

What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Part 1 Bible Study

One of the most reoccurring roadblocks for many people when they begin to study the Bible is when they get to Genesis chapter two. Almost *all* will ask some form of this question: "Why did God create an evil tree?" Many people argue it is just "unfair" or "unjust" for God to place Adam and Eve in a Garden with a "deadly tree" or for God to have placed Adam and Eve in a situation where they could be tempted. Others read Genesis and see God as one who is forcing Adam and Eve to "prove their love to Him." Others claim it was a set-up by God; that Adam and Eve were doomed from the beginning. Eventually, all these questions lead to the most poignant question of all: If everything God created was "good" as stated over and over in Genesis chapter one; then how can a tree that is both "good and evil" possibly be good? This leaves us with one nagging theme: how can God say everything He created was "good" and, yet, He allowed the existence of such a tree to live in the Garden of Eden?

First, we need to recognize, there is nothing wrong with asking questions. In fact, I believe, God wants us to ask Him questions, but we need to *always check* the attitude or motive behind our questions. We have to be willing to ask ourselves if we really want to know the answer. Or are we just finding fault and wanting to discredit the scriptures? Another important question we need to be willing to ask ourselves: is there something we may be missing while reading the story that is causing us to read things into the scriptures that are not really there; *or to leave out* things that are in plain sight? So with this in mind let's take a look at what was happening in the Garden of Eden regarding this particular tree.

Though the garden was filled with trees (Genesis 1:11); only two are named (Genesis 2:9). Therefore, we can conclude, immediately, that the two named trees are of vital importance. One tree is called, "The Tree of Life" and the other is called, "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good *and* Evil." What is so significant about these two trees, as their names suggest, is that one gives life and the other gives death! Yet, what is most disturbing for many people is that God is unmistakably the creator of both trees; and this is one of the great hurdles for Christians and many would-be Christians, alike, to comprehend (Genesis 2:9).

Many will ask, Why this tree? Why with all the beauty and blessedness of the world...why would God create a tree that could *and would* bring such devastation to humanity? This is the question that, even, every truthful Christian will admit to having asked themselves, if only silently, in his or her mind many, many times.

We have no problem with the tree of "Life" that makes perfect sense to us, but a tree that could cause human DEATH (Genesis 2:17) seems unfair, uncaring, and unloving to the human mind; and if our minds can only see this story from that lens it is *unlikely* we will EVER

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understand the significance of The Tree of the “Knowledge of Good and Evil” or the significance and beauty of the creation of humanity; nor will the Bible ever truly make sense to us. It is also unlikely we will ever be a deeply devoted Christian, because somewhere lurking in our minds will remain a huge feeling of skepticism and doubt. So, to ensure this doesn’t happen we need to take a few moments to build a foundation to work from...

Let's read: James 1:12-14

We are told God doesn't tempt, but God *does* test. What is the difference between a temptation and a test? Helpful hint: Why does a teacher give a test?

Before moving further into this we need to understand: **The Difference between Testing and Temptation**

God *tests* by the form of boundaries, and/or limits to help us. Therefore, God's boundaries are set to protect us.

Satan *tempts* us which is to push the limits/boundaries/ and to create disillusionment. Satan's tempting's are intended to destroy us!

So, in the Garden of Eden, God was setting up boundaries for humanity that would keep them safe and protected and on course with their purpose for being created (we will discuss more on that purpose in future lessons).

Another important foundational piece for this event in the Garden is to understand the nature of God. We must ask ourselves: Is God a human being having human emotions *or* is God one who for a short time dwelt in a human body and walked among humans, *but* never gave up His True nature? This is important to note. Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man that He should lie...” Let's turn there and read the complete verse.

God **does not have** human emotions. Too many times we try to attribute to God emotions and actions that are only capable by fallen-humans. When the Bible states that God is a JEALOUS God which is often used in debates about what occurred in the Garden. This implying that God was JEALOUS or ENVEOUS against Adam and Eve's betrayal of what He had commanded and this created God to be angry. This “jealousy” is also mentioned as part of the Ten Commandments...Have no other God's before ME...I am a jealous God (Exodus 20:5). Here are a couple more scriptures that tell us God is Jealous (Exodus 34:14, Duet 4:23-24). What does this mean? Does it mean that God experiences the emotion of jealousy like a human being? Or does it mean something far more superiorly just?

To understand this we have to take a better look at the word “Jealousy” and it comes from the Hebrew word קָנָה qanna [kan-naw] and it has two meanings: to be Jealous *or* Zealous!!! To be

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“jealous” is to be envious, or resentful, and to have rage. These are, absolutely, human emotions. These are the emotions of fallen-humanity, not God. To be “Zealous” is to be fervent, passionate, committed, or to be intensely devoted (to be fully justified)!! Now, read these verses again but with the understanding of “Zealous” and it gives us an entirely different understanding of God’s love toward us. Zealousness is a far better view of the totality of the scriptures; it is a more balanced and clear view of God. It seems to fit better with what scripture tells us over and over about God and His nature.

What is a zealous God saying when He is telling us not to worship false gods or to give-in to false religious practices *because* He is zealous of us? God is telling us how passionate He is for us; how deeply or intently He loves us; and how devoted He is to us. In other words: We are not a piece of property to a jealous God; instead, we are a creation that He is devoted and committed to. This kind of devotion from the Creator ought to melt our hearts and cause us to run to Him.

**Sidenote: This is why Paul instructed that Timothy (we) need to be careful that we study to show ourselves approved a “workman” (which means laborer) that needs not to be ashamed (2 Tim 2:15).

Both zealous and jealousy are fervent words of emotion; however, one speaks with hope and deep love and the other speaks with anger and hate. One speaks with the voice and heartbeat of God the Creator, and the other speaks as a voice of the sinner influenced by sin.

To understand even further let’s go back to the question about the difference between a test and a temptation.

God allows us to be tested by life as a way of allowing us to see how far we have come and to evaluate the quantity of our growth. We can see that a test has a beneficial characteristic for the person being tested. Through a test, a person can see their life in perspective. They can see those areas that need more attention or they can see they are ready to move on to new areas of learning. **A test is always about growth for the student!!**

Spiritually, a test is an attribute of a loving God who is zealous to show us our progress and to warn us when we are falling short. However, tempting (which is always evil) is about tearing down, not building up the soul. Temptation has one aim and that is to destroy the target or individual that the temptation is hurled against. So, temptation is about the depleting and total destruction of the soul involved. Therefore, temptation is motivated by jealousy from Satan toward fallen humanity with a desire to destroy them.

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So, we ask: why did God create the “tree of the knowledge of good *and* evil” to exist in the Garden of Eden? First, this particular tree had to be there. Why? A fall had *already occurred in Heaven*. **Sin** was a reality that *already existed* and the creation of this earth was part of God’s plan to eradicate sin; therefore, the tree had to exist in the Garden (more on this shortly). The following scriptures point to sin’s existence before the foundation of the Earth (Ephesians 1:3-11, 1 Peter 1:18-20, 2 Timothy 1:9-10, Revelation 13:8). These scriptures help us understand that God created this world as a means to reconcile; to cure sin forever (Colossians 1:20, Ephesians 1:10-11, 1 Peter 3:22). For now, this is only an introduction to these scriptures, you will not have a full understanding, just yet, but we will be coming back to them over and over throughout our studies so our understanding can grow with each lesson.

However, before we can go farther there is **one more foundational piece**. When God created the Heaven and the Earth He did so with one aspect many have missed when they read His Word. He created all of Heaven and Earth to exercise this power—**Free-Will**. I know, I know, I have heard it all my life, too, that angels don’t have Free-Will! Yet, that can’t be true, because a fall occurred in Heaven. Lucifer rebelled before evil existed, because he chose to take his Free-Will and exert it against God and Heaven and, thus, sin was created!! Satan used his free-will to rebel against God and to cause further rebellion against God; thus Satan created sin (1 John 3:8).

None of us can deny that as human beings we have the power to create!! Look at our technological and medical advances, the structures of our cities, governments, and schools, on and on. Free-Will gives God’s creation the ability to create!!! It is what we create and for what purpose we create that is at issue. For example: Free-Will in pure hands will flow or create in alignment with beauty, power, and purpose that matches the sinless God; therefore, those creations will be worthy of creation. However, Free-Will in defiled hands is acting in rebellion against God and will create from a sinful place; therefore, ending in destruction, ruin, loss, chaos, death!!

In the Garden of Eden, God had given Adam and Eve the power and authority they needed for success. God provided them all the safeguards they would need but to exercise their power and authority would require Adam and Eve to work within the boundaries God had set for them. Free-Will is not a free pass to sin; it is not an allowance to sin!!! Nor was Free-Will a guarantee Adam or Eve had to sin. Free-Will, simply, gave them the option to choose to stay within the guidelines that God had given to them or to go outside of those guidelines. Though God knew they would fail this did not mean they had to fail nor did it mean that God had created them inferior or programmed to fail.

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God had created them with the ability to choose His will or their own will. The choice was completely theirs to choose. Free-will gave them (and us) the option to choose our will or God's will. Our will—will always be the inferior way; thus the sinful way. God's Will is the best choice because it is ALWAYS sinless—it is perfection—it is the best possible outcome!

Free-Will carries with it tremendous responsibility and it is loaded with authority, power, ability, and lasting results. The lasting results are not with this life only, but with those talents God has given to each of us we are creating toward our future existence. Jesus said there will be those to whom He will say, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels...” (Matthew 25:41). And in Isaiah we read that “...that hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure” (Isaiah 5:14). What does this mean? This means hell, which was intended for Satan and the fallen angels, has extended itself to include fallen humanity too. Why? **Hell has enlarged because of how some within humanity have chosen to use their Free-Will. Literally, humanity has caused Hell to enlarge by how they have used their free-will. Think on that for a moment and let it sink in. This is the power of free-will in a creature God has created. We are more powerful than we think we are. This is why the enemy constantly wants to numb us out so we will not use our free-will in ways that reflect the attributes of God but, instead, will produce ill effects on us and others.**

Unfortunately, many, many people have failed to see that their Free-Will is the sum total of their life's power!! They have failed to see that each day they are creating with that power!!

Take a moment to reflect: How are you creating with the POWER, ABILITY, and CHOICE God has given to you? Are your works, creations, contributions to life flowing from a sinless place?? Or do your works, creations, and contributions bring chaos, suffering, selfishness, hatred, waste, or more madness to an already sick sinful world? Take some time to consider if you are choosing wisely.

Now, that we have a better foundation to begin to build from we can resume our lesson on The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil next time. For now, understand that Tree *existed because it had to exist*; there was no way of excluding it. Yes, it was GOOD because it was part of the ultimate *plan* of God to eradicate sin. How could this tree be a part of such an important plan? What does its name imply? How does that Tree still affect us today? All of this and more we will begin to tackle in our next lesson...