

# When Things Come Apart

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Genesis 3-9

Detailed outline from the Sermon on September 16, 2007

Up to this point, everything is good, even very good.

## Episode One

The deal – “You can eat anything and enjoy everything; except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat it you will surely die.” (2:16-17)

The deception – The crafty serpent deceived them. “When you eat it, you won’t die. Your eyes will be open and you’ll be like God, knowing good and evil.”

We consider this a deception not so much because it’s all lies. Death *doesn’t* come immediately and their eyes *do* open to good and evil. They are even *like God* in that sense, having eyes to see this distinction. But that doesn’t mean they’re really like God or that there aren’t deathly consequences.

The result – shame, vulnerability, complexity, needing to cover up and hide. The purity and uninhibited goodness has given way to, well, *this*. So beautiful that it hurts. So many potentials unrealized. Made like heaven but tainted by hell.

The evasions – Right away it starts. “Where are you?” asks God. And Adam hides. And we’ve been dodging God ever since. Oh, we come and go, but rebellion creates distance. Jesus is oh so right when he says, “If you love me, you will obey me,” because real love does the right thing and the right thing is always the thing that builds relationship rather than tearing it down.

“Nice fig leaf, Adam. Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from that one tree?”

“Actually, Lord, the *woman* gave it to me. It’s her fault. Wait, Lord, *you* gave me the woman so it’s *your* fault.”

“Woman, what have you done?” The Flip Wilson defense: “The devil made me do it.”

The aftermath – for the serpent, a low profile and a standing mutual dislike with woman. For woman, pain that taints the greatest euphoria she’ll know - childbirth. And for the man, one of his favorite things – work – will lose its luster.

And, of course, you came from dust and now to dust you will return. Death. As Paul puts it, the wages of sin is death. And with death, banishment from the garden; and that means banishment from the other special tree – the tree of life that gives everlasting life.

## Episode Two

Two sons – Abel the shepherd and Cain the farmer.

Their offerings – They bring their gifts to God. Abel brings his first and his best. Cain brings much less. He was a hold out. Gift-giving wasn't one of his love languages. God isn't favorable toward a heartless gift. God tells Cain, "Sin is crouching at your door. You must master it." In other words, "get a grip."

Violence – Cain goes the other way. He tricks his brother Abel and kills him.

The question from God, "Where is Abel?" The big question from Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The consequences – Cain and his offspring will become restless wanderers, distant from God. Not abandoned completely, but distant.

Some consolation – God protects Cain and gives him family.

Seth comes on the scene, another son. And there are apparently *others* on the earth. Cain and Seth had to marry someone. Either God created more people and families after He made Adam and Eve and Cain, Abel and Seth. Or, some suggest, the story of Adam and Eve and their sons really records the day that God began to hold developing humankind accountable for their actions and relationships. But we're simply not told where Mrs. Cain and Mrs. Seth come from.

## Episode Three

People begin to increase. The tide of wickedness swells. God grieves at the wickedness and resultant separation. He plans to purge the earth and virtually start over. But there is an exception; Noah and his family.

The first covenant with Noah: If you and your family bring yourselves and the animal pairs into the ark, you will be spared.

The catastrophe comes. God spares Noah's family and the animals.

The second covenant says that He'll never purge the earth like this again. And as a kind of *signature*, He paints the rainbow across the sky. It is a sign of the second covenant.

## Critical Moments and Themes

These are vital notions that lay a foundation and a framework for the whole book.

The tree – Why did God put that tree in the garden and say “hands off?” Why not the bliss of simplicity and naiveté and childlike wonder? Because God wanted a relationship of substance. Not one without options. Not a pre-programmed, robotic existence. Relationship. Free will. Choices. Authentic loyalty.

The serpent – the tempter; Satan; the devil. He keeps showing up intermittently throughout the story. He is not God’s anti-equal. He is an agent of the dark side, but with nowhere near the power of God. But he’s still to be taken seriously.

The consequential nature of rebellion – shame, broken relationships, distance from God, and sometimes even the spiral of violence. Death.

Bring genuine offerings – All over scripture, we’ll see repeats on this theme. Our offerings are love gifts to God, and when we hold out or hold back or hold God at arm’s length, our gifts will be the first evidence of it. And it grieves God.

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” - You can hear the scorn lick off of Cain’s tongue. The resounding answer of scripture is “Yes, you are.”

Exceptions and consolations – whenever God lowers the boom, there’s an exception or a consolation, because God never really quite gives up on us. Later, you’ll see the notion of a *remnant* find form. Noah’s family is the first.

Who’s in charge? This is the most flagrant truth of these stories. God is in charge and don’t forget it. This is our most flagrant sin. We want to be like God – not so much in character, which would be good; but we want to be in charge.

Covenant loyalty – with Adam, with Noah, with generations to follow; God sets up covenant relationships tilted generously toward the partners. God is loyal. We aren’t.