

# Genesis 3.1-7

## From Good to Bad

Of all the stories that have found a major place in our culture, the Star Wars films are perhaps the main one to centre on the story of how someone one moves from good to bad. The three “prequels”, episodes 1-3, trace the growth and corruption of Anakin Skywalker as he transforms into the evil Darth Vader.

In this way the Star Wars films have done us a favour. They provide people of our culture with a way into the Bible story of Genesis 3, even though there are also important differences as well, which I will show. (Still, I believe we should make the most of the opportunity this gives us !).



Genesis 3 is such a vital chapter in the Bible’s presentation of reality.

It shows us *how it is* that the world is *not* like the picture of Genesis 1 and 2 any more. It sets the stage for history as we know it.

Over the last few weeks we’ve seen just how incredibly *good* God’s creation was. We saw how it fitted God’s purposes perfectly (“it was very good”), and how God made a perfect environment for human living in Eden, it was a royal pleasure garden, a place for enjoying relationship with God. It was also a place for the man and woman to enjoy each other, living in a partnership of harmony, openness and freedom.

It is vital to see how this stands in contrast to almost all other views of reality. According to Genesis the world was not made with a *mixture* of good and evil in it. There were not two competing *forces* in nature, one good and one bad. Humans were not made with a good side and a dark side, with one side or the other coming to the fore.

Instead, Genesis shows us that there were *two clear stages* that produced the reality we live in. First, God made everything good. Second, humans went from good to bad. Genesis 3 shows us how this happened.

## How it all went wrong

Let’s look at how the chapter begins:

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more shrewd than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God say, “You shall not eat from any tree in the garden”?’

You see the story starts off, not with Adam and Eve, but with this other figure, the serpent, or snake. We are even given a description of its character. The serpent is “shrewd”, that is, it is cunning. We have a clue here that the words of the serpent may be tricky. He may not be saying what he seems to be saying.

Who is this serpent ? The story itself doesn’t tell us, but in the world of ancient Israel snakes could represent wisdom (think of the symbol of medicine). But snakes were also ‘unclean’ animals, and so they made a good symbol of opposition to God. It is only later in the Bible that the writers equate the serpent with the devil. For example, Revelation 20.2 refers to “the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan”. Jesus makes this connection too when he says that the Devil was a murderer from the beginning and a liar (John 8.44).

Can we see that the story in Genesis 3 is showing us that evil came into human existence *from outside*. In a way, this is followed by George Lucas when he has Annakin led to the dark side by Senator Palpatine, who is really a Sith lord. But the difference is that in Annakin's case there was a fault within him that made him liable to corruption. Remember the scene is Episode 1 when Annakin comes before the Council and Yoda detects a powerful fear lurking in Annakin's heart. Yoda announces prophetically "Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering". You see like many tragic heroes, Annakin has a fatal flaw that brings him down.

This is *not* the case in Genesis. God made the humans good, with no fatal flaw, no tendency to go off course, no fault that could be exploited. Just good. That is vital to hold on to in order to see that God is good. He did not make a faulty product that broke down under stress. If he did, then blame could be directed back to God. But in Genesis that is not possible. In fact, God's goodness is shown to be so overwhelmingly great, all we can do is gasp in horror at the entrance of evil into this creation.

## The Great Deception

So how does evil enter in ? Let's get back to the story:

<sup>1</sup>Now the serpent was more shrewd than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?''

What the snake does is to challenge the word of God. "*Did God say*". In fact, the whole of the story revolves around the word of God. Remember how God created by his Word ? He said "Let there be light" and there was light. He addressed the humans personally. God founded his relationship with them through words. Their life was to be directed by God's words.

So the serpent makes his attack at precisely this point. "*Did God say*". And then he misquotes God in the most awful fashion. "He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from *any tree* in the garden ?". Can you see how it is an attack on God's goodness ? In actual fact God had said: "You may *freely eat* of *every tree* of the garden" (Genesis 2.16). There was only one exception, and that was for the human's own well-being. Evil has to distort the truth.

Let's see how the woman responds:

<sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup>but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die." '

She doesn't quote God perfectly, but it is clear that she knows God's command, she takes it seriously, and she is ready to obey it. So we return to the serpent for round two:

<sup>4</sup>But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die; <sup>5</sup>for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

Can you see how the serpent makes out that God has deprived the humans, he's kept them in the dark about good and evil, he's prevented them from reaching their full potential of being like God, he's only kept the humans in line with a threat about death which is not even true. The serpent makes out that there is a rivalry between God and humans, and they need to win.

You see how the serpent presents God in terms that are the opposite of what we saw in Genesis 1 and 2. There we saw God's generosity, and the freedom he gave the humans. They were already "like God" in the sense that God made them in his image and likeness. They already knew good and evil – good is obeying the God who is good and evil is breaking his commands. They already had life in its fullest potential, in harmony with God and delighting in each other. There was no rivalry at all since God's rule and human freedom were perfectly compatible.

Yet the serpent is very shrewd. It does speak in a kind of half-truths. It makes these three promises. But as we saw at the beginning, the snake may not be saying what he seems to be saying. The story shows us this when it describes what actually happened when the woman and the man act on his promises.

<sup>6</sup> 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.  
<sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

The snake promises their eyes will be opened, and they are, but all they see is that they are naked! That is, they recognize their own vulnerability and they lose that wonderful openness and freedom they had before. They have to try to cover themselves, and it's a fairly pathetic attempt. They try to hide from their Creator because they feel unfit to meet him. What a let down !

The snake promises that they will be "like God", and in a sense they are, because now they determine what is good and what is evil for themselves, like God does. But, how can they do this thing that they have no capacity for ? They are stuck with an autonomy that they can't have any confidence in. What a let down !

The snake promises that they will not die, and in one sense they don't. They continue to exist. But do they have life ? Not in the terms of Genesis 2. They end up expelled from the place of life, the garden, they can no longer eat from the tree of life, they lack the very thing that made life "LIFE", and that is -- relationship with the God who breathed life into them. If they lose their life, then in a very real sense, they do die. What a let down !

In one way the snake's words came true, but in reality, it was a terrible outcome for the humans. There are some vital things that this story is teaching us.

## **The Truth About Evil**

First of all, we learn the truth about evil. We see how *subtle* evil is. We see how badly it leads humans astray. We see how little evil offers humanity. In fact they only *lose* by turning to evil. It is like a gamble on which everything God has given them is staked, and when the cards are on the table, they walk away with nothing.

It follows that evil is deeply *irrational*. It makes no sense. There is nothing you can say to explain why Satan acts this way or why the humans followed him. They had every reason to trust God and no reason to believe Satan's lies. Evil is simply perverse. It is stupid. It has no explanation.

Perhaps that is why the Bible doesn't try to explain it. We don't know where the Satan comes from, he just 'is'. There's actually very little if anything in the Bible that talks about Satan's origins. Even the stuff about him being a fallen angel is based on questionable interpretations of a few passages. In a real way, evil is *a mystery*. That is why darkness is such a fitting image for it. You can't see into darkness. You can't penetrate darkness with insight.

But we also see that evil has *no real existence* on God's creation. God made everything that exists. He shaped reality completely. And God did not created evil. It has no being, no existence

independent of creation. It is like a pimple which cannot exist without your face. It only exists as a perversion of creation. It only exists in good created things gone bad.

That also means that evil is only a *temporary* thing; a temporary blight on God's good creation. It has entered creation and it will be expelled from creation. There will be no evil in eternity. In the end, only God and his goodness are real and eternal. That is a vital perspective to have on life !

As I reflected on this passage it occurred to me that it only serves to emphasize the goodness of God even more by seeing it in contrast to evil. We need to take these truths deep into our hearts if we are to avoid the lies of the devil and the lure of evil.

## **The Essence of Sin**

The second thing this passage reveals is the essence of sin. We saw how God set up the relationship with the humans through his Word to them. Sin is not believing God's Word. That is where the woman and the man failed. They listened to the voice of the serpent instead of the voice of God. Their unbelief then led them to disobey God's Word. You can see that this is God's charge against them later in the story in **verse 11**:

<sup>11</sup> God said ... Have you eaten from the tree *which I commanded you not to eat* ?

As we have seen, their sin involved grasping at being 'like God', to take God's prerogative away from him, so that they become the ones who determine good and evil, instead of God. It is like trying to usurp the position of the King. Sin is not merely doing a booboo. It is not just a moral lapse. It is like turning the whole created order on its head, by trying to put humans on top and God beneath. Of course, it fails to achieve this. In fact, the humans don't even really achieve autonomy, since they have been manipulated by evil, they become followers of evil, not the leaders of creation.

## **Radical Rescue Required**

We see how sin causes such a fundamental disorder in creation. It's not going to be fixed by a quick apology. It is so serious, so radical in its effects, that it requires something far more thorough to return things to God's original design.

What God does is breath-taking! He enters this disordered creation in order to unravel the knot of sin, to undo the whole problem and bring about a reversal by doing the exact opposite of Adam. This is what the apostle Paul is talking about when he speaks of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2.6-9):

who, being in very nature God, did regard *equality* with God something to be *grasped*, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being born in human likeness, and being found in human form, he *humbled* himself and became *obedient* to the point of death, even death on a cross.

And again in Romans 5.19, Paul says:

For just as by the one man's *disobedience* the many were made sinners, so by the one man's *obedience* the many will be made righteous.

Through the deception of evil, human went from good to bad, giving up all God's goodness in exchange for nothing but disappointment. But God, through his Son, turns things from bad to good, and brings us back into that goodness forever. It is not hard to see how we should live in response ! Paul says "have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2.5) and "count yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6. 11). It's a radical new life we have to live in Jesus !