I. Set Up

A. Today is week two of our 40-week series, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. Last week we looked in Genesis 1 and the news was good – God created a good world, made us in his image and put us in charge. Today we're in Genesis 3 and the news is bad. Mike is going to walk us through chapter 3 verse by verse. Let me pray for us.

II. Intro

A. In *Perelandra*, the second book in CS Lewis's space trilogy, a Cambridge professor named Ransom is teleported by God to Perelandra, a planet where the Fall has not happened. He eventually realizes that his assignment is to keep that planets Eve – called the Green Lady – from falling to that planet's serpent (who is played by an entity called Weston).

B. It's a little heady – in part because Weston is code for Scientific Modernism and in part it's hard to describe a perfect world without it sounding a bit cheesy. It turns out we are a bit too broken for that ourselves. Evil is much easier to make sound interesting and fun than pure good is. I bring it up because it does help us understand Genesis 3, which is our text today.

C. Last week I said:

1. There are lots of stories out there – efforts to help us make sense of life, understand our context. And then we began unpacking the one that unfolds in the Bible – this all-time best-selling book, this foundation of Western Civilization, this book that reveals God and "explains us to us."

2. Last week I argued that the Bible is not just a collection of stories, it tells a story. Indeed, it tells The Story.

3. Between now and Christmas, we're in the Old Testament – also called the First Testament, the Jewish Scriptures or the Hebrew Bible.[1]

4. At the moment we're in the set up. The first 11 chapters that provide the context for the rest of the Bible. They give us the backstory.

D. In Genesis 1 and 2, everything was good – even very good. We were made in God's image and given rule over the world. Today we're reading about a lie, a rebellion and a curse. Thankfully we also get a promise.

E. The news is mostly bad. We're going to learn that evil is real and that we are broken... all the way down. But the good news is good news. Indeed, it is the first telling of the capital G and capital N God News. It's all quite important so I'm going to give you a line-by-line commentary of the whole chapter. Here we go. Genesis 3.

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[1] This – the Bible Jesus read – is frequently overlooked by Christians, but is the absolutely critical set up for the New Testament. Three-fourths of The Story is found in the Old Testament. Starting with the New Testament is like walking into a 2-hour movie with less than a half hour left.

III. **Now the serpent[2] (**cue the music in a minor key. This is the stand in for Satan) **was more crafty[3] than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.** There's a word play going on in the Hebrew that is lost in translation.[4] But the big thing to note is that we do not get any backstory.

A. The serpent is at once, one of the creatures God made and called good. And some sort of stand-in for Satan. And somehow he is inside the garden - a term used to imply paradise - and bent on wreaking havoc.

B. How is this possible? If things were good, where does evil come? This is called the Problem of Evil. This is a flyover, and the problem of evil is not in the text today. I will take this up in the pod cast. Remember, you can send in your questions.

IV. V1B: **He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"**

A. This is the first question recorded in the Bible. It's worth noting that it's asked to subtly undermine our confidence in God. The question is not, "Did God say something false?" That would be too obvious. The question is, "Did God really say that?"

B. It also demands a brief time out. I know some of you want to know: Were Adam and Eve real people? Am I really expected to believe that a snake talked?

C. Again, this is a fly-over. The goal is the forest not the trees. I will take up these kind of issues in the podcast. But let me say a few things right now:

1. I believe Genesis uses highly symbolic language to describe real events and real people and that this is a true account. I believe Adam and Eve were real people who rebelled against God.[5] And I believe that Eve encountered real, personal evil.

a) The serpent is not a symbol of our darker impulses. The rest of Scripture identifies him with Satan.

2. Did Satan speak through an ordinary animal, assume some kind of serpentine form, or is Genesis using more symbolic language to describe this supernatural encounter? I don't know. The text does not tell us. "I take the narrative as reporting real events using ancient literary conventions we're not used to reading"

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[2] Genesis does not tell us much about this figure. He is simply "the serpent," one of the creatures God made. Later (Rev. 12:9 and 20:2) Scripture will identify the ancient serpent with Satan.

[3] Genesis 2:25 says the humans were naked—ʿ*arummim*. Genesis 3:1 calls the serpent crafty—ʿ*arum*. The words sound almost identical in Hebrew. The innocent, exposed humans are about to encounter a creature skilled at exploiting their vulnerability.

[4] In 2:25, the man and woman are naked — *arummim*. In 3:1, the serpent is crafty — *arum*. Same root, same sound, different vowels. The narrator is playing with us on purpose. The ones exposed are about to meet the one who exploits exposure.

[5] Paul's argument in Romans 5 seems to depend on a historical Adam standing in contrast to the historical Christ. Through the first Adam came sin and death; through the second Adam come righteousness and life.

3. I do not think Genesis is giving us zoological reporting. This is not 21st century journalism. But this is not "a long time ago in a far away land." This is true in powerful ways.

V. V2: **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.' "**

A. Here Eve over-corrects - which suggests the serpent's distortion is working. She does not quote what God accurately. She edits the command and makes it into something harsher than what was given. In Genesis 2:16–17**,** God begins with generosity: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden." Eve minimizes that freedom and adds a restriction: "You must not touch it." The serpent's distortion is working. What she says sounds harsh, which makes disobeying it look more reasonable.

VI. "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[6] - such a blatant appeal to our pride **- knowing good and evil."**

A. The serpent immediately starts pressing. He moves from questioning God's Word to denying God's warning to 3) attacking God's character. His suggestion is that God is holding out on them. He doesn't want what is best for them.

B. Don't miss this. It is often where sin gains a toe-hold. Before we disobey God, we distrust his goodness. We disobey either because we believe we know better than God does, because we believe God doesn't want what is best for us, or both.[7]

VII. 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

A. Note that Adam is not absent. He is standing right there. And yet, he does not guard the garden, challenge the serpent, protect his wife, or obey God. Later – when this account is being interpreted by Paul in Romans 5 – Adam gets the blame.[8]

VIII. **… and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked;**

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[6] They were already like God in the sense God intended: created in his image to reflect his character. The serpent invites them to become like God in another sense—to claim the authority to define good and evil for themselves. Sin is not merely doing bad things. It is assuming God's place.

[7] Under every sin lies a suspicion about God: "If I obey him, I will miss out. If I place my life in his hands, he will not give me what I need. Therefore, I must take control and secure life for myself."

[8] Adam is treated as humanity's representative. Romans 5:12 reads: "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin"

A. The serpent promised enlightenment: "Your eyes will be opened." Their eyes are opened, but the first thing they see is their own shame. Sin always misleads. It always misdirects. It overpromises and underdelivers. They expected to become like God; instead, they became afraid of God.

IX. **so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.**

A. Their nakedness is a metaphor for more than physical nakedness. They were innocent. Now they are not. Before sin they were naked and unashamed. Now they feel exposed and unsafe. And so, they try to hide behind fig leaves. This is the first recorded religious act. Please note:

1. Their efforts fail. "Fig leaves" cannot heal or hide shame. They cannot restore innocence. Adam and Eve need a covering, but they could not make for themselves.

2. Every self-help program, every management strategy, every curated social media feed is a fig leaf. Every moralistic, pharisaical religious activity is a fig leaf. We've been sewing them for six thousand years. But they do not work.

3. But - as we will soon see - God provides the covering. It is the righteousness of Christ. We will be covered by His blood. But I am getting ahead of myself.

X. V8: **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?"**

A. This is quite a question. It's working at so many levels. *Where are you?* It's worth reflecting on that this afternoon. Where are you? Who are you and where are you?

B. By the way, God doesn't ask questions because he doesn't know something. He asks questions to force us to see something.

XI. V10: **He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And God 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."** And here we have the first – not the last – but the first instance of someone shifting the blame. "The woman you gave me…" The fault lies with her or with you. (As I said, Adam comes off as a weak, self-protecting jerk.)

XII. V13: **Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.**[9] This is a picture of total humiliation.

[9] The serpent (14-15): cursed above all creatures, condemned to crawl and eat dust — a picture of total defeat and humiliation, not a zoological explanation for how snakes move.

XIII. **And I will put enmity** this is stronger than dislike or disdain. It means active hostility, **between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he[10] will crush your head and you will strike his heel.**

A. This is a very important verse.[11] Theologians refer to this passage as the *protoevangelium* (the first telling of the Gospel). The term translated offspring – in Hebrew is *zera'*, meaning "seed" (the Septuagint uses *sperma*) – can give us a hint of the Virgin Birth.

B. What is being foretold is that the dustup started here will eventually playout in a conflict between a human (a representative of God and good – we would say, Jesus), and evil. And that good will win. Good will suffer (his heel will be struck) but will prevail.

XIV. V16: Then God speaks to the man and the woman. They are not cursed, but they are going to live under the curse given to the serpent and creation. **To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."**

A. What had been harmony between man and woman will be distorted by competing desires and disordered rule. This is not God commanding men to dominate women. It is God describing what sin will do to the relationship - love will become entangled with control, dependence, frustration, and power.[12]

XV. V17: **To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you.**

A. In other words, because of your position as co-regent (because of your federal headship[13]) it's not just you who fall, everything under you breaks as well. The world will be characterized by death and decay and Natural Evil. (In Romans 8 we are told that all of creation groans under the weight of sin. It waits to be restored).

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[10] The Hebrew pronoun in "he will crush your head" is masculine singular.

[11] Every promise, every covenant, every prophecy for the next 3,900 years of biblical history is commentary on this verse.

[12] The woman is told of pain multiplied in childbearing, and a struggling, competitive dynamic introduced into a marriage where there had been unity. The very things meant to be sources of greatest joy — bearing life, intimate partnership — become sites of greatest pain. That is what sin does to good gifts. It doesn't usually destroy them outright. It infects them.

[13] Adam acts not merely as a private individual but as the representative of the human race. Consequently, his decision has consequences for everyone he represents: "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin" (Romans 5:12–19). Adam's rebellion disorders his descendants and the realm entrusted to him. Humanity falls, the ground is cursed, and creation itself becomes subject to frustration and decay (Romans 8:19–23).

XVI. **through painful toil you will eat food from 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**."

A. Work is not part of the curse. God gave Adam work before the Fall. Work is good—but it is now harder than it needs to be. Every garden grows weeds. I'm sure I don't need to tell you, our efforts are riddled with frustration, exhaustion, disappointment, and failure.

B. The news here is very bad. Pain. Relational disruption. Chaos of all sorts. Death. Everything breaks – even nature. Which is what we see: cancer and floods, layoffs and funerals, conflict between men and women, shame within us. War. Injustice.

C. Sin has disordered everything, and death now hangs over everyone.

D. Our view of sin is way too small. The fallout of the Fall is far greater than we know.

XVII. Verse 20: **Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.** Her name in Hebrew is related to the word for life.[14] So, this may be some sort of act of faith. God has just pronounced death, but Adam responds by naming his wife Life.

XVIII. Verse 21: **"The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them."**

A. The text does not explicitly call this a sacrifice, but an animal apparently dies so that the guilty may be clothed. It begins a pattern that runs through Scripture: sin brings death, but an innocent third party can die so that guilty people can go free. And God himself will provide what his people cannot provide for themselves. This bloody trail will eventually lead to the cross.

XIX. **And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.**

XX. OK, so, what are we to see and understand? What are we being told? For our summary – for our fly over which is designed so you can come back and put more meat on the bones. I want to be sure four things are clear:

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[14] The Hebrew name is Ḥawwâ—*Chavvah*—which is related to the Hebrew word for "living," which is a remarkable act of faith.

A. Evil is real. We do not fully understand it. We do not get its origin story. There are aspects of it we cannot make sense of, but let there be no mistake, it is real. There are evil powers at work in our world. This is not quite as out of step with modern thought as it used to be. There was a time when believing in evil was considered naïve. Not so much anymore.

B. Two: We are broken. We are fallen and corrupt. We are not as bad as we could be. We can do good. People do love and serve and care for others. The theological term is total depravity not utter depravity. What it means is that every aspect of our life – our mind, our body, our emotions, our soul – has been damaged by sin.[15] If you think of us like a glass of liquid. The liquid is 99% water, but the poison is mixed in all of it.

1. So, last week – in Genesis 1 – the news was good. We were made in the Image of God. I said you are highly valued. You have dignity. Every person has worth and dignity. Yes! But, Genesis 3 provides more context. We are broken. We are highly valued but we are also deeply fallen.

2. What will come next – next week – is an awareness that we are so profoundly broken that we cannot fix ourself. And then, over the next 1,500 pages, we are going to see the distance God is willing to go to rescue us. And we will then add that we are: Highly Valued, Deeply Fallen and Greatly Loved.

3. But I am getting ahead of myself again. Today - in Genesis 3 - the message is: you are broken. We have inherited a fallen, broken nature. We are not called sinners because we sin. We sin because that is our nature.

4. By the way, this is hardly the only place where this point will be made. We will get it over and over in declarative statements, like: 1) In Jeremiah 17:9, where we are told that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. And in Romans 3, where we're told that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, or in Romans 7, where Paul marvels at how sin has undone him. "The things I want to do I don't do. And the things I don't want to do I do. Wretched man that I am." We will get passages that make it clear that sin does not merely lead us to make bad choices; it disorders our desires, distorts our judgment, and divides us against ourselves.

5. But it's not just there. We have 1,500 pages of examples. Of the good guys being cruel and selfish. Abraham lies. Jacob cheats. Moses kills a man. Rahab is a prostitute. David commits adultery and murder. Jonah runs from God. Peter denies Jesus. Thomas doubts. Paul persecutes the church. And these are the good guys.

6. And our brokenness should be obvious to anyone who looks around – who reads history or the news, which is full of wars and injustice and murder and rape and slavery and oppression.

7. And – AND! – it should also be obvious to anyone who looks in the mirror. And who realize, while we clean up well and put on our game face, we are selfish. If the person sitting next to you knew every thought that went through your mind in the course of a day, they would get up and move.

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[15] Our passion for justice is real - and is evidence we're made in God's image. But our capacity for self-deception is also real, and it is evidence of the fall.

8. Forgive me for belaboring this point, but the world is full of people who think we are good people – that human nature is at the worst, neutral – and who, with a bit more time, education and technology, we can bring heaven to earth. We will all get along. We will hold hands and share.

9. Which is obviously absurd. And which leads to the third point.

C. Three: One – evil is real; Two – we are broken; Three - We are a lot like Adam. We misunderstand who we are and shift the blame to others. "The woman you gave me…"

1. We need to make peace with the fact that sin is not a surface wound. We need to understand how deceitful our heart is. We tend to think the other side is full of evil idiots. I am trying to underline a different point here: you and I do not see our own selves accurately.

D. Finally, number four – a promise has been made. I want to end on the very good news.

1. Genesis 3 is unquestionably a tragedy. (I am using the term in the classic sense. Things get worse for the protagonist). We begin in a garden filled with life and end outside it. We begin naked and unashamed and end clothed and hiding. We begin walking with God and end east of Eden.

2. But this is not the end of the story. Not only does God come looking for those who have fled from him. He makes a promise. The serpent will not win. Evil will be defeated. He is going to send someone – Eve is going to perpetuate life – and one will be born who will crush the head of evil.

3. And because this is not our first time through the book, we know who he is talking about. Centuries later, Jesus will enter the story. He will come – in Paul's words – as the second Adam. And he will face the tempter (not in a plush Garden but in a harsh desert) and he will pass the test. He will refute every lie Adam and Eve believed. He will trust the Father where they distrusted him. He will obey where they rebelled. And He will bear the signs of the curse - thorns on his head, sweat and blood on his brow. He will be nakedand shamed on a cross for us. And he will die for us. The serpent will strike his heel. But he will come roaring back and crush the serpent's head.

4. Genesis 3 ends with humanity barred from the tree of life. The Bible will end – 1,500 pages and 38 sermons from now – the Bible will end with the tree of life standing open again, its leaves "for the healing of the nations."

5. The story that begins as a tragedy becomes the great comedy (I am using these terms in their classic sense. A tragedy is where things end worse for the protagonist. A comedy is where they end better. They end better Jesus and for those who are with Jesus.

E. Evil is real. We are broken. We are mostly clueless about just how broken we are. But a promise is made that God will rescue us.

XXI. Questions:

A. Do you think that Genesis 1-3 is literarily true? Do you believe in Adam and Eve and a talking snake? Or do you believe that it is a myth?

B. Are we to believe that the Bible is true in a way that other religious books are not?

1. Yes. you think other I believe it is true. That is not to say that the other stories do not have value or contain truth. I think they do.

a) I want to applaud the secular story's passion for justice.

b) And Buddhist insight about disordered desire – which lines up with what Augustine said sixteen centuries ago.

c) And Marxist rage at oppression. Yes. For sure, and by the way, this lines up with what the prophets of Israel had been saying.

2. I believe there is value and truth in the various other major meta narratives. But – no surprise - I think the Christian story is the true story. And so, we are focused there.

C. You mentioned the Problem of Evil. What is that and how is it resolved?