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Before the Serpent Became Satan # 4

By Jim Myers

Continued from Issue Number 52.

The stage is set for one of the great cosmic events of all times! On one side we have the serpent, the wisest of all wild animals, attempting to entice the woman to eat the divinely forbidden fruit. On the other side we have the man, the woman's partner, silently standing by knowing that she has inaccurate information about what Yahweh Elohim commanded. At center stage is the woman struggling with the information she has received from both the other players.

What's at stake? If the serpent is right, she will gain divine wisdom. If the man is right, as soon as she touches the forbidden fruit she will die. Is the chance to acquire the wisdom of an Elohim worth risking death?

Another silent player in this situation is Yahweh Elohim. The biblical text says nothing about Yahweh ever speaking to the woman. As a matter of fact, an interesting point is that neither the woman nor the serpent uses the name Yahweh to refer to Elohim. Both simply use the word Elohim when referring to the one who commanded the man.

In the previous article we discussed the thoughts that were going through the mind of the woman during this intense situation. What do you think the man was thinking as he stood silently by the woman's side?

(1) He knows exactly what Yahweh commanded.

(2) He knows that nothing will happen if the woman touches the forbidden fruit.

(3) Surely she would never touch it because she believed she would die.

(4) There is nothing to worry about because if she never touches it she will never eat it.

But let's not forget that he also heard the words of the serpent. Was he considering the possibility that the serpent could be right? One way to find out was to grab the forbidden fruit and take a bite. Of course, if Yahweh was right and the serpent was wrong -- he would die!

I can almost hear the flood of thoughts that must have gushed into his mind as he wrestled with the possibilities.

(1) Since she had been created from his rib she was part of him. Would the command of Yahweh apply to her also?

(2) Since Yahweh said nothing specifically about her, would she be unaffected by the prohibition?

(3) Why would the serpent make up such a story in the first place?

What would the man do? Would he believe the words of Yahweh and thereby act in accordance with the divine wisdom? Or, would he choose to believe the words of the serpent and act like a wild animal? This scene provides us with the author's insight into the nature of man and the origin of evil. It is an insight that will be completely lost when later theologians transform the serpent from a wild animal into Satan!

In order to understand the significance of this moment we must return to Genesis 1:24-28 –

24 And Elohim said, “Let the earth bring forth a living soul after her kind, cattle, and creeping things, and wild animals of the earth (fem.) after her kind.” And it was so. 25 And Elohim made the wild animals (fem.) of the earth after her kind, and the cattle (fem.) after her kind, and everything that creeps (masc.) upon the ground after his kind. And Elohim saw that it was good.

*26 And Elohim said, “**Let us make man in our image**, after our likeness: and **let them have dominion** over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” 27 And Elohim created man in his own image, in the image of Elohim created he him; male and female created he them.*

28 And Elohim blessed them: and Elohim said unto them, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Verse 26 has been argued about for centuries by countless numbers of theologians. The famous question is – “Who is meant by us?” In a monotheistic belief system there is only one God, so it couldn’t mean another God. The context of the verse, however, is overlooked in most of these discussions. It begins in verse 24 with Elohim commanding the earth to produce a “living soul” and is followed in verse 25 with Elohim creating the animals.

The process continues in verse 26 when Elohim turns his attention to the creation of mankind or as some translations say – *earthlings*. Contextually, the “us” must be the earth and Elohim. This new image will be a joint venture

between the two who will reflect the images of both. His nature will include the potentiality of acting as an Elohim or an animal. The thing that will determine which nature will rule is the “free will” of this new creature.

The halakhah embodies in norms of behavior deep reflection on the meaning of human nature. Endowed with autonomous will, man has the power to rebel against God’s will, and it follows that rebellion lurks as an ever-present possibility. (Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism by Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, p. 92).

This knowledge of the duality of man is once again in the opening verses of this second creation account in Genesis 2:7 –

And Yahweh Elohim formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Mankind is a creature of the earth and of the Elohim. He is neither just an earth creature like the animals, nor is he a god. In him are the desires and appetites of both worlds. The author of Genesis wants readers to be well-aware of the natures of the creatures that stand on either side of the woman. The serpent is just being what nature requires him to be – a wild animal. The desire to be like the Elohim is part of her nature and the potential to act as a wild animal is part of his. The factor that will tip the scale one way or the other is the decision as to whom the man will choose to obey – the words of Yahweh or the serpent. The man can only obey one, not both.

Of course, this is a mute question as long as the woman is afraid of touching the forbidden fruit. We can only imagine what he thought when he saw her extend her hand towards the tree. She knew better than to do that, but could he help but wonder what would happen if she did? And then she did the unthinkable -- “...*she took of the fruit...*” **(Continued in the next issue.)**

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