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GENESIS

{ 1 }

Redemption Prompted

I NEED TO SEE the big picture—especially when I’m trying to figure out travel directions. If I am about to drive through New York City, for example, the two- by three-inch GPS picture on my iPhone of the immediate vicinity will not suffice. I want an AAA road map of the entire city at a glance—the kind that opens up to three feet wide and can never be refolded the right way.

God has given us a road map for our lives. It’s called the Bible. God’s Holy Word. The Bible is the best place to turn for direction for our lives. But we need to have a sense of the Bible’s big picture in order to understand its individual parts. So, how are we going to get a sense of that big picture? We won’t find it summarized in a couple of paragraphs on the back cover of our Bible, right above a picture of the book’s author. (God won’t hold still while His photo is taken.)

No, the Bible is not like other books. In fact, the Bible is not “a” book. It’s actually a compilation of sixty-six books in

one. Sixty-six books that were written over a period of 1,500 years, penned by forty different authors. And those forty different authors lived in ten different countries, worked in more than twenty different occupations (including king, shepherd, general, tax collector, fisherman, and doctor), and wrote in three different languages (Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic).

What are our chances of ever being able to get a sense of the Bible's big picture, the Bible's *storyline*? And speaking of the Bible's storyline, does it even *have* a clear storyline? After all, the Bible mentions, by name, 2,930 different characters. Is it really possible that all these people belong to the same drama, that they're part of the same plot?

Yes, the Bible has a storyline: a single, overarching, comprehensive storyline. A storyline that amazingly ties the whole book together, from Genesis to Revelation. And once we grasp that storyline, we'll be able to make sense of the Bible's individual parts. We'll be able to use God's road map to gain direction for our lives.

But before we dive into the Bible's opening book of Genesis, let me say a word about the general theme of the Bible's storyline. We can capture this general theme in one word, *redemption*. Look up *redemption* in the dictionary, and one of the first definitions you'll see is *deliverance* or *rescue*.

The Rescue

The Bible is a rescue story. It begins with a crisis. There are people in grave danger. Who will save them? A lot of good stories begin this way. This is what immediately grabs our attention. This is what hooks us.

If you were ever a fan of the blockbuster TV series *24*, you know what I'm talking about. Each season the show began with an emergency. Lives were at stake. There was a plot in motion to assassinate the president, or suicide bombers were on the loose, or a nuclear bomb was about to be detonated, or a deadly virus was about to be released. These situations called for the rescue efforts of super-agent Jack Bauer.

Now, not every story that we read or watch begins with that much of an adrenalin rush. But a lot of good stories *do* begin with people in dire straits. And those dire straits prompt a rescue effort.

The Bible is no exception to this pattern. In fact the Bible opens with the mother of all crises. A crisis so big that it prompts the greatest rescue effort in the history of humanity. That rescue effort—*redemption*—is the theme of the Bible's storyline. After the description in Genesis 1 of an awesome God creating earth and its inhabitants, Genesis 2–3 tells us about the crisis that prompted the rescue operation. I encourage you to grab your Bible and follow along as I identify five stages to: *Redemption Prompted*.

The Command

In the first chapter of Genesis, the opening pages of the Bible, God creates the world and everything in it. This includes the original human couple, Adam and Eve. Mister and missus are then placed in a virtual paradise, called the garden of Eden. We pick up the story in Genesis 2:15–17: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’”

This command in Genesis 2:17 immediately raises a couple of objections in the minds of some readers. First off, it seems so silly, so arbitrary: *Don’t eat from this tree!* C’mon. That’s the best that God could come up with? I mean, this is the very first prohibition that we come across in the Bible. We expect something significant, right?

Hebrew scholars tell us that it’s worded exactly like some of the famous Ten Commandments. You remember the Big Ten? They include, “You shall have no other gods before me. . . . You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:3, 13–14).

But . . . *You shall not eat from this tree?* In the words of an old *Sesame Street* jingle: “One of these things is not like the others.” Is this really God’s best shot for the Bible’s opening prohi-

bition? How random! If God didn't want Adam and Eve to eat from that tree, why did He put the tree in the garden of Eden to begin with? Was He deliberately trying to trip them up?

May I suggest that objecting to God's command along these lines reveals a rebellious streak in our hearts? It reveals a resistance to the notion that God is *God*. As God, He has the right to command us to do whatever He pleases. If some of God's commands seem silly or arbitrary to us, the problem is not with *God*; it's with *us*.

Let me illustrate what I'm saying here. Last summer, I was looking for a place to take my family on vacation, and so I emailed a friend of mine who lives on Cape Cod. I asked him if he knew of any inexpensive rental cottages on the Cape. Preferably something near the ocean. My friend is a retired banker, a wealthy man. He emailed me back, saying: "My wife and I have a vacation house up in Maine. Why don't we go there for a week, and you and your family can have our house on the Cape?" That sounded reasonable to me.

When we got there, we realized it was a really sweet deal. Their house is massive. It has a beautiful swimming pool, a private theatre, and a gorgeous view of the ocean. Soon after we arrived we spotted a piece of paper on the kitchen counter, explaining where we could find everything. And in the middle of all this information, my friend had given us a directive: "Please water the house plants while you are here."

My immediate thought was: *What a stupid directive! Doesn't he know we're on vacation? With all his money, he could've hired somebody to do the watering.* So we just let the house plants wither and die.

Of course we didn't! It would have been foolish and ungrateful to defy my friend's instructions.

And yet, when it comes to *God's* commands, we're constantly pushing back. It's as if we reserve the right to determine which commands deserve our obedience and which commands are worthy of disdain.

A second objection that people have, when they read the "Don't eat from this tree" prohibition in Genesis 2:17, is that the penalty seems overly severe. What does our Bible say would happen to Adam and Eve if they ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? They would *surely die*.

The death sentence? Are you kidding me? For eating an apple? (Actually, the Bible never says that this was an apple tree. That's just how artists have depicted it.)

What's the deal with the death sentence? It's really quite simple to explain. For the first two chapters of Genesis, the Bible has been referring to God as the source of all life. He brought the world into existence, creating stars and oceans and forests and wild animals. And when He created Adam, God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

If God is the source of Adam's *life* (and of ours), what would be the natural consequence of unplugging from God by rejecting His commands? Death. Isn't that what happens when you're vacuuming your house and the plug pulls out? The vacuum dies, right? Well, people who unplug from God—the source of life—die.

The Con Job

The main characters in this drama now begin to distort God's original command. As you read Genesis 3:1–6, see if you can detect the truth-twisting that's going on:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

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

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was

good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Who is the serpent in this story? Satan. Now, the fact is Genesis 3 doesn't tell us who the serpent is. But the last book of the Bible identifies the serpent for us (Revelation 12:9): "The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray."

So the serpent who approaches Eve in Genesis 3 is indeed Satan—God's archenemy! But please note in verse 1 that God *made* Satan.

It's important for us to understand that even though God and Satan have been engaged in a cosmic battle of good

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vs. evil since the beginning of time, Satan is *not* God's equal. Satan is *not* God's exact polar opposite. God is the Creator of all things. Satan is a created being. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. Satan is none of those things.

And because Satan lacks God's power, he must fight his battles using trickery and deceit. The Genesis account refers to him as *more crafty* than any of God's other creatures. Just look at the first words out of Satan's mouth to Eve: "Did God

really say . . . ?” (v. 1) There’s something subtly sinister about this question. Satan’s use of the word *really* drips with sarcasm. Can you detect his *you’ve-got-to-be-kidding-me* attitude? Although God has just given Adam and Eve a fairly straightforward command, Satan is about to twist and distort that command so as to get them to disobey it.

Why? Because, if Adam and Eve disobey the command, they unplug from the source of life. They die. Satan is out to destroy the pinnacle of God’s creation. And he uses trickery—a con job—to accomplish his goal.

Satan’s Three Deceits

Let me note three strategies with which Satan deceitfully counters God’s original prohibition (strategies that he’s still using on us today).

The first is *exaggeration*. His first deceit is a misleading question: “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” Is Satan accurately quoting God? No. There was only *one* tree that God said not to eat from. So why is Satan exaggerating God’s Word? To make God’s command look severe, overly demanding, unreasonable, ridiculous.

Once Satan has us believing that God’s commands are severe, overly demanding, unreasonable, or ridiculous, we feel like we have the right to disobey them. Don’t we? Like when we drive 45 mph in a 30 mph zone because it’s *so stupid* to

drive the speed limit on that wide-open stretch of road. Like when we come in at midnight (if we're high school age), even though our parents have told us that curfew is 11 p.m., because it's *so lame* to go home by 11 p.m. When we exaggerate God's commands, we make them easier to dismiss, because they're so over-the-top.

Look at how Eve quickly picks up on Satan's bad habit of exaggerating God's Word. She starts to do it herself. In the middle of verse 2, Eve says (my summary): "It's only the tree in the middle of the garden that we're not to eat from—and we're not supposed to touch it either, or we'll die." Not supposed to *touch* it? When did God say not to *touch* that tree? He didn't. Now Eve is exaggerating.

A second clever strategy that Satan uses to counter God's command is flat out *denial of consequences*. In verse 4, Satan promises Eve: "You will not surely die." Satan's denial of the death sentence that God had attached to His command (Genesis 2:17) is even stronger in the original Hebrew. Satan actually begins his sentence with the word *not*. His denial is literally: "NOT—you will surely die!"

Isn't it interesting that the very first doctrine Satan ever contradicts is the doctrine of divine judgment? "God doesn't punish sin. Disobedience to God doesn't unplug you from the source of life. There's no such thing as spiritual or eternal death." People are still buying this lie today. We all buy it to

some extent. We convince ourselves that God will shrug His shoulders at our sin. We don't really expect to pay for sin in any significant way.

A third strategy Satan uses to counter God's command is the promise that *disobedience will bring tremendous satisfaction*.

That deceit remains

today a great weapon in Satan's arsenal.

He guarantees Eve that the forbidden fruit will make her

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"like God, knowing good and evil" (v. 5). That sales pitch was actually half-true. Eve would know good and evil if she ate the fruit. But not like God.

God knows evil like a cancer doctor knows cancer. But Eve would know evil like a cancer victim knows cancer. Do you see the difference? If Eve ate the fruit, she would know evil from personal experience. That wouldn't be a good thing, even though Satan tried to dress it up as if it would be tremendously satisfying.

Satan is still in the business of dressing up evil and trying to pass it off to us as something wonderful. "You'd feel much better if you got some revenge." "You'd really enjoy a shopping spree." "You'd laugh yourself silly over this raunchy movie." "You'd be a lot happier if you got out of your difficult

marriage.” “You’d loosen up with a few more beers.”

Eve fell for Satan’s con job. She ate from the tree that God had said not to eat from. So did her husband Adam. And we’ve been falling for Satan’s con job ever since.

The Cover-Up

What happened after Eve and then Adam bit into the fruit? According to Genesis 3:7–13:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

The man said, “The woman you put here with me— she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate it.”

This is the cover-up—also called the Shame and Blame Game. This is what sin always leads to in our lives.

First, there’s shame. Adam and Eve were embarrassed by their nakedness, and so they tried to cover it up with fig leaves. (I’ll bet *that* was pretty uncomfortable.) We’re still trying this same approach today. We don’t use fig leaves. But we do our best to hide our sinfulness from other people, to keep them from finding out the worst about us. We’d be mortified if others knew some of the things we’ve thought, said, or done.

Adam and Eve not only tried to hide their shame from each other, they tried to hide it from God. When they heard the sound of God walking in the garden (v. 8), they hid from Him. How crazy is that? Hiding from God? I was in a clothing store with my wife, Sue, recently. A little boy was standing next to a rack of dresses. He pulled one of the dresses across his face and, with 90 percent of his body still showing, he called out to his mom, “Come and find me!” How childishly amusing. How very like our own attempts to hide from God.

The psalmist dumps a bucket of cold water on those of us who are inclined to try this approach. He addresses God

with the rhetorical question (Psalm 139:7–8): “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.” We have no chance of hiding from God—even though our *shame* drives us away from Him.

So, hounded by our shame we resort to blame. We try to cover up our sins by blaming them on other people, blaming them on our circumstances, blaming them on our personality, blaming them on our upbringing.

Adam blamed Eve. Look at verse 12: “The woman,” Adam says. “She gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” *The woman*. I’m sure that Adam spit that out with disgust. But ironically, when God first created Eve and brought her to Adam, Adam looked at this beautiful naked lady and joyfully exclaimed (Genesis 2:23): “She shall be called ‘woman.’” My grad school Hebrew teacher said that the proper translation of this exclamation should probably be: “She shall be called ‘Whoa! Man!’” But in Genesis 3, it’s no longer “Whoa! Man!” It’s now a derisive “the woman,” as Adam blames Eve for his sin.

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And Adam doesn’t just blame Eve. He blames God! Look

again at verse 12: “The woman *you put here* with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree” (italics added). So, it’s *God’s* fault for putting Eve in the garden with Adam in the first place.

Of course, Eve also participates in the blame game, so don’t get the idea that it’s just men who like to shift responsibility for their wrongdoing to others. Whom does Eve blame (v. 13)? “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

You may be old enough to remember the comedian Flip Wilson. He made famous the gag line, “The devil made me do it!” Evidently, Flip got the line from Eve.

This is the Shame and Blame Game in action. Rather than cover up, we all need to participate in a frank self-assessment. I love the familiar story about British writer G. K. Chesterton, in this regard. Early in the twentieth century, a prominent London newspaper asked a variety of famous writers to submit articles that would address the question: “What’s wrong with the world?” Chesterton’s response was quite brief: “I am.”¹

The Consequences

I find it fascinating that the consequences of Adam’s sin and Eve’s sin seem to be gender related. The penalties seem to track with how God has uniquely wired men and women. See what you think about that as you read the rest of the story (Genesis 3:16–19, 23):

To the woman he [God] said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” . . .

So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

Adam and Eve faced some pretty stiff consequences for their disobedience. Let’s start with Eve. Her sin had negative repercussions on the important relationships in her life. As a mother, she would experience great pain in childbirth (v. 16). And as a wife, she and Adam were going to struggle in their marriage.

What does God mean when He says to Eve, “Your desire will be for your husband”? Wouldn’t that be a good thing? Unfortunately, God isn’t using the word *desire* here in a

positive sense. He's not talking about Eve's sexual desire or emotional desire for Adam. God is warning Eve about a sin-corrupted desire, a desire to control Adam.

This same word—*desire*—pops up again in the very next chapter of Genesis. God warns Cain, who's extremely angry with his brother, "Cain, watch out!" Why? Because sin "*desires* to have you." In other words, sin wants to control Cain, manipulate Cain, make Cain do its bidding. This is the same Hebrew word for *desire* that's used of Eve in Genesis 3. Her sin-corrupted bent will now be to control her husband. And what will be Adam's response to that? The last line of Genesis 3:16 says that Adam will push back. Adam will *rule* Eve. In other words, Adam will be domineering. Needless to say, their marriage is now going to be characterized by power struggles—something that still troubles married couples today.

Well, if Eve's sin is going to have negative relational consequences, what about Adam's sin? God tells Adam that he is now going to experience futility in his work. Adam will try to make a living off the land, but the land will not cooperate (vv. 17–19). Isn't it interesting that because Adam disobeyed God by eating forbidden fruit, getting something to eat is now going to be a difficult task? (God uses the word *eat* five times in His reprimand of Adam.)

So, Eve will struggle with relationships, and Adam will

struggle with work. I won't suggest that these struggles are entirely gender exclusive. But they do seem to touch on important priorities of women and men. And much worse than these consequences, Adam and Eve will now be banished from the garden of Eden, the place where they had experienced such a close relationship with God. One Bible commentator writes about their life-after-banishment: "They had breathed the air of God's presence. Now it was impossible. For them, their new state must have been like life without oxygen. They were perpetually short of spiritual breath. They could never get enough of God."²

**THE WORST PART
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relationship with God.**

That's the worst part about sin. It cuts us off from a relationship with God. This is spiritual death. Do you remember how God had warned Adam and Eve that if they ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would *surely die*? Maybe you're wondering why they didn't die—not immediately—after eating the fruit in Genesis 3. The answer is: They *did* die. They died spiritually. Their relationship with God died. And eventually spiritual death would result in physical death and eternal death.

These are the consequences of sin! Brokenness in relationships. Futility at work. Alienation from God. This is what

prompted God's intervention, specifically God's *redemption*. (Remember the theme of the Bible's storyline?) Adam and Eve needed to be rescued, as do we.

The Coming of Christ

If you saw the 2004 movie *The Passion of the Christ*, you might have been confused by the opening scene. Jesus is praying in the garden of Gethsemane, shortly before His arrest and crucifixion. And as He prays, a snake approaches Him, slithering along the ground. Jesus spots the snake, leaps to His feet, and stomps on the snake's head until it is dead. Do you recall the Bible saying anything about Jesus duking it out with a snake in Gethsemane?

Well, you won't find that scene depicted in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, the four biographies of Jesus. But you will find it described indirectly in Genesis. Note the words with which God curses the serpent for leading Adam and Eve into sin: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (3:15).

What is God saying here? He's telling Satan that one day Eve's offspring (i.e., a human being) will totally destroy him ("crush your head"), even though this person will be mortally wounded in the process (Satan will "strike his heel"). This is a description, amazingly, of what happened between Satan and

Jesus at the crucifixion. Let me explain.

Satan had hoped to destroy Adam and Eve by leading them into sin. Their sin unplugged them from the source of life, bringing about their spiritual death, which potentially would result in their physical and eternal death. Satan's plan is the same for every member of the human race. He wants to bring about our death. But Jesus was willing to die in our place. He suffered the consequences of our sin. And because Jesus is the eternal Son of God, His sacrificial death is of infinite worth. It becomes a gift of life to all who put their trust in Him. So Jesus defeated Satan at the cross. Satan may have struck Jesus' heel, but Jesus crushed Satan's head. Just as Genesis 3:15 promised.

There's another hint of redemption in Genesis 3, which can be observed only through the lens of the Christian faith. When Christians celebrate Jesus' death at Communion services (also known as the Eucharist or Lord's Supper), the bread that they eat represents the body of Christ. His body was hung on a cross to pay for our sins. When Jesus first taught His disciples how to celebrate Communion, He handed them the bread with these words: "Take and eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26). *Take* and *eat*. Where else are these two verbs coupled together in Scripture?

In Genesis 3:6, we read that Adam and Eve "took . . . and ate" the forbidden fruit, introducing sin and death into the

world. What a disaster! But help was on the way. One day Jesus Christ would arrive on the scene. And just before He gave His life for us, He would break bread with His followers and say: “Take and eat.”

Do you see the connection? You and I—just as Adam and Eve—have personally feasted on sin. This puts us under the sentence of death, unless we personally feast on Christ. Have you ever done that? Have you ever taken Jesus Christ into your life by faith? You *take and eat* of Jesus when you ask Him to save you from your sins, rescuing you from both their consequences and control.