

## 5. GENESIS ... BACK TO THE BEGINNING: The Test

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And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2: 16-17).

These are crucial verses in our journey back to the beginning for understanding our world and our place in it.

We have already seen how, fresh from the Creator's hand, Adam stood as a real man in an objectively real world at the very start of real human history. Today's text tells us the Creator invested Adam with free will and moral accountability.

Standing in the garden as an unprogrammed part of the cosmos, Adam heard the LORD God explain precisely what was involved in being His representative on earth. Before him were two trees, two choices, two outcomes, two destinies.

I don't believe Adam saw how big 'the deal' was for himself, his wife, or his family --- yet alone for all future generations! But his choices would have massive repercussions for all subsequent human history as we know by sad experience.

Stop right there! You may not have realised it, but we have not only made a huge statement about Adam being a free rational being. The text also tells us about *the God Who spoke to Adam* --- *the Creator God is the God Who speaks!* God is a communicating God Who speaks propositional truth to the man. And Adam was able to receive that communication, and to act on it.

### ADAM BECAME 'TO' A LIVING BEING

So let's take a closer look at the significance of language as **Genesis** teaches.

Approximately 1,900 years ago the rabbinic commentator **Onkelos** highlighted a tiny word in **Genesis 2:7** which, although found in the Hebrew text, is not in our English translations. It's the little word **to**;

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [*the neshamah* ] and [the] man became **to** a living being [*nephesh*] (Gen. 2:7). ( <sup>1</sup> )

To the best of my knowledge, that little word --- **to** --- is not in any other foreign language translations either. **To** is considered too insignificant! **To** is overlooked as too subtle to make any extra contribution to our understanding --- but **Onkelos** considered it critical to our understanding of what kind of a creature Adam was.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by **Gerald L Schroeder** in *GOD According to God: A Scientist Discovers We've Been Wrong About God All Along*, Harper One, NY, p156

The supposedly superfluous word “**to**” --- **and the man became to a living being** --- is there to teach us something vital, argues **Onkelos**. He says it hints at a change from a lower to a higher form of existence.

**Onkelos** translated this way; **And the man became a speaking spirit**. That is, he understood the text to be teaching that **the man was not a speaking animal**. It is **the breath of life**, the *neshamah*, which elevated Adam, the man, from being a mere animal and which lifted him up “**to**” the status of being Divine image bearers. And that which raised Adam up to that class above, was his God-given capacity for rational communication through spoken language.

Nor was it only that Adam would be able to reason and discourse with his future wife and fellow human beings on his own social level. That’s important, of course, but it’s secondary because that type of verbal communication doesn’t come first in **Genesis**.

**Genesis** shows that God spoke to Adam before Eve arrived on the scene! Thus, Adam heard the voice of God before he was able to speak to, or listen to, anybody else.

As a communicating ‘spiritual’ being (*not* ‘spirit being’!) man is able to receive propositional truth-content from his Creator --- as well as dialogue with his fellows. By the inbreathing of God into Adam’s **nostrils** human beings are differentiated from the rest of God’s world in that we can stand in a loving relationship with our Creator. We can hear the words of God. We can process messages and choose our responses. ( <sup>2</sup> )

The word “**to**” tells us that *God stepped Adam up from the plane of a merely animal existence to a higher spiritual level altogether*. Man is a communicating, rational, spiritual person made in **the image of God** Who is Himself a Person.

In every human being, no matter how marred by sin and unbelief since Adam’s defection, God has left a witness that cannot be removed. Deep down we instinctively know we are different from the animals.

Linguistics --- the phenomenon of propositional language which can articulate things like memory, dreams, hopes, fears, feelings, objective observations --- is one of the greatest arguments that human beings are truly made in the likeness of the God Who is personal.

The greatest proof of our significance in this world, is that you and I can hear the voice of God! We are made to be a speaking people, on the vertical and upward plane, as well as on the horizontal and sideways level. Unfortunately, the popular acceptance of **Darwinian Evolutionary Theory** means society, by and large, has forgotten our unique origin and status, reducing mankind to nothing higher than the status of animals.

## ALL RUNS LIKE CLOCKWORK ... EXCEPT

Up until the creation of mankind, everything else in this cosmos operated according to the “**Laws of Nature**” in the great “machine” which we call the Universe.

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<sup>2</sup> The **Septuagint** (LXX) says God breathed into Adam’s **face** --- it’s only when we look into the face of another person that we can really know them. Lovers can’t stop looking into each other’s eyes!

The atoms work according to their own nuclear laws. The minerals and the elements function according to their own inbuilt chemistry. The sun and the moon and the stars operate independently of anything mankind can do. The bird sings “just because” it does. The horse runs and the dog barks, because that’s what they “just do” by nature. The cosmic “machine” just works. That’s how the Creator designed things.

But although we humans are also subject to the same physical laws like everything else, we have been imprinted by design with this one key difference --- we can speak with rational content, and we can make informed decisions based on that communication. God has lifted us up **to** a high level indeed. As **Onkelos** says, you and I are far more than mere **speaking animals**, far more than *just animals who can talk!*

Regarding our capacity for information-bearing language and communication, I can’t go past **Francis Schaeffer’s** excellent observation here; **Each time one man communicates with another, whether he knows it or not, even if he is the greatest blasphemer that ever lived or the atheist swearing at God, even when he swears, even when he says, “There is no God” --- he bears testimony to what God is. God has left Himself a witness that cannot be removed. ( <sup>3</sup> )**

## THE DYNAMICS

We first read how God **commanded the man**, “**You are free to eat ... but you must not eat...**” The Creator can do this for He is, after all, the Sovereign. But it was a command with an *explanation*. Adam learned his options and their consequences, proving God is also a reasonable and loving Father God! The whole world was his for the taking except for one solitary tree!

The fact that God treated the man as a rational communicating being is further attested to in **Genesis 3** after Adam & Eve took the wrong option. Feeling their guilt and after trying to patch over their newfound shame, God asks them a series of questions, “**Where are you? Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from? What is this you have done?**” And the guilty pair gave their excuses. Then God explained to them the consequences of their disobedience. Articulated communication via speech!

After **the Fall** things in the relationship with their Creator drastically changed. The original open fellowship which had formed a daily delight for Adam & Eve --- something they no doubt looked forward to with excitement as they anticipated hearing **the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day** --- has now become a nightmare (**Gen. 3: 8**). ( <sup>4</sup> )

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<sup>3</sup> *Genesis in Space and Time*, IVP, Ill., USA, Third Printing, 1972, p60

<sup>4</sup> The expression **the sound** may just as accurately be translated as they heard **the voice of the LORD**. Also, there is actually nothing in the Hebrew text to indicate what time of the day the LORD would seek fellowship with them. The phrase **the cool of the day** literally is, **the wind of the day**. Throughout the rest of the Bible the wind often indicates God’s presence, His breath, His Spirit. The Bible has many examples of God speaking words of comfort or of judgment through the wind.

What had been Adam & Eve's greatest delight before their rebellion --- unbroken and joyful communication with God --- now became the source of fear and foreboding. Hearing the voice of the LORD God had become a daunting prospect.

## WHY THE TEST?

But someone may be wondering why in the first place God should have put Adam & Eve in the way of testing. Look at our opening text again;

**The LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2: 16-17).**

As already mentioned, this is the first time **Genesis** records a command from God to mankind. Modern man is abhorred by such a prospect. What right has God got to tell me what I can and can't do? But the original Hebrew audience saw in God's command the prime example of the love of God for man. Let me explain ...

For the Hebrew, only God knows what is good, and only God knows what is not good.

For the Hebrew, the way to enjoy God's good land and blessings is contingent on **keeping** His loving and all-wise commands (Cf. **Deut. 30: 16**).

For the Hebrew, God's commandments represented safety, indeed life, much like a fence protects from the dangers of trespassing and falling over a precipice.

For the Hebrew, to be left to decide for ourselves what is good and what is not good is a dangerous place full of potential disaster.

Already the **Genesis** narrative has told us that God declares what is good --- note the repeated phrase, **and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:4,10,12, 18,21,25,31)**.

After commanding Adam concerning his moral responsibility the very next thing we learn about is Eve's creation out from Adam's side. This context is surely significant, for **Genesis** sees Eve's creation as the climax of God's knowledge of what is good for Adam. God pronounced it was **not good for the man to be alone** because He is a good God!

However, for us moderns, this still begs the question. Why test Adam with the command not to eat of one of the trees in the garden? The powerful answer is that man is to love God freely, from the heart, and true love for the Creator can only be proved by a heart-obedience to Him.

Think of our own experience with a disobedient child who says, "**But I love you mummy**". We are not shocked when the parent challenges, "**Then why don't you listen to mummy and do what mummy asks?**" It is actions that prove our love. (Of course mummy and daddy tell the child what they want because of their superior knowledge and because they know what's good for that child's safety and happiness.)

If love for the Creator doesn't include obedience to His good wishes then love is evacuated of any meaningful content. The only way Adam could be truly free and rise to the level of everything his loving Creator designed him to be, was that he continue to stand before his God in a relationship of loving trust.

By definition, love must be free to make choices. It's been well said that if you love someone you must release them. They must be allowed to go if that's what they want. That's why Adam must be tested with a real choice. God must let him be free to go, as well as give him the freedom to want to stay.

God did not make Adam or Eve robots. Man is not an automaton. You'll never find love in the mechanics of a machine. (I know some **Harley-Davidson** enthusiasts will tell me that the purring of their motorbikes is the language of love!) But I can't demand my wife love me, otherwise it's not love. I crave her *heart*! In this we humans truly reflect **the image of God Who is Love.**

## THE TREE

We are now in a good place to ask what exactly the test was that God put before Adam & Eve? We must first dispel any notion that **the tree of the knowledge of good and evil** was in itself a bad or an evil tree. Remember that, so far everything in Paradise has been declared good. **Francis Schaeffer** notes that;

God has made no evil things. If He had, or if God had programmed man so that man must disobey him, then we would have here a concept like the Hindu idea that eventually both good and evil, cruelty and non-cruelty, spring from God and thus are finally equal.

But God has not made a bad tree. He has simply made a tree. And there is nothing intrinsic about this tree that is different in any way from the other trees. Rather God has simply confronted man with a choice. He could just as well have said, "Don't cross this stream; don't climb this mountain." <sup>(5)</sup>

As we have said, in giving Adam a free choice God did open up the possibility for the wrong choice to be made, and with seriously evil consequences. But this is not to agree that God was responsible for the bad choice, as if the potential was the actualising of it.

But in giving that free and unprogrammed moral choice God was validating Adam as man. And on that note, as an aside, I find it reprehensible that **Calvinism** insists that God has determined beforehand who is individually elected to salvation and who individually has no choice in the matter because they have been chosen before their birth as destined to everlasting destruction. That theology is a travesty, a denial of **the image of God** embedded in our natures since the beginning of our creation. <sup>(6)</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Op. Cit.* pp 71-72

<sup>6</sup> I know the Calvinist and Reformed theologian will counter that since the Fall, man is dead in sin and so has lost the ability to freely choose life. I have written a little on this elsewhere if your interest is piqued. Just go to the articles' subsection *Practical Christian Living* and the two articles titled *Once Saved, Always Saved?* & *Can a Christian Lose Eternal Life?*

Also, as an aside, I note the massive debate within the halls of scientific academia and philosophy over whether mankind has free choice or whether his behaviours are genetically and chemically determined beforehand.

With both theology and science questioning man's capacity to truly be a free moral agent, is it any wonder that society increasingly sees human beings as pre-programmed animals who cannot help their already genetically and chemically determined behaviours? The excuse, "But I was made this way, my genes made me do it!" is a moral cop-out and a denial of our high created status as being made in **the image of God!**

Inevitably the casualty of all deterministic theories is true love.

## WHAT EXACTLY WAS THE TEST?

So, God put before Adam two trees and a choice. Adam could choose a tree that represented life --- loving obedience to his God --- or **the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**. But what exactly was the tree that would lead to death?

Most commentators say something like this. Adam & Eve already knew good. Everything around them was very good. They experienced harmony in nature, with the animals, with each other, and especially with God Himself. But what they lacked was the *experiential* knowledge of evil as opposed to just having God *tell* them about evil. That may be, but I think there is more involved.

Not surprisingly, the phrase **good and evil** occurs a number of times in the rest of the Bible, and its usage in these places can help us answer. The following analysis is found in an excellent [YouTube](#) presentation by a friend of mine in the USA. I summarise with [John Truitt's](#) permission. ( <sup>7</sup> )

The expression **good and evil** is a well-known Hebrew idiom occurring a number of times (eg. **Gen. 24: 49-50; 2 Sam. 14: 17; Deut. 1: 39**). Take for example, when **Solomon** asks the LORD for an **understanding heart** so that he **may discern between good and evil**. He is praying for wisdom to properly judge and determine God's mind in administering his kingly office (**I Kings 3: 9**). As the king of Israel, **Solomon** sat on the LORD's throne with the authority to legislate good and evil, right and wrong for the people.

Contrast that with **Judges 21:25** where we are told, **there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes**. Instead of a duly appointed king sitting as God's representative to determine His will for the land, Israel suffered societal chaos when everyone took it upon themselves to determine their own morals and courses of action. Here was a society of "little gods" making up their own rules. It was chaos!

A careful study of the contexts of each of these cases shows that the phrase **good and evil** in Hebrew parlance, means the ability to determine questions of right and wrong.

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<sup>7</sup> [John Truitt's YouTube](#) on **good and evil** here:- <https://youtu.be/pJgQKAbHi3c>

So, the test that Adam & Eve faced was the age-old question: Who would be their “God”? Would the Almighty determine for them what was **good and evil**? Would they trust His wisdom and love or would they usurp His sovereignty to become in effect, their own little “gods”, free to judge their own rules for right and wrong?

They soon found out the evil of **doing what was right in their own eyes**.

**Next time ...** Enter the “talking Snake”!