

## 4. The test tree of obedience

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For the last 2 weeks we have gone over the history of creation by God. In a typical Hebrew writing style, Moses, the author of the Book of Genesis is going back over a portion of the history of creation in details.

In the midst of all this exciting creation process, there is one element that would be used to change the course of the destiny of the entire universe from the perfection to the corrupt and imperfect situation. That is the test tree of obedience. None of the elements of the universe have what humans have – free will to obey God or disobey Him. That is what we are going to learn today.

### A. THE DAY GOD RESTED

*Genesis 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. 2 And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.*

Following the sixth day of creation, the Lord God deliberately stopped working. He rested. It wasn't that there was nothing else He could have done or He was exhausted. Our omnipotent God never gets tired. He hadn't run out of ideas, because our Omniscient God knows no mental limitations or have another Green Valley Moment. He could easily have made more universes, created an infinite number of other forms of life, and provided multiple millions of galaxies beyond what He already did. But He didn't. He stopped.

He spent an entire day resting. In fact, He blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, something He did not do on the other six days. He marked this one day off as extremely special. Like none other. Sounds to me like He made the day on which He rested a "priority" period of time. He did so that we may follow His example.

The Seventh Day Adventists condemn Christians for not worshiping the Lord on Saturdays. Because according to the OT law, they believe that we all must worship the Lord on Sabbath which is Saturday.

Christians are not under obligation to observe the Sabbath any more, because Jesus fulfilled the purpose and plan of the Sabbath for us and in us. Every day is a day of rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Every day is specially set apart to God.

*Colossians 2:16-17 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*

You workaholics, it is perfectly OK to rest, take a nap, and relax on your day off. God approved this message.

### B. THE HISTORY OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH

*Genesis 2:4-7 This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, 5 before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; 6 but a mist went up from the earth and*

*watered the whole face of the ground. 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 being.*

Physically, the man was taken out of the ground. It is quite interesting that our bodies are made up of about 15 or 16 chemical elements. Those same chemical elements are in the ground. If we were to be boiled down into the separate chemical elements of which we are made, we would be worth very little in terms of money. Some say \$2.98, but inflation factor has increased that figure a little more, maybe \$10 to \$12. Yes, we humans are made out of dirt which is literally 'dirt cheap'. But the same time, we are made in the image of God which cannot be counted in monetary measurement.

If someone calls you a dirt bag, no need to take it as an insult. He was just reminding you of your origin.

We are created for His pleasure and we are created because our God loves us so much. Our God wants to have a close relationship with us. That is why we are made in His image.

I ask you to underline the *LORD* in these 4 verses. This is the first use of the *LORD* in the Bible. Our English word "Lord" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word for "bread," because ancient English men of high stature would keep a continual open house, where all could come and get bread to eat. They gained the honorable title of lords, meaning "dispensers of bread."

In the original Hebrew, God's name transliterates to "YHWH." This is known as the tetragrammaton – meaning "four letters" in Latin script. Because of the lack of vowels, Bible scholars debate how the tetragrammaton YHWH was pronounced.

Some versions of the Bible translate the tetragrammaton as "Yahweh" or "Jehovah"; most translate it as "LORD" in all capital letters.

Due to a fear of accidentally taking God's name in vain, according to Leviticus 24:16, the Jews basically quit saying it out loud altogether. Instead, when reading Scripture aloud, the Jews substituted the tetragrammaton YHWH with the word "Adonai" – "Lord."

I want all of you to notice a very important thing in this paragraph. The two humans are the last one that the Lord created in His creation week. For all the other creatures, He simply commanded them to existence and there they were. But for humans, He not only created us in His image, but also He fashioned us with His own hands according to v7.

### **C. ADAM IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN**

*Genesis 2:8-9 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 the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

Some consider the fact of the Garden of Eden as a fairy tale. It is not. If you believe Genesis 1:1 as the truth, why would this Garden of Eden be anything other than fact? It was a very real paradise where God designated for the first man and woman to be in.

The tree of life was to grant eternal life to mankind. The tree of life is mentioned 3 times in Genesis 2, in Eden, and again 4 times in Revelation, 3 of those in the final chapter. It means that if we had a fruit of the Tree of Life, we would be forever young.

That would put the majority plastic surgeons out of business. According to USA Today, people in the US spent about 16 billion dollars in 2016 to keep themselves looking young with just about any kinds of procedures, including 'Nip and Tuck' and dangerous 'Botox Cosmetic' method. If you have extra money laying around to make yourself look good, go for it.

"The tree of the knowledge of good and evil" was the test tree of human's obedience to God. I don't believe that it was any special fruit tree. It was a matter of obedience to God's command.

I don't know where the idea of "apple" as the forbidden fruit came from. Some people believe that the true forbidden fruit was not an apple, but a pomegranate. Others believe it was a tomato. Some Muslims believe that it was a banana. But who cares? Anyone arguing about the identity of the forbidden fruit is missing the point. It was about obedience or disobedience.

"The knowledge of good" would bring the conscience that accepts and obeys the Holy Spirit's commands. "The knowledge of evil" would awake our disobedience in the sinful nature as a free will agent.

Then another question would arise: Why did God give humans this tree and free will to choose? Wouldn't it be an entrapment? Besides, God knew that humans would make wrong decisions, not just Adam and Eve, but all the way to the modern day humans, including us.

Listen, free will is a blessing and a curse. God has given all of us the absolute ability to make choices in life. We have the ability to choose good or evil, right or wrong, self or others. Unfortunately, from the beginning of time, we have chosen evil quite often, actually more often than making good decisions. Many argue that mankind is generally good. In reality, mankind is generally bad. Just look at history. Just look at small children. We don't have to teach them how to sneak cookies to eat before dinner or bite siblings or lie.

Why did God give us free will then? Wouldn't it have been easier and nicer to create mankind as inherently good? God's purpose with mankind is to have eternal fellowship with those who truly love Him. Therefore, to create us as inherently good robots, without the potential for the opposite character, evil, would not allow for true love. For only love that comes from a free choice of the will is TRUE LOVE. Voluntary choice is the key – love isn't genuine if there's no other option.

I like what C.S. Lewis said, "Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having."

### **C. THE LOCATION OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN**

*Genesis 2:10-15* Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. 11 The name of the first is

*Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates. 15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.*

Nobody knows the exact location of the Garden of Eden. If we knew where it was, Disneyland people would set up the Garden of Eden 2.0 with a bunch of souvenir shops. Many scholars believe that it is somewhere in the Tigris-Euphrates valley.

According to v15, the oldest job of mankind is being a gardener.

## **D. OBEDIENT TO GOD'S DO AND DON'T**

*Genesis 2:16-17 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 evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*

God not only made His command clear to Adam, but He also clearly explained the consequences for disobedience. This prohibition is given in the same legal format as Israel's Ten Commandments. The Lord built law and obedience into the fabric of His covenant relationship with humanity.

The consequences of disobedience would be immediate spiritual death – loss of relationship with God and eventual physical death.

When God speaks to us by His Word, there's only one acceptable response. That's obedience. We shouldn't weigh the options; we shouldn't examine the alternatives; and we shouldn't negotiate the terms. But we simply should do what God tells us to do and leave the rest to Him. Faith is believing in spite of evidence, it's obeying in spite of consequence.

A simple obedience always brings further truth from the Lord. Why should our Lord give us any more revelations or more insights when we are not even willing to do what He tells us in the first place? He tells us to follow His instructions through the Word of God one step at a time.

## **E. APPLICATIONS**

*John 13:14-15 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, (1) you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 (2) For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.*

*John 13:17 (3) If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.*

Reading the words of our Savior, we need to realize the tremendous emphasis He put on obedience. As we think about Christ's model and commands, 3 specifics seem important enough to mention:

### **1) Obedience means personal involvement.**

Honestly now, are you willing to get involved and help at least one person in need? Willingness must precede involvement.

### **2) Obedience requires Christlike unselfishness.**

Let your eyes dig into those words. To pull off this concept, we'll need to see others as Christ sees them. We'll need to risk reaching out, giving up the luxury of staying safe, giving up our preferences for His. Unselfishness never comes easy.

### **3) Obedience results in ultimate happiness.**

The true blessing comes when we roll up our sleeves, wrap the towel around our waist, and wash a few feet. Quietly, graciously, cheerfully like Christ who was “gentle” and “humble in heart.”