

Born to Win

What Is God Doing? #5

by: Ronald L. Dart

If there's one story in the Bible that is familiar to everyone, it's the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. For one thing, people who start out to read the Bible naturally start at the beginning. And the story doesn't get real boring until you get to Leviticus, which is where a lot of people stop. A lot of times they make it about to Leviticus 6 and they just get lost, quit, give up.

Some time later, they start over again, and since they want to start over again, they go back to Genesis. There's no point in going back to Leviticus 6, is there? And they read the story of Adam and Eve all over again.

It would be a rare person who doesn't know who Adam and Eve were, and that they lived in the Garden of Eden. But this familiarity means that there are hundreds of different theories about Adam and Eve, none of them really compelling. Was the Forbidden Fruit an apple? It is generally taken for that. Or, was it sex? Was the Devil a snake?

I've advanced a few theories on Genesis, myself. Everyone who believes in God is an implicit theologian. And who's to say your theories are not as good as anyone else's? It's good enough to direct your walk of faith. But you do want your theology to be informed. And you are willing to modify it as you learn, right?

Why don't we take a walk through the Garden of Eden and see if we can develop our own theory of the case. The story in question starts in Genesis 2:7:

Genesis 2

KJV

⁷ And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

⁹ And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

So, man was alone in the Garden of Eden. You have to assume it was a beautiful place. You have to believe that it was well designed. After all, the Designer of the universe designed it, planted it, put it together. The LORD God built Eden. Now, a garden is by definition an intentionally-designed layout of plants and trees and so forth. The place was beautiful and it was full of food.

Now there are these two trees in the middle of the garden. One wonders what they are all about. The Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Genesis 2*KJV*

- ¹⁵ And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.
- ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:
- ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Hmmm. So man had work to do. Any garden will fall into disarray if it's not kept up. Dress it. Keep it. But a sinister element enters the picture, here. There is a command and a consequence of breaking that command. "Thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Now, notice that I said there is a consequence of breaking that command. I did not say "penalty." There is a difference between the two, and the difference is important.

The first thing you need to know about this passage is that the English word "evil" is the wrong word here. The English word "evil" denotes something that is morally bad. That is sinful. That is wicked. The connotations are of things that are exceedingly immoral and wicked and even malicious. When you see a movie that's supposed to be a pictorial of evil, well, it's slaving at the jaws. It's really nasty. It's bad stuff.

But the Hebrew word here translated "evil" includes no idea of immorality or malice. The Hebrew word is simply the opposite of good. This is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad. A tornado is bad. You get one that's about a mile or a half mile wide and walks its way through your community, you will say that something bad has happened to your community. But no one thinks there is any malice or any immorality or wickedness. These are moral things. That is not included in the Hebrew word translated in your Bible—your King James Bible—as "evil."

A scripture that many ask about is Isaiah 45:7, where God says,

Isaiah 45*KJV*

- ⁷ I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

Well now, does God create evil, people want to know—moral wickedness? Of course not. Notice the parallel structure that exists in this passage. First, he says, "I form the light and create darkness." We have two opposites that are presented to us—light and darkness. Then the parallel structure: "I make peace and create evil." So, evil would be the opposite of peace. A better rendering of the Bible verse would be, "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create adversity: I the LORD do all these things."

So, back to Genesis. This is not a tree of good and evil, that is, of good and sin. It is a tree of the knowledge of good and bad, whatever that may mean.

But why was the tree there at all? I mean, if this tree is bad, if it's dangerous, or, let's put it this way: If Adam and Eve were not supposed to eat of the tree, why did God put it there? And that, folks, may be the most important question in this whole sequence.

Genesis 2*KJV*

- ¹⁸ And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help

meet for him.

Okay, here we have a fundamental truth about the nature of man. It is not good to be alone. Now, I don't know about you folks, but I have long since figured out that for myself. But the point here is it's good for us to know that we were designed to not be alone.

Man's a gregarious creature, we're a social creature. We need to be with other people. But more than that, each of us needs to be matched up with one other person.

Genesis 2

KJV

¹⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

²⁰ And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

Now, none of this was to suggest that God thought he was going to find a help among the animals. If you read this carelessly, you almost get the impression, "Well, let's see...not good for man to be alone. He needs a help suitable for him." And so we create a dog, but no, that's not good enough. We created cats—that's not good enough. We create horses and that's not good enough. It's as though through trial and error we kept looking, but no, we just never found a help for man.

Well, that's not really what was going on here. God never thought he would find a help among the animals. God had something other than a dog in mind for a companion to man from the beginning. This has come to the place, now, though, where he is going to do it.

Genesis 2

KJV

²¹ And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

²² And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

²³ And Adam said, This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Now here is an interesting question. Why did God make man first? Why not make woman first, and just have her give birth to a man in the normal way? Well, you can probably think of many reasons why he may not have wanted to do that. Or, better yet, when he was making man out of the dust of the earth, why not just make two, male and female, and start them out on an equal footing? In other words, the first time Adam opens his eyes, woman is there, and man is there for her, and they are equals in every way.

The problem with this passage is that it puts man first and creates woman to help him. And there is no way that passage would be written like that now, in this century, at this time. That is, if men were writing a story about the origins of things. So you are left with a dilemma. If the Bible is nothing but a work of ancient folklore, then you can believe that men wrote this story to subjugate women. But if the Bible is the record of God's revelation to man, then this fact is something we have to deal with. Why did God do it that way?

Why did God make man first and woman second? Every man since Adam has come from a woman. And since that's true, well then, in the normal course of things, one would think that women would dominate. Maybe God brought woman from man and then man from woman to even things out. At least, that's what some people think. I think those who call women the weaker sex are very shortsighted. They are strong enough to have babies. Which one of you guys is ready to take that on? Why, if God hadn't held women back, they might very well have ruled the world. And if you want to argue that the world would be a better place, I guess the only refuge I have to fall back on is the Bible and say, well, God must have know what he was doing.

In verse 24 the story continues:

Genesis 2

KJV

²⁴ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

²⁵ And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

You know, to be united in the flesh—one flesh—is taken by some to be a euphemism for sex, especially in light of the next verse about nakedness. One thing is clear enough. It is God's intent that a man cleave to his wife once he gets married, that he leave his father and mother—in other words, that the old family ties are separated, and a new family is created every time.

But one has to wonder about the remark that they were not ashamed of being naked. Why should they be? To be ashamed, you have to have a consciousness of something that was wrong. And this they did not have. But now, the serpent enters the picture.

Genesis 3

KJV

¹ Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

It's almost as if the serpent came on the scene and looked around, and was surprised to see this one tree there. For if it hadn't been there, I don't think there would have been a question to have asked. He didn't expect the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, I think, to be there.

Genesis 3

KJV

² And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of 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 hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

Ah. Okay. Well then, I return to my original question. Why was the tree there at all? And I'll ask another question. Why was it in the midst of the garden? Why was it given centrality of place, right along with the tree of life? This is an important question. It wasn't there for decoration. God could have made a pretty tree without making it deadly. So he put it there for a reason.

Genesis 3

KJV

⁴ And the serpent said to the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

⁵ For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Now, I have heard it said that the serpent lied. And yet, they ate the fruit and everything the serpent said would happen, happened. Their eyes were opened, they knew good and bad, and they didn't die. Now, you will argue that they died later, and you are right. But from their point of view, in the moments after eating the fruit, the serpent was entirely right. In fact, they lived for a very long time.

Now this premise of the serpent is fascinating. He said, "Ye shall be as gods." What do you suppose that meant? We don't have enough information to complete the theory yet. Let's go on.

Genesis 3

KJV

⁶ And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

⁷ And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together; and made themselves aprons.

I can't help laughing when I think of Adam and Eve making aprons out of fig leaves. I visualize something like a hospital gown that covers the front but doesn't do very much about the back. So here they are, covered in front and exposed in the rear. I think there may be some symbolism in that, somewhere. Generations of kids who read the Bible have been titillated by this story.

What do you mean, they ask, they knew they were naked after eating the fruit? How could they have not known before? Didn't they have hands? Sense of touch? What do you mean they didn't know they were naked? Well, what Genesis means, obviously, is that their nakedness suddenly became significant to them, and it was not significant before. Some have opined that clothes are a possession, a status symbol, and that may have been part of what was behind it. But I don't know. Nakedness is a kind of vulnerability which sometimes is important and sometimes is not. I think Adam and Eve suddenly realized that they were vulnerable, and they hadn't been vulnerable before.

Genesis 3

KJV

⁸ And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

⁹ And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" This is a sad and charming story and revealing at the same time. Did God really not know what had happened? Now here we are. We believe that God is omniscient—that he knows everything. He knows everything that's going on all the time, anyplace, everywhere.

So he comes into the garden and says, Where are you? Doesn't he know? Didn't he know what had happened? Did he really not know where they were hiding? Well, I suppose that we would have to assume then that he was pretending not to know. Unless, of course, he had decided not to know. You know, there is a certain charm in the realization that God is not a voyeur. He had given Adam and Eve privacy to be intimate with one another, and hadn't looked. Now, he could have, I suppose. He is all-powerful. He's the Creator. But I gather he chose not to. Otherwise, we have the image of a god coming into the Garden of Eden pretending, deceiving Adam and Eve. Making them believe he didn't know, when, in fact, he really did. I think it's much more charming to believe he chose not to. And in many ways, it's much more in keeping with the character of God as we learn about him through the pages of the Bible day by day and page by page.

And this also leads logically to the question of whether the sin of Adam and Eve was sex. Now, does anyone seriously believe this? Yeah. I think they do. I just want you to think about it for a moment. God

put Adam and Eve, two perfect physical specimens in the prime of life—please take a moment and visualize—he put these two perfect people in the prime of life in the garden, naked and told them to be fruitful and multiply. And then, God got mad at them for having sex? Right? Does that make sense to you? My question is, how were they supposed to multiply—by cell division? I would really think that God expected them to do it the old fashioned way—to have children.

Genesis 3

KJV

¹⁰ And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

So now Adam is afraid of his best friend.

Genesis 3

KJV

¹¹ And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

¹² And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

¹³ And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

This is the original, the first time in history, of the passing of the buck.

So the consequences of all this were immediate and severe.

Genesis 3

KJV

¹⁴ And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

¹⁶ To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

So the woman would have children, and that's good. She would have her children in pain, and that is bad. But you see, she had eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.

Genesis 3

KJV

¹⁷ And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Though shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

¹⁸ thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and though shalt eat the herb of the field;

¹⁹ In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

You'll have food to eat, and that's good. You'll have to fight for every morsel, and that's bad. You're going to live a long time, and that's good. But you're going to die in the end, and that's bad. But you

see, Adam had eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.

Adam and Eve had made a choice. They had a choice to eat of the Tree of Life and live forever. Or they could eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad, which would, in the end, take their lives.

Now, why was the tree there? Why put them at risk? It was there because God wanted his children to be free to make the choice. They could eat of the Tree of Life and live forever, or they could eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which basically means they go into the world. They experience good, they experience evil. We get to try things. We get to succeed, we get to fail. God wanted us to have the choice.

Why was the serpent allowed to be there? Surely he could have kept that stinker out of the garden, couldn't he? No. The serpent was there because God wanted man to face the choice. We weren't going to be allowed to slide by, one way or the other. We actually had to come up against it, look at it, think about it, and decide. And right there is the fundamental truth about the Garden of Eden, the experience of Adam and Eve, and the trees—the Tree of Life, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It's all about making choices.

I've said before: God could have made a creature that couldn't sin. Well, he did make creatures that couldn't sin. We call them cows. The fact is, you and I don't want to be a cow. We want the right to choose. We want the right to be intelligent, sentient creatures who are capable of knowing God. And God wants us that way, because then we can make a choice to love him or not, as the case may be. But without the choice, there really is no love.

Genesis 3

KJV

²⁰ And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

²¹ Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

²² And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil[.]

That's interesting. That's what Satan said would happen. When the serpent said, you'll become as gods, knowing good and evil. And God said, he's become as one of us.

Genesis 3

KJV

²² [...] And now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:

²³ Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

We've got to get him out of here, because in his condition, we don't want him to live forever.

Genesis 3

KJV

²⁴ So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

So all of Adam and Eve's children, including you and me, have been born outside of the garden, and without access to the Tree of Life and exposed continually to the choices that Adam and Eve left us with. We get to endure the good. We get to endure the bad. This, I suppose, is the idea of original sin. It's not so much that we are guilty because of Adam and Eve's sin, it's just that the only option we have

is to live life with the choices of good and bad. And the experiencing of good and bad and learning from good and bad.

So what have we learned from Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden? Well, we've learned that God has left us with the power to choose. No, he's left us with the imperative to choose. We have to go down life's road and make choices every day. The choices we make turn us into winners or they turn us into losers.

The people who listen to God, follow his commandments, listen to his instructions, have a guide to life and the choices of life that turn them into winners. And the people who decide that they are going to live life by experience—I'll try it. If it works, fine. If it doesn't work, oh well. I'm sorry. Those people are going to be losers.

But there is a way back to the Tree of Life. There is a way whereby God is determined to turn losers into winners.

Until next time, this is Ronald Dart reminding you—you were *born to win*.

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