

## ***The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil***

### **A. Questions:**

1. Was the tree of knowledge of good and evil placed in the garden of Eden before sin or after sin?
2. Would it have been necessary for God to put a tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden if Satan had not rebelled?
3. Did God put the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the **midst** of the garden near the tree of life? (Genesis 2:9; 3:3) If so, why? Was that fair? To Adam and Eve? To Satan? Was the test too hard? (1 Corinthians 10:13)
4. God said they would die if they ate of the tree (Genesis 2:17) and Satan said they wouldn't (Genesis 3:4). Who appeared to be right?
5. Was the tree intended to be an arbitrary test of our obedience?
6. Do you think Satan was surprised that God gave him permission to test or to try to deceive Adam and Eve, if he did it only at the tree in the midst of the garden?
7. When did man first see that "death" that God had spoken about in Eden?
8. Whose sin was worse, Eve's or Adam's (1 Timothy 2:14)? What would you understand is so bad about what she did? Was God being unfairly harsh in this experience?
9. Shouldn't we desire to be like God as Eve tried to be?
10. What kind of God would expel Adam and Eve on their very first offense? Would you still be alive if your parents had treated you like this?
11. Why is God apparently so arbitrary?
12. Is the Sabbath, like the tree of knowledge of good and evil, a perfectly arbitrary test of our willingness to obey? (*3RH:603:1:2; 1BC 1106; OHC 343*)

### **B. Suggested Answers:**

1. To be fair to Satan, and yet limit his access to the holy pair he was allowed to approach them only at one tree, which was, however, placed in the center of the garden near to the tree of life. (Genesis 2:9) When God told them not to go too near the tree, he was only trying to protect them. Nothing had yet been said about death being the result of sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). Remember that shortly Satan was to claim that this was a lie (Genesis 3:4).
2. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was put in the garden primarily to try to answer some of the questions and accusations that had already been leveled against God.
3. Perhaps if Satan had not already rebelled and raised the questions the tree would not have been there. Adam and Eve would have had an opportunity to exercise their freedom in some other way as the rest of the universe does. (Lucifer didn't need any tree!)
4. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was in the midst of the garden near the tree of life. (Genesis 2:9) Why were they put so close together? Adam and Eve couldn't go to the tree of life without seeing the other tree. God did not hide the tree of knowledge of good and evil—where the devil could approach them—in a dark corner of the garden. He put it right there where they'd see it. What do you suppose the Devil had to say about that? Why would God give Satan that chance to approach them; because God could easily have said, "Satan, and you evil angels, you may never come near these people; I refuse to allow you." But that's not the way God runs His universe. He put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil right there, so that when they went to the Tree of Life, which they needed to do, they saw the other tree. Think what that says about freedom! Don't you think the onlooking beings (See Job 38:2-7) were saying, What's all this about God not respecting our freedom? He even gives Satan a chance to represent his cause there. But He wouldn't let Satan tempt them more than they were able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13), so He advised Adam and Eve in their inexperience not to go near that tree. Eve was careless, and sure enough she was tempted. But that tree was not primarily a test of obedience. It was there to protect them. Satan was limited to that tree. Otherwise he

would have followed them wherever they went in the garden, popping out from behind every bush, flower, or tree to trying to tempt them. If Satan had been free to tempt them whenever and wherever he wanted, wouldn't he have gone to the tree of life? Furthermore, Satan knew that our first parents had been told not to go there. Why do you think God told them not to go to that one particular tree?

5. If you take what I would call the "this world view," as if there were no other intelligent creatures in the universe, and if one does not recognize there has been a war up in Heaven (Revelation 12:7), then you would say that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was placed in the garden *before* sin—that is, before man sinned. But there was already an enemy abroad. That's why the tree was put there. And he was limited to that tree. So if you take the larger, great controversy view, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was placed in the garden *after* sin. And the Sabbath (based on our world's cycles), as we know it, was given *after* sin. That tree was not put there as a test of obedience. That tree was put there to help them, to protect them. To limit the places where Satan could approach them.
6. In the beginning God warned our first parents, "In the day you eat of it (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) you will die." (Genesis 2:17; compare Romans 6:21,23) In our day this has come to be understood commonly to mean, "My children, you either love and obey Me, or I'll torture you for eternity in the fires of hell." If God has said this, could we ever really love and trust Him? How could we ever fit this in with 1 John 4:18 (*The Living Bible*), "We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us, and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us?" How many people have found it possible to accept that picture of God and still try to serve Him and therefore offer Him the obedience that springs from fear?

**References:** Genesis 2:9,17; 3:1-5; Romans 6:20,23; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Timothy 4:14; 1 John 4:18

#### **Discussion Questions:**

What actually happened to Eve when she ate of the fruit? What does sin actually do to people?

##### *Traditional model suggestions:*

Her sin was recorded in a book of record in heaven, where, if it was not forgiven, it would be held against her in the judgment and therefore God's wrath (justice) would be poured out on her.

Is the most serious thing about sin the way God reacts to it?

##### *Trust-Healing Model suggestions:*

Sin is a poison and Eve and later Adam were actually changed by it. Their minds were corrupted and somehow deranged by their doubt and then rebellion against God. If they had been left alone by God, the sin would have actually destroyed them that very day. God has artificially kept sinners alive all these years to give us a chance to learn the truth about Him. We can only be saved if we are healed of this "sin" condition. In the end God will simply leave His permanently rebellious children to reap the perfectly natural results of their own choices, which is eternal death. This is the death that God had warned Adam and Eve about in the very beginning!

**Our lives are constantly dependent on God who created and is in control of all things:**

**Nehemiah 9:6:** <sup>6</sup>"You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, the highest heavens, and all their host, the earth and everything upon it, the seas and everything in them. **You keep them all alive**, and the host of heaven prostrate themselves before You." (*Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures-Jewish translation*)

**Genesis 2:7:** "then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and **man became a living being.** " (*RSV*)

“Then the LORD God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it; he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the **man began to live.**” (GNB) [Footnote: ground...man: *The Hebrew words for “man” and “ground” have similar sounds.*]

**Psalms 33:6,9:** 6 **“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. . . 9 For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.”** (GNB)

**Psalms 104:20-21:** 20 “You made the night, and in the darkness all the wild animals come out. The young lions roar while they hunt, looking for **the food that God provides.**” (GNB)

**Psalms 104:27-30:** 27 “These all look to thee, to give them their food in due season. 28 When thou givest to them, they gather it up; when thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good things. 29 When thou hidest thy face, they are dismayed; **when thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust.** 30 When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground.” (RSV)

**Psalms 147:8-9:** 8 “He covers the heavens with clouds, he prepares rain for the earth, he makes grass grow upon the hills. 9 He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens which cry.” (RSV)

**Psalms 104:16-17:** 16 “The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon which he planted. 17 In them the birds build their nests; the stork has her home in the fir trees.” (RSV)

**Job 26:7-10:** [speech of Job] 7 “He stretches out the north over the void, and hangs the earth upon nothing. 8 He binds up the waters in his thick clouds, and the cloud is not rent under them. 9 He covers the face of the moon, and spreads over it his cloud. 10 He has described a circle upon the face of the waters at the boundary between light and darkness.” (RSV)

**Job 26:11-14:** [speech of Job] 11 “The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astounded at his rebuke. 12 By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he smote Rahab. 13 By his wind the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent. 14 Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways; and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?” (RSV)

**Jeremiah 10:13:** “When he utters his voice there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightnings for the rain, and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses.” (RSV)

**Acts 17:25-28:** 25 “nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since **he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.** 26 And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, 28 for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” (RSV)

**Isaiah 40:26:** “Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing.” (RSV)

These verses make a very strong case for the fact that we could not take even one breath or one beat of the heart without God constantly exercising His power. He is the one who makes it possible. If He should step back and allow us to reap the consequences of our sin, we would perish instantly. This is what would have happened to Adam and Eve if God has just left them to reap the results.

“Parents, in wisdom and love teach your children the grand lesson that in God we live, and move, and have our being. **Every pulsation of the heart is a rebound from the touch of the finger of God.** He watches over us by day, and under his wings we find shelter by night. His preserving care is over us, whether we wake or sleep. He is as a sentinel to guard us from Satan’s power, or we should be taken captive by him. Jesus is our constant friend. We are to look to him moment by moment, and by looking to him we are to live.” *Review and Herald*, December 2, 1890 par. 15

7. Ellen White: *Education* 130,13; *Patriarchs and Prophets* 115; *The Upward Look* 50; *Signs of the Times*, March 20, 1884; 1ST 419:2:4-3:0; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 2, 1890

“The Lord has given me a view of **other worlds**. Wings were given me, and an angel attended me from the city to a place that was bright and glorious. The grass of the place was living green, and the birds there warbled a sweet song. The inhabitants of the place were of all sizes; they were noble, majestic, and lovely. They bore the express image of Jesus, and their countenances beamed with holy joy, expressive of the freedom and happiness of the place. I asked one of them why they were so much more lovely than those on the earth. The reply was, “We have lived in strict obedience to the commandments of God, and have not fallen by disobedience, like those on the earth.” **Then I saw two trees, one looked much like the tree of life in the city. The fruit of both looked beautiful, but of one they could not eat. They had power to eat of both, but were forbidden to eat of one. Then my attending angel said to me, “None in this place have tasted of the forbidden tree; but if they should eat, they would fall.”** Then I was taken to a world which had seven moons. There I saw good old Enoch, who had been translated. On his right arm he bore a glorious palm, and on each leaf was written “Victory.” Around his head was a dazzling white wreath, and leaves on the wreath, and in the middle of each leaf was written “Purity,” and around the wreath were stones of various colors, that shone brighter than the stars, and cast a reflection upon the letters and magnified them. On the back part of his head was a bow that confined the wreath, and upon the bow was written “Holiness.” Above the wreath was a lovely crown that shone brighter than the sun. I asked him if this was the place he was taken to from the earth. He said, “It is not; the city is my home, and I have come to visit this place.” He moved about the place as if perfectly at home. I begged of my attending angel to let me remain in that place. I could not bear the thought of coming back to this dark world again. Then the angel said, “You must go back, and if you are faithful, you, with the 144,000, shall have the privilege of visiting all the worlds and viewing the handiwork of God.” [Bold added] *Broadside 2 - To Those who are receiving the seal of the living God*, January 31, 1849, par. 7; *Review and Herald*, August 1, 1849 par. 18; *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (1851) p. 22,23; *Early Writings* p. 39,40; *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White* (1922) p. 98,99; *Maranatha* (1976) p. 368

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