

## What is Death? – Who is Death?

By Haven D. Mankin

Even people, who don't know or believe the Biblical Creation Story, have heard that God created everything and said it was good. If everything was good, then where did bad come from? Where did death come from?

It was we, mankind, which brought death into the picture, not God.

Let's review the story again to see why this is so. God created the Garden of Eden as our gift; everything was provided for us. There was plenty food, a beautiful setting, no toilsome work to do, just enjoy life and relationship with God. There was one rule however. God placed two special trees within the forest; one was the "tree of life", and the other was the "tree of right and wrong". The trouble that Adam and Eve got into was, in an effort to be all knowing like God, they ate from the "tree of knowledge".

Again, most people, even non-believers have heard of the story of the apple, the snake, and the beginning of the blame game. Adam blames Eve and Eve blames the snake, but the fact remains that it was the individual choice of both Adam and Eve to eat the apple...plain and simple; it was something God said not to do, yet they disobeyed. God didn't cause them to eat fruit from the tree; it was not pre-planned. It was out of love, that God allowed them freedom of choice to decide for themselves. Their actions basically ruined the whole thing for you and me; everything would be as God planned it, if they had only obeyed that one rule.

So God had a choice to make. As Creator of the creation, He still wished to be in relationship with His creation, for this was the original point of creating in the first place. So what to do? If Adam and Eve remain in the Garden and they should eat from the "tree of life", being that they are now in a fallen sinful state, they would forever live in this fallen state (Genesis 2:22), never, to be in relationship with their Creator. Solution? Kick them out of the Garden! It was the first act of salvation!

You see, the tree of life, as verse 22 tells us, has fruit that will allow you to live forever. Now with the fall of mankind, God tells Adam in Genesis 3:17, "As long as you live...". This implies that there will now be an end to his life, and this means that God's original plan to have His created man and woman live forever will not take place at this time, at this time of the fall. Mankind's sin must now be washed away by blood, and only God can do this.

So we see that a free choice by mankind to disobey God, to sin against God, brings in death into the picture. Death, that did not exist at the beginning, is now ruling man's life.

Death is a multi-headed beast. With death come many dead positions; here are three: our arrogance that we are as powerful & knowledgeable as God, that there is no meaning in life by itself, and that we love darkness and evil. Please take note that

within the previous sentence, the life of man without God, whether that life is powerful, knowledgeable, or of evil, will always end the same way...in death. Separation from God is deadness. The prophet Isaiah had these things to say about the deadness of man in his fallen state in the 59<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah, quoting from the NIV:

- “your iniquities have separated you from your God” (verse 2)
- “your sins have hidden His face from you” (verse 2)
- “your hands are stained with blood” (verse 3)
- “your lips have spoken lies” (verse 3)
- “no one calls for justice” (verse 4)
- “no one pleads his case with integrity” (verse 4)
- “they rely on empty arguments” (verse 4)
- “they conceive trouble and give birth to evil” (verse 4)
- “they hatch the eggs of vipers...whoever eats their eggs will die” (verse 5)
- “their deeds are evil deeds” (verse 6)
- “their feet rush to sin...their thoughts are evil thoughts” (verse 7)
- “we look for light, but all is darkness” (verse 9)
- “like the blind, we grope along the wall” (verse 10)
- “among the strong, we are like the dead” (verse 10)
- “we look for justice, but find none” (verse 11)
- “for our offenses are many” (verse 12)

None of this was created by God and none of this existed before the Fall of Man. To those who think, in their arrogance, they are so wise and knowledgeable, and certainly not “one of those evil people” Isaiah spoke of, the writer of Ecclesiastes saw this life of meaningless and darkness, apart from God, as he wrote: “I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. Then I thought in my heart, the fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise? I said in my heart, ‘this too is meaningless.’ For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!” (ECC 2:13-16 NIV)

So we see that “in the beginning it was good” and we messed things up; don’t go blaming God as Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the snake. We made our choices out of freewill; God had no chains on us, no force was applied, you make your choice and I make mine. Death, that did not exist at the beginning, is now ruling our lives. So, are we then doomed?

Do you honestly think our omnipotent God would give up on His creation that easily? Do you think He would just say, oh well, this group didn’t measure up, I’ll just start another universe, thereby leaving us condemned by our own actions? If you say yes, then you know nothing about a loving creative effort. A good creator never turns his back on his “good” creation!

Salvation is coming to those who are willing to turn. The Apostle John tells us “He [Jesus] was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it.” (John 1:2-5 NIV) Jesus is the light of the world; since the darkness does not understand the light, many will turn away. You see, we all love darkness! Since our deeds are evil and deep inside we are ashamed by our deeds, what is the best way to hide those evil deeds? Play in the darkness, of course!

Many will say, Haven, I’m not an evil person and my deeds are good. I go to church on Sundays, I do this and I do that...I am not an evil person! All those “other people” are evil, but not me! Friend, your arrogance is evil; you can not change “the fall” on your own!

“All of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.” (Romans 3:23 LB) As Jesus was teaching Nicodemus, He said: “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.” (John 3:19-20 NIV, underline added)

It is not God’s deeds that are causing the problems in the world; it is our deeds that are evil. Many times I’ve heard people reject Christianity as being false because God couldn’t possibly exist because a good God would have created a good world. “Don’t blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil, and He doesn’t use evil to tempt others. We are tempted by our own desires that drag us off and trap us. Our desires make us sin, and when sin is finished with us, it leaves us dead.” (James 1:13-15 LB, underline added). Could we just possibly drop our stupid arrogance, turn toward our Savior Jesus Christ, who has already paid the price for the sins we commit in darkness, and by His grace become children of God...children of the Light? We have a chance to come out of the darkness, turn toward the “Light of God” that has come into the world, and be saved from our sins.

So, now the question must be, why wouldn’t God create us without a chance for us to select evil or desire evil things? You often hear people say, “Why does God allow evil?” What would you have Him do? By force, change everybody into a different kind of puppet? Often you hear of people rejecting God as they express: “you say God is love and since there is evil in the world and God created everything, then God must not be love at all...I will reject a God like that”...or, they will say, “He simply must not exist at all because if He was in fact all powerful and a reality, then there would be no evil.” To which I say: Where is the love in a God that would manipulate, control and force His people into selected thoughts and actions? Is a manipulated relationship, actions controlled by strings & chains, movement & thought controlled by force or predestination; is that kind of a relationship, a loving relationship? Should we all simply not be trusted to obey a simple command like, “don’t eat from that tree”, or shall we be placed in a jail cell and then told what to do, where to go, and what to think? Oh gee, now that sounds real loving to me! [Structural note: for those who don’t see it these days, that was sarcasm.] Those of you who truly love their spouse, who would give

your life for them (as Jesus did for you), let me ask you: Would you ever, ever dream of manipulating their spouse's every thought, word and action by the heaviest of force? Of course not! And neither would your loving God in Heaven do that to you!

You are loved so much that God created in you freedom! You have the freedom to choose your own path to follow. You have the freedom to choose your words and actions; the question is how will you apply them? Will you blame God for everything and stay in the darkness of death, or will you choose to come into the Light of everlasting life with your loving Creator God? God told the Prophet Jeremiah in the classic promise of restored relationship that, "I will give them [the people, including you & me] a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with all their heart." (Jeremiah 24:7 NIV). In other words, God has created a path back to Him through the Son, conquering the pollution of death we created; the question is, will we turn back to Him to walk in the Light of Life or remain in our deadness? It is our choice now. God wants you back in relationship with Him; God wants you back in the Garden! What are you going to do?