their spouse.

Genesis 3:7 - ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Seeing these crude coverups would've been silly if it weren't so tragic. Have you ever seen a small child try to clean up a big mess they made?

They felt the guilt of their sin and immediately tried to cover it. But, notice what they did: They covered part of their bodies. Not their hearts. They *couldn't* do that. But this is human nature: We feel guilty for the sin inside because God's moral law has been written on our hearts, and so, humans go out and create all sorts of arbitrary coverings in an effort to dress up that guilt. But

⁸ CSB Study Bible Notes

human religion, human effort is *just* as worthless in reconciling us to God as Adam and Eve putting a few leaves over their swimsuit areas.

Genesis 3:8-9 - ⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹So the Lord God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”

Now the Lord comes on the scene. Of course, He had seen it all. Not just the eating. He saw into their hearts and knew every thought, every emotion, every aspect of what was going on. He had been betrayed and defied. His perfect creation had been completely spoiled due to their rebellion. What was God’s response? He would’ve been justified in burning the whole thing up. Instead, He *immediately* came down to be with His people. He seeks *them* out, calling out to them in kindness.

God’s nature is compassionate love, gentleness and mercy. Yes, He must pour out wrath on sin, but His desire for human beings is always reconciliation and restoration. That’s been His way from the beginning. We see it here. Why bother with this conversation with Adam and Eve? Why bother asking where they are if He already knows the answer? It’s because He is acting in tenderness and giving them a chance to *repent* of what they’ve done. Let’s see what they do.

Genesis 3:10 - ¹⁰And he said, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”

Notice, as God speaks with Adam and Eve, He’ll give them all the space they need to say they’re sorry, to fall on His mercy and ask for forgiveness, but they *won’t*. Instead, Adam says he’s afraid. Now, remember, what had the serpent promised? “Your eyes will be open.” But what happened? Adam is in the dark. He doesn’t know *what* is going to happen. One commentator suggests that, perhaps Adam thinks God will come and execute them for their crime.⁹

Genesis 3:11 - ¹¹Then he asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

Look at the heart of God. He’s so patient, so gracious. Adam *hasn’t* repented, but God is trying to lead him there.

Genesis 3:12 - ¹²The man replied, “The woman you gave to be with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate.”

Rather than repent and ask God for mercy, Adam shifts the blame first to his wife then to God Himself. “It’s the lady’s fault. And, You’re the One that brought her here anyway.” Our nature is to blame-shift, to excuse ourselves, to try to wriggle out of our own responsibility for sin.

Genesis 3:13 - ¹³So the Lord God asked the woman, “What have you done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Eve also tries to pass responsibility off to someone else. But we see God’s nature here. He’s not only patient and tender, He also is firm in the truth. Notice how He emphasizes, “What have *you* done?”

⁹ Justin Jackson *Adam & Eve* <https://online.billsdale.edu/courses/genesis>

When we sin, it's *not* someone else's fault. It's not society's fault or because I had no other choice. Your actions are your responsibility. God wants to help you in that mess, but first you have to own it.

Now comes the consequences.

Genesis 3:14-15 - ¹⁴So the Lord God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, you are cursed more than any livestock and more than any wild animal. You will move on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

Immediately God's massive plan of redemption was put into motion. Why not just erase these two people *and* the serpent and start again? Because God loved Adam and Eve so much He was unwilling to consign them to eternal damnation. He wanted to save them. And, as the Bible reveals, there is only one way that man can be saved. And that's for God to come Himself, put on flesh, pay the penalty for sin and then give humans the free choice whether they will accept Him as Substitute and Savior or not. And all that takes an immense amount of time and effort and providence. But, in God's mind, Adam and Eve were worth the trouble. And *you* are worth the trouble too.

There weren't only consequences for satan. Humankind would have to lie in the beds they made.

Genesis 3:16-19 - ¹⁶He said to the woman: I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children with painful effort. Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you. ¹⁷And he said to the man, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it': The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. ¹⁸It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust."

This isn't God being vindictive. This is simply what Adam brought into the world. The NET Bible translates God's curse in verse 17 this way, "Cursed is the ground thanks to you." He had *tried* to warn them, He had provided every single thing they could possibly need or want for a perfect life. Instead, they chose poison and death.

Even still, we see God's grace. Because of sin, Adam and Eve immediately died spiritually. They would've died eternally but God made a way of escape. They deserved to face sudden *physical* death, but instead God allowed them to live for hundreds of years. And though they faced a now hostile environment, God's next action was to *help* them be protected.

Genesis 3:20-21 - ²⁰The man named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all the living. ²¹The Lord God made clothing from skins for the man and his wife, and he clothed them.

So we see that there has been some level of reconciling between God and man. Adam *believes* God and is paying attention to what He has said. That's why he chose this name for his wife. And we see God bring His people in close and says, "Let me take these silly leaf clothes off and I will give you better clothes. Ones that fit properly. Ones that will help, rather than hinder." Of course, for *these*, an animal had to die. God establishing, from the beginning, the truth of how atonement, how *covering* for sin is accomplished. Only one way: The death of a substitute.

Genesis 3:22-24 - ²² The Lord God said, “Since the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, take from the tree of life, eat, and live forever.” ²³ So the Lord God sent him away from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove the man out and stationed the cherubim and the flaming, whirling sword east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life.

This is another act of grace on God’s part. For them to eat of the tree of life in this condition would trap them forever in an unredeemed state. And so the Lord drives them out of the Garden and stations these fearsome angels there to block them from re-entering. Cherubim, by the way, are not little fat babies. In the Bible they appear as hybrid beings, looking part human looking and part animal. Usually with 2 or 4 faces, wings and a lot of power.

So, in this text we see our enemy’s nature is to lie and to ruin and to attack God’s word. God’s nature is to come with grace and compassion, even though we are absolutely guilty of rebellion. *Our* nature is to focus on the wrong things, to stray from God and to then try to avoid personal responsibility.

Does that mean when we’re tempted it’s hopeless? No. As Christians we’re given a *new* nature, provided by God like a garment to help us navigate this world with all its temptations. Paul tells us in both Ephesians and Colossians to “Put on your new nature,” so that we can be like God¹⁰ and so we can be renewed according to the image of our Creator.¹¹

Temptation is still going to come. The Devil isn’t done doing his nasty work. When it does, we can learn from this scene about how to overcome. First, always remember that God is not withholding any good thing from you. Nor does He tempt you to sin. Our enemy does. And when he does, he is *lying*. He may have great arguments or shiny bait, but it’s a lie.

One example: Today some secular psychologists suggest that having an “open marriage,” where you go out and explore romantic liaisons with people who aren’t your spouse will actually *help* your marriage. In *Psychology Today*, a Ph.D. college professor wrote about various “studies” being done in this terrible field. His conclusion is that “well, more research is needed, but this seems to be a positive thing. (*Paraphrase*)” He suggests it will actually *increase* your trust and communication while *lowering* levels of jealousy.¹² It’s a lie from the pit of hell.

Now here’s what Adam and Eve *should* have remembered: First, that God is good and only wants what’s good for you. Second, that they had *power* over the serpent. He was under their dominion! What about us? When temptation comes around, remember this truth: Resist the devil and he will flee from you. The devil couldn’t *make* Adam and Eve sin and he can’t make *you* sin either. As a Christian, God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear *and* He will provide for you the way out.

Finally, when we sin, which we all still do, remember this: There’s nothing you can do to cover what you’ve done before an all-knowing, holy God. But you don’t need to cover it. *He* has done the covering. Your part is to *repent*. But repentance is an act of the will. It’s a choice we make. It’s what we must do to avoid the disaster of sin. And when we do, God is ready to take us into the safety of His love and provision and make right what we have done wrong.

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:24

¹¹ Colossians 3:10

¹² https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-apes/202004/are-open-marriages-happier?utm_source=pocket_mylist