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Before the Serpent Became Satan # 8

By Jim Myers

Continued from Issue Number 56.

Up to this point we have learned that Yahweh cursed the serpent, but not the woman. Her actions brought pain into her life, but they also made it possible for life to continue after their deaths. Now let's see what Yahweh has to say to the man:

17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed *is* the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat *of* it all the days of your life. 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. 19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you *are*, and to dust you shall return."

Pain is also included in Yahweh's declaration to the man. His pain, however, is linked to his need to produce food for himself and his family. She will experience more pain as she bears children, his pain will increase as the number of people he is required to feed increases. Did you notice that **Yahweh did not curse the man**, but he did curse the ground? As a result of that curse new kinds of plants would grow that would serve as instruments of pain as the man worked his fields. Man would now have to labor and sweat for his food. As he worked the ground he would also be forced to remember that at some point in time he

would die and his body would decompose and become part of it. There was no mention either of an afterlife or a time of judgment in the story. The reader is left with the understanding that man came from the ground and he would ultimately become part of it again.

Yahweh wasn't finished with the ground. He makes a promise concerning it in Genesis 8:

21 Yahweh smelled a soothing aroma. Then Yahweh said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. 22 "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease."

In Genesis 3 Yahweh established agriculture as an integral part of mankind and in chapter 8 he promises that the cycles upon which agriculture depends will be permanent. It appears that Yahweh is learning from his experiences with mankind. He has come to the conclusion that "the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth." The challenge will be for both Yahweh and mankind to learn how to deal with man's dual nature. Mankind, however, has the promise that Yahweh will not "destroy every living thing again." Now he will have time to learn.

The Genesis account is the foundation for the doctrines of rabbinic duality -- *yetzer hara*, the

so-called "evil inclination," and *yetzer hatov*, the "good inclination." The *yetzer hara* is not a demonic force that pushes a person to do evil, but rather a drive toward pleasure or property or security, which if left unlimited, can lead to evil. When properly controlled by the *yetzer hatov*, the *yetzer hara* leads to many socially desirable results, including marriage, business, and community.

For many centuries the readers of Genesis believed that evil was the result of human nature and the solution was to be found in the Torah. It was man's imagination that had to be directed towards good if evil was to be overcome. This is the heart of Rabbinic Judaism's view of redemption, which teaches that one has the power to choose to follow one inclination over the other. The way of overcoming evil is through strengthening the good inclination by following the instructions of God recorded in the Torah.

Ultimately, the rabbis taught that people have a choice of two ways or paths to follow in their lives. One is the way of the good inclination and the other the way of the evil inclination. We find a reflection of this concept in one of the early writings of Christianity – the **Didache**.

“There are two ways, one of life and one of death, but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love God who made you; second, love your neighbor as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you. . . . And the second commandment of the Teaching; You shall not commit murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not commit pederasty, you shall not commit fornication, you shall not steal, you shall not practice magic. . . . My child, flee from every evil thing, and from every likeness of it. . . .”

Three centuries later, however, the message and beliefs of Christianity were transformed forever. Karen Armstrong addresses this monumental event in her book **In The Beginning**:

Ever since St. Augustine developed his doctrine of original sin in the early fifth century CE. Christians in the West have seen the story of Adam and Eve as a catastrophic fall from perfect innocence to chronic guilt. They have traditionally equated the serpent with Satan, the fallen angel who became a devil and lured humanity away from God. Jesus died on the Cross, Christians believe, to save us from the sin of Adam, which was inherited by all human beings.

Augustine transformed the Garden of Eden account into a cosmic battle between supernatural forces of good and evil, something the original author would have never understood:

It is to be concluded then, from exegetical grounds alone, that the history contained in Genesis 3 was not intended by its ultimate compiler to supply an explanation of the cause of universal sinfulness. The most that it offers is an account of Sin's actual beginning. Mankind's capacity for sin from the first is assumed. . . . It is indeed open to question whether the narrative under consideration was intended primarily as a description of the entrance of sin into the world, rather than as an explanation of the ills of life, which are here, as in many ancient legends, associated with the striving after knowledge and civilization. Perhaps, after all, its chief moral is that human evils are the consequence of sin. Man's hard lot is indeed traced to sin. . . .” (**The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin** by F. R. Tennant)

Are your beliefs about evil and redemption based on the serpent *before he became Satan – or after?* Your choice plays a significant role in how you interpret and respond to the “evil” experiences in this world. *Are you caught in the middle of a cosmic battle between two supernatural beings? Or, do you live in a world where bad things happen when human beings choose to act like wild animals?* **BHC**

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This spiritual journey begins with one book for many of us – our Bible. It has a history too. Who wrote its words? Who decided what our “word of God” would be? In what language was it written? How can we most accurately understand its words and messages? How accurate are our English translations? Is there a way that I can learn to work with the original languages -- without going back to college -- so I will be able to check the work of the translators?

Information that will help answer the above questions, as well as many others, has already been gathered and deposited on the BHC website and written about in our newsletters. It is available without charge to the public. Obviously, it cost money to do our work. The money comes from the tax-deductible contributions of those who understand the importance of, and urgent need for, quality information. Only by having access to factual information are we able to test the accuracy of what we believe to be either true or false.

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