

# The Fall of Man

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The following is an exposition of Genesis 2.15 – 3.7. This saga, which tells of the temptation and fall of man, remains relevant to us not just as a historical recall of the first sin, but as a revelation of the nature of God, his intentions and his intended relation to mankind. It is also a constant reminder of the consequences we face as we choose how our lives are lived. The context for this exposition is the creation: God has just completed the creation of the heavens and earth, the divine light, and the firmament; he gathered the waters and caused dry land to appear; he created light in the firmament, the sea creatures and birds, then the creatures of the earth and finally, man (who was created in the image of God). God also planted a garden, and among the trees in the midst of this garden were the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. This garden is a place where God's presence is made, so his placing man in the garden reveals God's desire to have man in his presence.

### Reading the Scripture:

#### Genesis 2.15 – 3.7:

- 15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.  
16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;  
17 "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."  
18 And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."  
19 Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name.  
20 So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.  
21 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.  
22 Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.  
23 And Adam said:  
    "This is now bone of my bones  
    And flesh of my flesh;  
    She shall be called Woman,  
    Because she was taken out of Man."  
24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.  
25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

- 3.1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"
- 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;
- 3 "but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"
- 4 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.
- 5 "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and bad."
- 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.
- 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

Translation of Hebrew terms played an important part in shaping my thoughts regarding these verses. The Hebrew words *yada*, *tob* and *ra* (translated as knowledge, good and bad) could have a range of meanings or connotations, just as words we commonly use today could have multiple meanings. I am convinced that the key to grasping the intended meaning of the written word is to carefully consider the immediate context in which the author has used the word. Take the word *tob* (good), throughout this saga the word good is used to describe God's creation, but in a context that suggests the connotation of completeness, beauty, harmony, satisfaction or pleasantness, not in a sense of being morally or ethically good. God created the light and saw that it was good; he gathered the Seas and saw that it was good; he created the living creatures and saw that it was good; and with everything that he had made, he saw that it was good. The good God saw is the sense of completeness, harmony, beauty, etc. God saw that it was not good that man should be alone – this is certainly not a moral assessment for God is not saying that this is morally or ethically bad or evil for man to be alone, but not good in the sense of lacking completeness, joy or satisfaction.

Likewise, the Hebrew word "*ra*" has typically been translated as "evil" but could also mean "bad" as in being unpleasant, incomplete, undesirable, ugly or objectionable. Given the context of its use, especially its use as a conjunctive (and opposite) of "good", I propose that the appropriate translation is bad, and this translation has no moral or ethical connotations. It simply denotes a condition of disharmony, incompleteness, unpleasantness or distress.

Therefore, the tree is more properly the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Knowledge (yada) is not referring to knowing in the intellectual sense, but knowing experientially (as the result of experience). Then what we see at Genesis 2.17 as God instructs Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and bad is God's intention that man is not to experience "bad". This means that God never intended man to experience unpleasantness, disharmony, distress, ugliness, pain, discomfort, etc. And we see what I regard as confirmation of this as we read in Revelation where God's intentions are finally fully realized.

Revelation 21. 4:

- 4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

We see the elimination of the experience of "bad." And we know that what we shall realize following the day of final judgment is what God intended for man from the beginning. So, we have evidence that God's intention at the beginning is that man would not experience bad.

The fact that God put man in the garden of Eden indicates that God intended man to live in his presence. There was not a need for a temple or a tabernacle, for God would walk among the trees of the garden and could there enjoy communion with man, as it was God's intention to have man live in harmony and union with him. Again, we see this intention confirmed and realized in Revelation 21.3:

- 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."

Furthermore, there was no restriction on eating of the tree of life, therefore, God's intention included eternal life (or at least the choice of eternal life). Death is an experience of bad that God wanted man to avoid, as his specific instruction to Adam was to not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and bad or you will experience the ultimate bad – death.

We also see in this saga the one thing in God's creation with which he was not satisfied: the incompleteness of man. The "alone" status of man denotes that he is divided or in a state of separation, so to remedy this incomplete state, God decides to make man a "helper" who is

“comparable” to him. In examining the term “helper” we find that it should not be perceived as designating a subordinate or one who is inferior, for as we note how the term is used elsewhere, we see it referring to God (Psalm 30.10, 54.4, and Exodus 18.4) and to the Spirit (John 15.26). Neither God nor the Spirit is subordinate or inferior to man in any way, therefore we should not infer that God created woman subordinate or inferior to man. The Hebrew word *neged* is translated ‘comparable’ as it denotes the act of comparing, meaning the helper (who is to benefit man by bringing completion to him) contrary to being inferior or subordinate to man, is like him.

This relationship between man and woman completes the goodness of God’s creation. The fact that woman was made from man speaks to the quality of their union. The relationship is one of union (marriage) and is modeled on the holy union of God with mankind. Just as it is forbidden for man to disrupt the union and unity he has with God by serving others (the spiritual adultery of idolatry), it is forbidden for man to disrupt his holy union and unity with woman – for Christ corrected the Law of Moses when he clarified that divorce results in adultery (except in cases of sexual immorality) and remains forbidden (Matthew 5.31-32 and 19.4-9). The seriousness of marriage union reflects the seriousness of our holy union with God.

The quality of man’s union with God and woman is indicated in the fact that they were naked and not ashamed, for there was the goodness of harmony and unity, as there were no differences, distinctions or concepts of separate selves. We now see that this perfect unity was made possible through the Spirit which was in mankind and of God. Man’s (mankind’s) purpose is to serve God by doing his will, not for God’s sake, but for the sake of man. In serving God, man becomes an expression of the will of God; he becomes an expression of God, and in so doing, he is one with God. For God is self-existent and eternal, he was before the beginning and requires nothing for his existence; therefore, Lord God shall be forever. It is only in union with God that man can exist eternally, for God is the true and ultimate reality – all that is not of God is ultimately not real, but temporal and will perish in time. The union of man and woman is the worldly type of mankind’s union with God. This union is life.

In the garden, man was instructed by God, but he retained free will. Man had the will to choose between life and death – the tree of life or the tree of death (for the fruit of the tree of

knowledge of good and bad would surely lead to death). When seen from its true perspective, no sensible man would choose experiences of bad and death over the experiences of eternal good and life, but the serpent was of cunning deception and lies. The serpent presented a distorted perspective in which he first placed emphasis on the tree which was restricted while concealing the truth that every tree that was good for food and “goodness” (including the tree of life) was available, only that which brought death was restricted. For God actually said, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat” with the exception for the tree that would bring separation and death, but the serpent asked if God has said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden” to emphasize what they did not have rather than what they had. That the woman was susceptible to this deception is revealed in her embellishment of the restriction by adding that not only were they not to eat of it, but were told “nor shall you touch it, lest you die.” The truth is they were not forbidden from touching the tree or its fruit.

The serpent’s deception caused man to doubt the providence of God, and he coupled this deception with the lie that wisdom, not death, would follow eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. It is true that God could “know” or experience good and bad, for God had given angels and man free will, therefore he was exposed to the possibility of being disappointed by their free-will choices, and this potential disappointment is a potential experience of bad. However, God intended to shield man from the possibility of experiencing bad, and it was from the magnitude of his providence and love that he attempted to do so. The cunning serpent made an appeal to the pride and ego of man, for the prospect of being “like God” was an appeal to define oneself separate from the oneness of God; this is an appeal to serve self rather than God, and therefore, ultimately, an appeal to worship the idol of self in a commission of spiritual adultery.

The decision to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge did result in the opening of the eyes. However, this awareness was not the wisdom man had sought, but the experience of bad, for true wisdom comes from our reverence of God. By eating of the tree of knowledge, man had acted contrary to the will of God. This disobedience and disunity resulted in the experience of death – spiritual death, and spiritual death is separation from God. This experience of bad resulted in death, disharmony and disunity that led to an awareness of

differences and distinctions where before there was life, harmony and union. Mankind became ashamed of its nakedness and wished to hide because the spirit of oneness and unity had died; the one became two.

Man is now in sin, a state of separation from God. Man had spiritually died, and it is this spirit that will have to be restored if man is to escape the grips of sin and death. It is the spirit that must be resurrected if man is to end his separation from God.

We can clearly see that Adam and Eve were duped into choosing to eat from the tree of knowledge, which was actually the tree of death. While this tree of death was in the midst of the garden, so also was the tree of life. We can clearly see the absurdity in choosing death and the experience of bad while forgoing eternal life and the exclusive experience of good. The serpent appealed to them with lies and deceptions that led them to think they would obtain something desirable and beneficial, while what they actually received was loss – loss of harmony, unity, prosperity, beauty, joy, pleasantness and eternal life. Because man doubted the loving and complete providence of God, he was unable to see through the lies and deceptions of the serpent.

We must be mindful that the choice presented to Adam and Eve remains before us even today. Our true purpose is to serve the will of God, and in obeying his voice, we are to have eternal life in communion with him. We know whom we serve by noting the priorities in our lives, for whatever is your first priority, whatever is most important in your life, this is truly your God. We can choose to serve first the one true God, or we can elect to serve the idols of our own creation, be it the idol of self in our “pursuit of happiness” (as was the case with Adam and Eve in their pursuit of God’s wisdom), be it the idol of worldly desires, or other idols we create with our minds, hands or hearts.

Christ, who died on the tree, has become the fruit of the tree of life. We can choose to eat of his fruit by entering and keeping his covenant, and by so doing, enjoy eternal life; or we can choose to eat of the tree of death by following the deceptions and lies of the temporal world and by living a life that is contrary to the will of God. By keeping covenant with Christ, we can through our love of God and one another begin to restore the unity and harmony that existed at the beginning, being assured of eternal bliss. By following the temptations of the

world, we repeat the tragic absurdity of Adam and Eve, and with this choice, experience eternal death. As with Adam and Eve, God granted us free will to choose – the tree of life or the tree of death; and each day as we live, we reflect our choice.