

An Examination of Genesis 1-4; No. 2

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(Please read last week's installment before reading this second and final portion of Greg's essay. You may respond to him at the address at the end. –Cecil Hook)

Applying a Different Approach

Let's examine the text with a covenantal backdrop in mind. Let us see what it may contain if we pursue it from a symbolic or figurative point of view. Perhaps we can spiritually appraise this most interesting narrative.

At the time Genesis was written, the symbols that were used would have been readily understood by the people of that day and age. They would have definitely understood anything to do with agriculture, such as trees, fruit, cultivation, weeds and water. Likewise the serpent had become a feared and hated creature and would have been easily associated with evil, cunning and even death.

Adam was created in the image of God, but when he sinned did he lose that image? Was he then purely a man of dust or of the earth? Have all men since borne the image of Adam rather than God? Or do we lose the image of God at the moment we first have sin accounted to us? 1 Cor. 15:47 says, **"The first man is from the earth, earthly; the second man is from heaven."** Verse 49 says, **"Just as we have borne the image of the earthly, we will also bear the image of the heavenly."** So Paul is saying that he, and those to whom he was writing, were not yet at that time bearing the image of Christ, but they would in the future. So as natural beings in a sinful state, it seems we bear the image of Adam, and through Christ we again bear the image of God. We regain what was lost in the garden when we believe. Paul and his fellow believers had not yet attained this even though they were believers, because the consummation had not yet taken place, but was in the near future. We are born again of the spirit. It is our inner man that undergoes the change. That believers are in the kingdom of heaven now, is a fact that is hard for most to accept. We don't have to wait until we die. Paul said, **"...and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However you are not in the flesh but in the spirit..."** (Rom. 8:8-9). The natural man focuses on the things that are seen, while the spiritual man focuses on that which is not seen. Jesus said, **"The spirit is the thing making alive, the flesh does not profit anything. The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life"** (John 6:63). Is being in the image of God any different than having life? I am not referring to physical life, but true life, the life that Jesus came to give.

In the creation account we read that God formed the man from the dust of earth and breathed life into him. We don't see this being done with the animals. There is something different here. It was more than physical life that God gave Adam. It seems

to me that God gave Adam true life in his presence. This garden seems to symbolize the very presence of God. The river that flows out of Eden (delight) to water the garden, divides and surrounds. This is symbolizing the same water of life that Jesus spoke of to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). I would contest that it represents the Spirit of God. In John 7:37-39, Jesus states that everyone who believes in him, rivers of living water will flow from him. The next verse tells us that Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit. This is the effect of the Gospel. It divides, spreads out, grows, and waters, or gives life. The Holy Spirit definitely has a flowing, spreading and surrounding nature. Ezekiel 47:1-12 portrays a river flowing from under the threshold of the house, toward the east, that grows in size. This river gives life and the trees on its banks yield continual food because it flows from the sanctuary. This is spiritual food, the food that endures to eternal life (John 6:27), and the water is spiritual water. In John chapter six Jesus stresses that he is the bread of life. Jesus always taught spiritual messages, and John chapters 4 & 6 are good examples. Now would be a good time to read John 4:1-38, 6:26-65 and 7:37-39.

In both Revelation 7:16-17 and 21:6, this same idea is portrayed. Rev. 22:1-2 also speaks of this river of water of life, flowing from the throne of God, with the tree of life on either side. Rev. 2:7 tells us that the tree of life is in the paradise of God. Revelation 21 & 22 presents a picture of paradise restored. This was the purpose of the new covenant, and Jesus pulled it off perfectly. Paradise has been restored. We as believers partake of the tree of life freely. We are in the presence of God, yet we are still physically alive on this earth for the sole purpose of spreading the gospel that more will receive Christ, and so partake of the tree of life. Both the kingdom of God and salvation are present realities. We lack nothing because the promise has been fulfilled. All things were consummated in AD70 at the fall of Jerusalem. It was then that the old covenant was fully terminated and the new covenant was fully established.

This garden had trees. The tree of life was there in the midst of the garden as was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Trees often represented a life-giving superstructure. Read Ezekiel 31 and Daniel 4. While the tree of life was a source of life, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was ultimately a source of death. Look at how the phrase "tree of life" is used in Proverbs 3:18, 11:30, 13:12 and 15:4. It is definitely not referring to a physical tree any more than Ezekiel 31 or Daniel 4. So if these passages are not literal, and Ezekiel 47 and Rev. 22 are not literal, why force a literal interpretation to the tree of life in Genesis?

Adam and Eve were free to partake of all of the trees in the garden, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is commonly taught that God gave Adam and Eve a choice. However this choice was indirect. By the scripture we can see that God did not offer them a choice, but rather, he gave them an ultimatum. He told them they were not to partake of that tree, for in the day that they did, they would die. I see the serpent as symbolizing their own independent directive. It represents their own voice of temptation. They desired to have the knowledge of good and evil. They certainly had the freedom to disobey God and they took that opportunity. This opened their eyes to sin and guilt. They

realized that they were now vulnerable (naked). They would now be without the supreme protection of God. Their fellowship with God had suffered a fatal blow.

Because of the knowledge of their sin, they were forced from the presence of God and the tree of life. This is symbolized by their expulsion from the garden and away from the tree of life. Now they were without life and away from the inner presence of God.

If you believe God is all-knowing, you must realize that God knew that Adam and Eve would listen to their own voice of temptation and partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He knew they would sin and die. God was the one who created this tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He was the one that placed it in direct access of Adam and Eve. Why give them an opportunity to sin at all?

If God wanted a love relationship with man, he had to devise a method of giving man the choice to love him in return. Forcing or programming man to love him was not an option. To know love, we must also know hate. To know good, we must also know evil. We cannot understand one without the other. To comprehend blindness, we must also understand what it means to have sight. The man born blind understands neither. You may want to refer to the section in last month's issue titled "Opposition." Adam and Eve had life, but they had no knowledge of good or evil. How could they choose to love God without that knowledge? Going through the process of sinning and dying, and subsequently being forgiven of those sins, enables us to see the love of God and love him in return. We love him because he first loved us. Jesus paid the price of sin and death for us. Through this grace we are brought back into the presence of God, with full access to the tree of life. We have **both** life **and** the knowledge of good and evil. God's plan was complete from the beginning. He was not playing a chess game, countering man's self-condemning moves, nor was he playing such a game with "Satan."

There are things we did not have space to cover and we can look at them next month. I probably raised more questions than answers. I hope you have begun to see that there is another way to view Genesis 1-4 other than the accepted tradition. []

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