

## **“Don’t Be Coaxed by a Hoax”**

Genesis 3:1-13

*Series: Outlaws and Outcasts Week 1. Adam and Eve*

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Two dusty, trail-worn prospectors stumble one night into the San Francisco office of prominent business man George Roberts. It is November 1870 and Philip Arnold and his cousin John Slack want to deposit a small leather bag in the Bank of California but it just closed. So they come to Roberts. Reluctantly, after much prodding by Roberts, they cautiously mumble that the bag is full of rough diamonds. After they make Roberts swear an oath of secrecy, they tell him of a wondrous hidden paradise in Wyoming where diamonds, rubies, emeralds and sapphires litter the dusty terrain. After the pair leaves, Roberts quickly breaks his vow of silence and begins enlisting investors.

A few months later Arnold and Slack return with sixty pounds of diamonds and rubies valued at \$600,000. Roberts and other bankers and businessmen form a company. Shares of stock are sold. To verify the claim, a few stones are sent to Charles Lewis Tiffany of the Tiffany Company in New York. He declares, “Gentleman, these are beyond question precious stones of enormous value.” Now Civil War General George McClellan, Congressman Benjamin Butler and Presidential candidate Horace Greeley join the company.

The final test is an inspection of the site by a well-respected mining engineer named Henry Janin. The two prospectors lead the party on a blindfolded, roundabout journey. Finally, on June 4, 1872 they reach a Wyoming mesa studded with rubies, sapphires and diamonds. Janin the engineer examines the finds and pronounces them genuine. He tells the company to go ahead and sell 100,000 shares. Diamond fever rages through San Francisco. Everyone is desperate to get in on the bonanza.

Everyone except Clarence King. As the Chief US Surveyor in the area he senses there is something sinister in paradise. King is the Sherlock Holmes of the West. With only a few clues he leads his team on a bitterly cold 150 mile trek right to the secret diamond fields. And they do find real gems – some have already been cut and polished. King knew that nature never deposits all these different gems on the surface. Returning immediately to San Francisco he reveals to the company directors they were duped by a pair of uneducated Kentucky swindlers. On November 26, 1872 the San Francisco Chronicle breaks the news of the Great Diamond Fiasco. It turns out Arnold and Slack purchased leftover gems from diamond cutters in London and Amsterdam and scattered them over the ground. By the time the hoax is discovered, the two cousins are long gone with their payoff, estimated at \$8 million in today’s money. The San Francisco bankers go bust. Slack blows through his money and disappears. Arnold turns up back in Kentucky where he became, of all things, a banker. He pays back some of the money. In 1878 he gets into a shootout with another banker, took a bullet in the shoulder and, six months later, dies of pneumonia at the age of 49. Several hundred thousand dollars are never found.

Why were so many intelligent, powerful, well-connected businessmen and national leaders coaxed into falling for the Great Diamond Hoax of 1872? One word: temptation. They

were enticed by the power of riches. They were fooled by the appearance of reality. They were all taken in by a lie. They so desperately wanted it to be true even expert gemologists overlooked the obvious. Now before we judge them too harshly, let's remember that all of us can be coaxed by the hoax of temptation. Here are a few facts:

**Temptation hits all of us.** The Apostle James says,  
Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.  
(James 1:14)

We may be tempted by something on the outside: wealth, power, painkillers, lust, alcohol, food. Any person, place or thing can trigger temptation. What tempts one person may have no effect on another. James, however, focuses not on the outside delight but the inside desire. The Greek word for "enticed" means to catch with bait. See the picture? The temptation sets its hook in you and then drags you away. Without that inner desire, the bait holds no power over you. Fish love to gobble up worms on a hook. Yet you have no desire to eat a wiggling worm – at least I don't think you do. What desire is temptation trying to hook in you?

**Temptation promises what it can't deliver.** Temptation promises to make our lives wonderful and meaningful. Yet Solomon discovered,

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11)

Ecstasy, power, wealth, approval, applause, affirmation, acceptance – these are what temptation promises. But it can't deliver. In the end, the promises are as empty as an arid mesa in Wyoming.

A group of Minnesota teens were apprehended recently for stealing a cake from a local grocery store. As if the embarrassment of getting caught by police wasn't enough punishment, it turned out the stolen cake was not even real—it was a cardboard display cake. The grocery store decided not to press charges, but the local police department and news stations had fun posting the story with phrases like "#nocakeforyou."<sup>1</sup> Temptation promises something sweet, satisfying, exciting. But in reality it's as flat as cardboard.

**Temptation always costs.** The Great Diamond Hoax was fueled by a desire to get rich quick. In the end, it cost the investors vast sums of money. Paul says to Timothy,

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (1 Timothy 6:9)

If riches are not tempting to you, substitute some other substance and you get the same effect.

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<sup>1</sup> The Associate Press, "3 Teens Caught Stealing Cardboard Display Cake in Minnesota," ABC News (6-07-2017).

In 2006 Robin Williams checked himself into a rehab center. After twenty years of sobriety from alcohol he slipped. He was also addicted to cocaine which he called “the devil’s dandruff.” When he was back on the road to recovery he explained to ABC’s Diane Sawyer,

The addiction waits. It lays in wait for the time when you think, 'It's fine now, I'm O.K.' Then, the next thing you know, it's not O.K. Then you realize, 'Where am I? I didn't realize I was in Cleveland.'"<sup>2</sup>

It was not alcohol or drugs that led Robin Williams to take his life on August 11, 2014. He was clean and sober for eight years. Yet his struggle reveals that temptation does not care about your fame, wealth, age, gender, background, religion or intelligence. It’s waiting. It’s patient. It always exacts a cost. It always demands a price...sometimes a terrible one. Temptation promises much, delivers little, and eventually takes everything.

The classic picture of temptation is the first message in our series Outlaws and Outcasts. Some of the greatest figures in Scripture were, at one time, outlaws or outcasts or both. All of us, in one way or another, are outlaws and outcasts – whether by our own poor choices or by the exclusion and rejection of others. Yet as we’ll see, God does not give up on them or us. In fact He works with the outlaws and outcasts to help all of us. And in their stories, we find hope.

The first couple we meet are both outlaws and outcasts: Adam and Eve. They broke God’s law and were cast out of the garden. It doesn’t start that way. God plants a beautiful garden in the land of Eden for them. They tend the garden, care for the animals, live off the abundance of the fruit trees, and, above all, enjoy a close and loving relationship with the Lord. There is an innocence and a peacefulness in the garden. But it doesn’t last. By the third chapter of the Bible everything falls apart. The snake, who is revealed to be Satan later in the Bible, begins the temptation in a most subtle way.

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?’” (Genesis 3:1)

It’s just a question. Innocent. Harmless. The serpent doesn’t even mention the forbidden fruit. Eve responds with the instructions God gave them.

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.’” (Genesis 3:2-3).

She goes a little farther than God’s word. He never said, “Don’t touch it.” Perhaps she is afraid of it. Maybe she is wisely putting a wide margin between her and the forbidden fruit. She should have put a wide margin between herself and the snake.

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<sup>2</sup> Dave Itzkoff, "Robin Williams, Oscar-Winning Comedian, Dies at 63 in Suspected Suicide," The New York Times (8-11-14)

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4-5)

The serpent calls God a liar. He claims the Almighty is keeping a wonderful power from the humans. The temptation is not any of the traditional ones: money, sex, food, or drugs. It’s the ultimate temptation: to be gods. Why let God be King when you can reign? Why let God be in charge when you can rule? Ultimate power awaits. Nothing will stand in your way.

Yet it’s a lie. **Temptation is Born in Deception.** It promises what it can’t deliver. If Eve turned away or turned to God at this point the temptation would stop. But the snake hooked her hunger. Temptation is **Nurtured by Desire.**

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. (Genesis 3:6)

Now Eve focuses on the tree and notices it’s: 1. Good for food. 2. Pleasing to the eye. 3. Desirable for gaining wisdom. All the same enticements advertisers use today. It hooks into the desire of Eve and her husband Adam who joins her. Perhaps Adam and Eve wonder, “Why is God keeping knowledge from us? Why is He preventing us from learning, growing, developing, improving, maximizing our potential? Why doesn’t He want us to be equal to Him?” This is a revolution! It’s a strike against oppression! It’s a victory for the human spirit! They seize the fruit and boldly sink their teeth into it.

And suddenly they realize they were coaxed by a hoax. The snake told them a half-truth. Their eyes are opened, they do not instantly die. Yet they also do not become gods.

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. (Genesis 3:7)

Temptation **Causes Division and Dread.** Innocence is instantly replaced with shame, guilt, cover up and fear. With forbidden fruit juice still on their chins they desperately try to sew together fig leaf formal wear. Like children who know they’ve done something wrong, they try to cover up their sin and hide. Then God, like a parent coming home at the end of the day, walks into the Garden and discovers it’s very quiet. Too quiet.

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?” (Genesis 3:7-11)

Adam and Eve did not become gods. They actually became less than human. They lost the best part of their humanity: their close relationship with God. The Lord knows where they are. His real question is, “Why have you separated from me?” For that is the essence of sin – a separation

between us and God, a breakdown in every relationship. The decision to go my way instead of God's way, to rebel against God's will, to play god instead of letting God be God is repeated in every age, every day, in every person.

Temptation ultimately **Leads to Destruction and Death**. What is the fallout of the fruit? A broken relationship with God and broken relationships between people. When confronted, brave Adam blames his wife and Eve passes the buck to the serpent. No fig leaf will cover sin. No hiding will make it go away. The history of humanity is littered with broken relationships, war, crime, abuse and destruction.

Why did God put the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil in the Garden? God creates reality and reality always includes choices. Most people misunderstand this tree. It's not really knowledge in the sense of education. To "know" in Hebrew means to embrace and experience as when Adam knew his wife and she conceived (Genesis 4:1). "Good and evil" in Hebrew means essentially everything. This is the voracious hunger for everything on my terms, my way. It's a hunger temptation loves to stoke. It's a hunger that is never satisfied. It's a hunger that destroys. The choice in the Garden is the most basic one of all – a choice we face every day: my way or Thy way. My will or Thy will be done.

If you think God is cruel for sending them from the Garden look again. The curses He describes – toil in working the soil, pain in childbirth – are the consequences when we tell God we don't want to live under His protection, we want to do things our way. God could not let them stay and eat from the Tree of Life and live forever in the chaos of sin, in the endless hunger for everything. That is a fate worse than hell. Instead, even here, in the third chapter of the Bible, God hints at how He will solve this conflict. God loves you and me so much that He will do anything to get us back. He gives the serpent Satan fair warning.

And 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." (Genesis 3:15)

One day, a Child of Eve will take on the devil. In a dark garden, another human will face the same choice: my will or Thine be done. Instead of running and hiding, He will surrender Himself to the Cross. The old serpent will sink his fangs into that Son. But in that great battle, the Son will crush the serpent and set us free.

How do you fight temptation? Do the opposite of Adam and Eve. James says, Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:7-8)

Remember the 4 Rs:

**1. Recognize Your Weakness** – What tempts others may not tempt you. But each of us is weak in some way. The devil will push against that weakness. Stay far away from situations where you are vulnerable. Don't let temptation trigger you.

**2. Resist the Devil** – Do not listen for a minute to that lying snake. By the power of Jesus tell Him to get lost.

**3. Receive Power from God** – James says it's not enough to deny the devil. We also need to draw near to God for His help, power and protection. Jesus knows how to beat temptation.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.  
Hebrews 4:15

**4. Rely on Others** – Adam was no help to Eve but we can help each other. Ask a friend to hold you accountable.

While sitting on a plane to Denver, Jay Kesler noticed the twenty-something woman sitting next to him was crying. After several minutes Jay, who worked with Youth for Christ, asked her, "Can I help you?" She just learned her fiancé ran off with another woman. Because of her faith she'd been saving herself for their wedding night. But since a "wild girl" stole her man, what's the point of staying pure? She was headed to a ski lodge to make up for lost time.

"Do you think it's worth giving up what you've always believed because of this painful experience?" Jay asked. "I don't know," she said, then sank into silence. Finally she looked at him and asked, "Where are you staying tonight?" It turned out they were booked in the same hotel. She suggested they "have a couple of drinks together and see how the evening turns out."

The offer was very tempting.

"I don't want you to be confused," Jay said. "Let me show you something." Jay took out his wallet and showed her his family photos. "I sympathize with the pain you feel. And you're very attractive. But I'm not going to act on this desire. You're vulnerable right now; you're in a difficult situation. I'm married. I'm also a Christian. I'm not going to do it because it would mean taking advantage of you and violating my commitments and my faith."

After a few minutes of silence she said, "Well, if I thought I could find another man who would turn down the offer I made to you, I'd stay pure till I found him." Jay replied, "There are more guys like me out there than you may think. I hope you don't go through with your plan."

When they got to Denver, Jay put the young woman in touch with some female Youth for Christ staff, and she stayed the night with them. They spent a few days with her and then sent her back home.

They both avoided being coaxed by a hoax. How about you?