

As Deep Cries Unto Deep
Part 2 of authentic spirituality
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Introduction

Daniel

The story of Daniel doesn't start in the book of Daniel. There is a long drawn out history of Israel that needs to be fully understood. The thing that is most often misconceived is that Israel never followed God. This isn't true. Before Israel was Abraham. It was to Abraham that the promise was given.

God promised Abraham that he would be a nation, and that his offspring would be as countless as the stars. This wasn't odd. In these times, cities and nations were named after real people. Real people had children, who then had children, who then had children. Five generations later, the family is now about 50 or 60 people. That's enough to start a small town or city. The town or city continues to grow, and is named after the patriarch. God promises Abraham something that he has heard of, and has seen happen. Indeed, father Abraham had many sons; and many sons had father Abraham...

It was all because of a simple belief. Abraham took God at His word. This started the continuation of a people who would take God at His word. When God speaks, the servant listens. Abraham's son Isaac followed in Abraham's trust. And his son, Israel, also lived like Abraham. And then we get to the tribes of Israel. There were twelve sons. Everyone had their flaws, including Abraham. It wasn't about that, though.

There is a story in Genesis about how God makes a covenant with Abraham. God visits in the form of three people. They all travel to Abraham, and talk and discuss. Abraham has such hospitality that he doesn't find it enough to open his door. He runs to the travelers (whom he doesn't know is God), and begs them to stay with him. This speaks of the heart of Abraham, by the way.

After this discourse, God makes a covenant with Abraham. The way that you would typically make a covenant is that each party gives offerings, and they lay out the offerings in a line. Each party then walks the line toward the middle to finalize the covenant. It's like a handshake, but more symbolism.

This isn't what happens though. Abraham prepares all of the offerings. After preparing all of the sacrifices, he doesn't get the opportunity to walk through. God walks through the whole thing to Abraham. The symbolism is that Abraham has nothing that he has to do. There isn't an "Abraham's side of the bargain." It is all upon God and upon His faithfulness. God's promises and covenants aren't based on us.

So when we get to the book of Exodus, and we see Israel the nation and the way they act and treat God, we have to understand that there is something bigger behind the story. The story is in itself a piece of a story. The exodus brings the people out of Egypt, which is out of bondage. The whole of the relationship between Israel and God is that God is the deliverer. It is a statement of that first covenant. God brings them out because of His faithfulness, not because Israel upholds their side of the bargain.

Then the commandments are given. This isn't what we think. In our Gentile minds, we see the giving of the Ten Commandments as being something that any god would do. I am God, you are not, so here is a do's and don'ts list. That is not the heart of God. God longs to be with His people.

The Ten Commandments were given in a wedding language. Ancient Jewish culture reveals that it is a groom who would give their requirements of their bride before they wed. The bride also gives her requirements, so each know what the other party expects. After the document has been made, they sign it, and they uphold their end of the deal. God is giving Israel His requirements. Interesting fact: there is what's called a chuppa in traditional Jewish weddings which is a symbol of God being a "cloud" over the two being married (I wonder where they get the idea of God being a cloud over them...) This is why the prophets always refer to Israel in marriage language. This is why Israel "plays the harlot" instead of a prostitute. It isn't that Israel is selling herself short by embracing other gods; Israel is cheating on her God.

The story of Israel has its ups and downs. There are the good times and there are the bad times. You find the same thing with study of church history.

The story takes us to a time in Israel's history that I don't believe anyone enjoys learning about. There was a shift between the tribes of Israel that caused for some to believe they were better than others, and others to actually believe that they were less. Because of this shift, the Kingdom split into two kingdoms: northern Israel and southern Judah. Judah was not only the tribe of Judah. They had the tribe of Benjamin, Manasseh, and a handful from all the tribes. The Levitical priesthood also remained in Judah.

This split in the Kingdom only furthered the prejudice and hatred between tribes. Israel never had a good king. They were only always evil. Judah had some good kings, and wicked kings as well. There was a last good king of Judah. His name was Josiah. Josiah was very young (possibly in his early teens) when he became king. The priests found a copy of the Torah (possibly Tanakh), and read it in the hearing of the king.

Josiah was so broken over how far Judah had fallen away from the original intent of God that he rent his clothes and wept. He took all of the altars that were built to foreign gods and tore them down. As if that wasn't enough, he then took bones and scattered them over the used-to-be-altars to defile them and ensure no one could ever use them again. There was a major reformation of Judah in the time of Josiah.

Then he passed away... The next generation was the generation of Jeremiah. There is a story in the book of Jeremiah of how these priests and prophets bound Jeremiah up with intentions to kill him. In all of the commotion, some of the nobles and royalty came down from the palace and intervened. Of these youth who came down, some of them *could have been* Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. You probably recognize the first name (there is a book of the Bible named after him). The other three you also know. Their Babylonian names are Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego.

Now here is where it gets interesting. It isn't for certain, but it is very plausible that these four young men were some of them who went down from the palace to save Jeremiah. The reason this is so interesting is that it seems like the same men who would have defended the prophet before exile are the same men whom God promotes and protects while in exile.

Do you see the question rising? How do we, in the world we live in now, live as a Daniel generation? We are in the generation after Josiah. If you don't think so, then you're severely mistaken. You'll see what I mean.

This is a decent question. The book of Daniel helps us to understand better as to what this looks like. In the very first chapter, you see the renowned men of Judah being brought before the king's table to be taught with the Chaldeans. They learn in the school of Babylon, they learn how to divine, they learn how to be magicians, and they learn how to be good counselors for the king. The whole thing reeks of sin.

But what do we read? "Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and asked the chief official permission not to defile himself in this way," Daniel 1:8. There was something of a prophetic stature in Daniel to be able to see that this food and drink was not of God. When everyone else seemed to indulge and, I have to assume, count it as God's provision, Daniel and his three friends stand up and say, "I would rather die than eat that."

There is more going on here. This kind of seeing doesn't come into existence simply because we read our bibles and know that it says in Leviticus that we shouldn't eat these meats... Every Jew was taught in the local synagogue to have the Torah (first five books of the Bible) memorized through and through by the time they would graduate elementary school. This takes sensitivity to the Spirit of God that is only formed by extreme devotion to the Lord. It is only built by our relationship with God.

Daniel proves that age doesn't matter. There are teenagers who understand deeper spiritual truths than 50-year-old pastors who have walked with the Lord for 35 years. It isn't about how long; it is about how much. Your spirituality is measured by your devotion. Your devotion is measured by willingness.

It says of Jesus that the Spirit was given to Him without measure (John 3:34). I don't believe that this can happen to you and I unless we are devoted and willing without measure. Every stop sign that we decide to come up to, slow down, look both ways, then drive through is a negation of truth. It is in the details. There are thousands of examples from both everyday life and from the general path of life.

Every time we cut someone off because we aren't sure if we'll ever have opportunity to pull out of the parking lot is detriment to our spirit. Did you pull out because you don't trust the Lord to provide instance? What if you were supposed to stay longer for some reason the Lord had ordained? Yet we pull out and cut people off in hopes of getting to the next destination out of selfishness and pride.

My wife and I don't drive the highway. It promotes in people a mentality of "I have to get there now." It diminishes patience. It takes away from our ability to wait on the Lord. It builds in us the kind of character that would cut people off. It builds in us the kind of character that would want instant gratification. It is of the flesh, and ultimately of the devil. The highway, fast food restaurants, processed foods, and anything promoting "instant" are traps and snares that develop mindsets that we don't even realize they are developing until they have already entered in.

Every time we bow the knee to Baal and we take a loan is cutting away from that which God has placed in us. Who is your provider? God? The bank? Your job? All of the above? You cannot serve two masters. If you can't buy it outright, then you don't need it. God will provide for your every need. If He uses your employment, then praise Him. If he uses your community, then praise Him. Do not go and get a loan when you don't have money to afford that car, or that house, or that matching furniture. Everything in society

is designed to be bought out of debt. Debt is spoken against through the entire Bible. I believe the deeper spiritual aspect is that debt is directly related to Baal.

It is in these little things that we forfeit the Spirit of God. There are thousands of them a day. When we are willing to ignore the little details, we are willing to ignore the God of those details. We will not have the ability to discern the difference between the clean and the unclean, the precious and the vile. There will be gray area that the king's meat will fall into where we're unsure. There will be others who won't even have the gray area of uncertainty. They will joyfully eat of it without remorse.

Our spiritual testimony to the world hinges upon this. If we eat the food and drink the wine, we're just like everyone else and our words have no power. To abstain from it, we will find fierce opposition (like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah). They were thrown into a fiery furnace. Daniel was put into a lion's den. The gods of this world hate it when we oppose the system that they have placed in effect.

It is our opposition to them that will cause for persecution. We won't need to go searching. It isn't about our prayer being neglected and our churches are full of lazy people. The real issue is that without the proper attention to these details, the kingdom of darkness is able to say to us, "Jesus we know, and Paul we know, but who are you?"

Lets keep going through the book of Daniel, because it does show some profound things. In chapter 3, we see these three men of Daniel's companions stand in opposition to an entire faulted system. The system is that the king orders, and the king gets what he orders. He has the power, and he will exercise this power without humility. There is no need or reason to be humble. You listen to him because you are the peon in the pew, and he is the pastor. You are the peasant in the plain; he is the president in the palace. You are the plodder; he is the professional. Got the picture?

This stems directly to how we're taught to think about ourselves. We're worth more than what we have. We're taught that we deserve the best in life. We're taught that we deserve the Hollywood lifestyle, even if we're making a few percent (or in my case, not even that) of what Hollywood makes. We're taught that it's ours for the taking. This mindset of the king's isn't some peculiarity or an anomaly. It is what the principalities and powers preach. It is what every person feels, even if only slightly.

The King has spoken, and you must listen. He has said that you shall worship this statue when the trumpets and horns and music start playing. And Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego continue to stand and neglect the worship of this statue. It is a stance against an entire governmental system that describes the last days and even these days here and now. These men defy something deeper than a government official. They defy the very spiritual powers behind that governmental figure.

This is how you must read the Scriptures. When they are cast into the fiery furnace, it is because they have gone against the ways of the world. They have stood in opposition to something that everyone held to be "the way it is." They stood against those dark powers that bind men to death and keep them bound, and offered the world resurrection by saying in their disobedience, "You don't have to live like this." They stand in the gap and tell the world all about the lie that society so preaches, and we in the Church have so believed. These three men came against a system that says, "If you're ever going to have a house, you'll need a loan." Then I don't need a house. I don't need a

car. I don't need the supermarket. I'll buy and sell in my own way. I find my own employment without having to support a system built by Satan. I'll plant my own garden, and from it shall I eat.

I believe that this is the answer to a question that I've heard quite a bit. If at the end of the times we cannot buy, sell, or trade, then how will we live? We will live by growing our own crop and taking care of each other. As it was at the first, where they sold everything and shared with one another, so it shall be at the end.

That is why they were tossed into the furnace. The false humility of the king is also presented in that he offers them their lives if they will bow down to the statue of gold. Doesn't this story just sound like all of the kid's movies we've watched? The hero stands against all that is evil, and just when it looks like it might be the end, the evil doer gives one last chance to surrender to the dark side...

They don't. In fact, they insult the king. "Even if our God doesn't deliver us, we're still not bowing down to your stupid statue that doesn't even talk, and that you built with your own hands. It is not a god, and it doesn't deserve humanity to even acknowledge it." It is no wonder why the king turned the heat up to the maximum.

What does it say? How does the story end? These three men, our heroes, those who are within our cloud of witnesses walk in the furnace with a fourth man. And the fourth man looks like a son of the gods... There are obvious theological implications we can take from this. I'm sure you've either heard or thought about how Jesus walks with us through our fiery furnaces. What I want to glean is not the fourth person with them, but that they don't smell like smoke, and they aren't even singed. There is simply no evidence that they were even tossed into the flame.

Where, oh grave, is your victory? And where, oh death, is your sting?

Martyrdom isn't something that is optional. It is a necessity. And because it is a necessity, it isn't something that happens at the end of your life. Martyrdom is the style of living in opposition to these principalities and powers. You know persecution will come. You know death is an option. You live in opposition anyway. You bump against the grain anyway. Even when they threaten you with death, you say, "Our God will deliver us. But even if He doesn't, we still won't bow the knee."

That is martyrdom. When we count it as blessing to walk through the fire of the furnace, whether it means life or death. Suffering isn't something we fear. The displeasure of men (or our parents) isn't something that we fear. We wrestle not with flesh and blood...

All of this brings me to the story of Stephen. I have recently been convicted of having anger in my heart towards a fellow brother. I know it is true that God is offended at his behavior. Yet, I was not able to let it go and say, "Father, forgive him. He doesn't know what he is doing." What is it about Jesus' character and Stephen's character that caused them to say such things while they were at the verge of death?

I believe, now, that it is an understanding of the powers behind such systems. When the religious system came against them, they were able to see that it wasn't the people doing it. It was the powers that were ruling them. I had it wrong. This man is a brother. He is supposed to know better. He is supposed to know that this kind of action

and unwillingness toward God is unacceptable. Yet, though he has no excuse, it wasn't my place to judge him. I am to judge the angels.

It is my place to stand in the gap for him, and to condemn the powers behind him that blind him. There was something in me of authenticity that stood against whatever was in him. Though it is true that it is evil in him, it doesn't mean that he is evil. The opposition between the two of us was not noticed.

He didn't realize what was happening. And those people I gave that message to didn't realize that when truth went forth, they didn't have the capacity of truth in their own lives to receive it. So they rejected it by rejecting the messenger. It wasn't that they are evil, it was that they are bound my Satan. And they need someone to be able to pray, "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing."

There has to be a generation who is able to stand against the powers, and at the same time offer to even the rulers and the kings and priests and prophets and all of those who oppose us freedom. We are to in one sense stretch out a hand in opposition, and with the other hand stretch out relief and freedom. With one hand we hold back the powers of darkness and with the other we offer hope. We wrestle not with flesh and blood, and this is how we can be a Daniel generation.

This kind of thing doesn't come with prayer and fasting. These things help, but they must come with wrestling. We have to wrestle with the Scriptures and with theology and with our community and with God Himself. We must be willing to truly pray. This kind of prayer that wrestles until the blessing comes is the only thing that will suffice. That is why this is only the introduction. We need to examine the character of God in order to understand better what details we need to pay attention to.

At the heart of everything we do and say and believe is our perception of who God is. God's one strike against Israel in the Psalms is "You thought I was one like yourself." It was in the wrong understanding of God that the people Israel did wickedness. The same is true for us. It is in our wrong understanding of the character of God that we wrestle with flesh and blood instead of the principalities and powers.

This book is my hope to try and express something of an authentic view of God. A lot of the polytheistic and ancient and medieval views of God are very much alive today. The Christ we preach is not Jewish anymore, let alone different than other gods. Please consider what the following pages have to say with openness and humility.

Chapter 1

Beginning

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

These are the first few verses of the Bible. I have learned in the past couple years that the best place to start with people is the beginning. There are many reasons. One is that when you properly understand the beginning of the Bible, you can better understand the entire Bible. The beginning shows forth the end. These beginning chapters of the Bible have so much in such a small amount. The text is terse.

If you didn't know, the Bible was not originally written in English. Genesis was written in Hebrew, and the Hebrew words aren't simply translated. Hebrew is a language of few words. These words usually mean concepts. God is Elohim (el-oh-HEEM). Elohim is the concept of a god. In fact, there is decent argument that the word *elohim* is plural. The way that you make a noun plural is that you add the “*eem*” ending. Did a plural God make the heavens and the earth?

Did “gods” make the heavens and the earth? Let's keep going... *Bara Elohim* is the phrase for “God created.” *Bara* is a verb, which means that it is only three consonants, and the translation depends on what vowels they put on those three consonants, if there are any prefixes or suffixes, and the verb form that they use. *Br'* is the verb (beth resh aleph). To be honest, this is kind of anticlimactic, because the only thing I want to prove is that God created. The verb form simply means, “created” (past tense of the verb). There aren't any suffixes or prefixes, and there isn't anything interesting that has happened to it.

My point, however, is that *bara elohim* places God as a creator. It isn't simply that it says a god created. The wording works together to say, “There is a God over all other gods who actually created this world. He Himself identifies Himself as a creator.” For obvious reasons, we don't translate it that way. Every chapter would take a book. Where as other gods need statues and temples and buildings and monuments built for them, this God created something for Himself. This is a revolutionary thought in the time that Genesis was written.

So this God is a creator. He is also recognized later as a spirit. The Hebrew phrase is *ruach elohim*. *Ruach* is what we translate as spirit, but there is a much bigger way of looking at *ruach*. I'll speak on that in the next chapter. The spirit of God hovered over the waters. God is recognizing Himself as a spirit as well.

God said, “Let there be light.” The Hebrew word for light is *or*. I put it in italics so that you can know it isn't our English word *or*. *Or* means light, but what kind of light?

We think of light as being that you flip the switch, the lights come on. The sun gives off light. The moon reflects light from the sun during the night hours.

Or is different. Let me show you the use of the word from the Psalms: “Let the *or* of your face shine upon us.” Let the light of your face, or countenance, shine upon us. This light is something that is most likely visible, but it might not be. This light is a spiritual light. It is something that when we’re talking about light and dark we’re talking about the original state of the universe. When John says, “God is light, and there is no darkness in Him,” it is a reference to Genesis 1. God essentially is saying, “Let me, who is light, be a manifest part of this creation.”

This light is also referenced as Jesus in John 1. The light took on flesh. It is the “light of all men.” We read in the Psalms that God is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Same light. In another Psalm (106:20), there is wording that states that Israel changed “their glory” into that of a created calf. This idea of changing, or exchanging, their glory is another reference to the idea of the light being within mankind. This light is a spiritual light that is in all things, and you can sense this light in a very tangible way. I would challenge those of you who are interested to look into these concepts for yourself and see what ways God can completely reform your theology.

God recognizes Himself as a creator, spirit, and light. He is one (Deuteronomy 6:4) “*elohim*,” but He is multiple. Let me not turn away from this concept of light and dark so soon, though. This is something that we need to speak on before we can continue on.

I think that we all understand what I’m talking about when I say that God is a spiritual light. I think we all know what it means when it says “darkness was upon the face of the deep.” This is an exodus message that has been placed within the first few verses of Genesis. “We have been brought out of darkness and into His marvelous light.” Sound familiar?

Every time that we’re bullied, every time we hear of a bombing or school shooting, every time we see some sort of injustice, every hate crime (including rape), every lie, every time we rob someone of their humanity, and every time we experience inflicted pain and grief and sorrow, we see this darkness upon the face of the depths of our hearts and lives. And God says, “It can’t stay like this.”

God inserts Himself. He is the light. And the darkness cannot overcome it. That is the point. Darkness cannot celebrate victory when the light breaks forth. God is trying to get something bigger out in a poetic way. Darkness upon the face of the deep – yeah I’ve seen that. Let there be light – God has done this in me and through me.

Do you have a better understanding now? It is God’s character that He always hears the cry of the oppressed. He always responds to suffering and injustice. He cannot ignore the darkness and chaos. It is in His very nature and character that He must produce light when there is darkness. And He doesn’t stop with being light, but says that He will place Himself right there in the middle of the darkness with you and suffer and struggle through it. He will come into it, and out of the chaos, out of the darkness will start to produce light, and order, and life, and stability.

This is why the wording is “evening and morning was the first day.” We see it over and over again: evening and morning, evening and morning, evening and morning.

It all points to being brought out of darkness and into light. “Let there be light, and there was light, and God saw the light and it was good. And it was evening and morning, the first day.” Day two: God creates sky and oceans, and evening and morning was the second day. Day three: God creates land and seas, and plant life appears. Evening and morning are the third day. Day four: God creates the sun, moon, and stars (which fills that which He made on day one), and evening and morning are day four. Day five: God creates fish and birds (which fills that which God made on day two), and evening and morning are the fifth day. Day six: God creates animals to walk upon the land, and God creates mankind (which fills that which the Lord made on day three), and evening and morning are the sixth day...

God continues to bring more and more order, and to then fill that which He had made. He doesn't stop with His creation and let evolution and natural selection take over, but instead continues to create. It is His nature. He is the creator. He brings life and order into that which was dark and chaotic. He then continues to bring more and more life and order into it. And when He gets done with all of the creation of the world, He creates rest. We can use this as an analogy for heaven, but I think it speaks greater for the journey that God takes us through here and now.

We all have experienced light and dark. We've experienced evening and morning. Some of us (most of us) are still experiencing greater and greater degrees of freedom and life and developing order. Rest isn't something that comes afterward, but is something that we experience when God is wrought in us. Rest is the natural state of humanity. We aren't to be stressed and running to and fro in hurry and always feeling the strain of life upon our shoulders. These aren't natural feelings. These are remnants of darkness. As we continue to be stripped of the darkness and chaos, we are brought more and more into this eternal rest that transcends our conventional understandings of sleep and relaxation.

Rest (Sabbath in Hebrew) is not something for one day as it is mentioned in Exodus (Ten Commandments). It was originally intended for us to walk in it. Every moment is a Sabbath, because every moment we are with God, and He is with us. Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote a book on the Sabbath where he points out that the original intent was an eternal rest.

From Eden to New Earth

Genesis 2 bursts on the scene loud and proud. It speaks of the seventh day (which never has an “evening and morning” but just continues on), and on this day God rested. The word for rest is shabat (shaw-bawth). This wasn't simply ceasing from work. It is a cosmic restoration and deep sanctifying act. This rest is more than “resting up” to go back to work tomorrow. It is ceasing our focus upon the temporal and diving into the eternal.

There is a place in Jewish mysticism that even considers the Sabbath (shabat) to be a bride (kallah). The idea they propose is that we accept the Sabbath with joy and thanksgiving like we would accept a wife. However, this bride seems to speak of us, the people of God, being united unto God and therefore rest being the product. God makes

His creation, and the result of Him being an intricate part of this cosmos is a rest that lingers, and never ends. We, as the “bride,” are to be a description of this rest.

Naturally, this raises some significant questions. Does that mean that God is no longer an intricate part of this creation? If He is, then is the cosmos at rest? Is this really what rest looks like? If He isn't, then where is He? Why isn't He an intricate part of this creation? There is a deeper question to ask. Instead of looking upon the negative, a better question is to ask about the positive... If God placed Himself in this creation as an intricate part (the light), what does that mean?

When God says, “Let there be light,” this is the ground being broken. This is the “Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.” This is more than light. It is freedom. It is goodness itself. Words cannot sufficiently describe this reality. Which is why we use metaphors like darkness and light. Is God still an intricate part of this cosmos? Aren't we really asking, “Does God still care about this place? Is all lost? Has the devil won? Are we stuck in this evil place?”

Thus we have the whole point of Genesis chapter one. It moves from evening to morning. The darkest night cannot stop the morning. There is still hope. There is still light. And we are here to celebrate this light. God has not forsaken us, but has equipped us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. He is the light. He still delights in us.

The word Eden even means delight. So, in Genesis two, when God makes the garden, and He calls it Eden, He is calling it “delight.” The imagery to describe Eden is beauty, good, lush, pleasant, remarkable scenery. The way that God has originally (and therefore always) intended is that things would be good, pure, holy, sinless, beautiful, etc. It was not chaos and corruption.

All in all, if we look at the garden, we find the garden, man placed in it, there is beauty, there's a river, there is what's called the tree of life, and God gives the man work (purpose). Now lets move to the last two chapters of the Bible. If the Bible starts like this, then what does it end like? Revelation 21-22 can be summed up as follows: God makes a new Heaven and new Earth, puts man in it, there is beauty and a river, a tree of life, and God gives work (purpose) to mankind by ruling and reigning with Him *forever*.

So.....

The Bible begins and ends in pretty close to the exact same way. It begins with beauty and sinlessness and purpose for mankind and ends the exact same way. Anything within the rest of the pages is nothing more than an additive. God made it like this, and He is redeeming it to be like this, and everything else is only life *between the trees*.

I guess this is what Jesus meant when He said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” This temporal land and kingdom we live in now is not the reality. This is only life between the trees. The reality is eternity, and if we cling to the one tree, and neglect the tree of life, we will miss it. This is why we must begin at the beginning, and not at Genesis 3.

Jesus was proclaiming a truth that we still struggle to see. His Kingdom, the light, the “good” is not found in this present age. It is found in another Kingdom. This world is temporary and fleeting. The true Kingdom is where heaven and earth meet. It is where

God dwells with His creation. But where is that? Is it far off? Or, as Jesus says, is it “at hand?”

This is the Gospel, isn't it? The good news isn't that Jesus died on a cross, but that God still cares. Jesus' death wasn't everything. It was the agent used in bringing about everything. The “everything” is that God desires to be with His creation, and when He is with His creation, darkness and chaos have no place. Starting at Genesis three, we see that sin is in the world, and God redeems us from it. Starting with Genesis one, we see that God has always been redeeming and bringing creation into greater glory. It is a bigger picture than the fall of man and the redemption of man.

The Eternal Perspective

The Hebrew word that is translated as “in” in Genesis 2:8 could actually be translated as *from*. From Eden would be from eternity. So, for man to be placed “in Eden,” it could actually be speaking of a deep theological aspect of eternity.

In Hebrew, the word *olam* (oh-lahm) is used for eternity. The picture that it paints is “to the horizon, and then more.” The idea is that we can only see to the horizon, and eternity is past that. Time in the Hebrew mindset is likened unto direction. We can see. So, to see, in this sense, to the horizon and then some is speaking of as far ahead in time as we can possibly imagine and “plan,” and then some.

We are placed *from eternity*. We are placed on this earth, but not stuck on this earth. In humanity, heaven and earth are brought together. God and creation are brought together. It is within man being placed “from” Eden, or from delight, that the Jewish sages argued quite persuasively that Eden wasn't necessarily a place as much as a reality.

The next thing to note is that humanity is placed in between God and earth. We have communion with the world, and we have communion with God. We are physical to be able to react to the world around us. We are spiritual to be able to react with God. If we loose our spirituality, then we become too much like the animals, and run about according to our senses. If we loose our physic, then we become too much like the angels and run around destroying our own bodies. Humanity was placed within these two. All three parts (spirituality, carnality, and soul) should work together harmoniously.

Thus, we are always spiritual, and always physical. When some one tells you, “I'm just not all that religious of a person,” the proper response is, “Are you human?” Too late. We have been given this life by God. We were placed *from Eden* into this world. When this starts to sink in, this really starts taking a hold on us. Our humanity is derived from heaven, not sin. Our nature is derived from eternity, not the garden. Our being is *from Eden*, not from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God created us good, and sin/depravity/corruption came *after*.

Why does it matter? The ideology of our intrinsic nature to be sin brings about judgment. It is too much a temptation to call people fallen or depraved and not to think of them as lesser in our hearts. But to look at people as intended for good, then we find ourselves being heartbroken over sin. The reason I make this point isn't so much about a

theological argument as it is what that mentality seems to bear fruit of. To teach and preach that we are all sinners in the hands of an angry God seems to validate hatred, segregation, isolation, condemnation, and bitterness between brother and sister. Between congregation and congregation we find hard feelings. In the name of upholding the truth, we reject our brother because of a doctrine or creed they hold to. If we can't even be open and inviting and willing toward our own brethren, then how are we supposed to see the world and all that the darkness and chaos that it is in without condemning them? How are we supposed to be the holy vessels to preach light when our own eyes are full of darkness?

Two Trees

With this, let us look upon the two options: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We all know the result of the fall. We see it daily. It's like a never-ending movie from hell.

When we see the tree of life, the Hebrew word used for life is *chay* (clear the throat when you say *hay*). The name Eve in Hebrew was *Chava*. It was derived from the word *chay*. It means life. It means living. The *Chava Elohim* (the living God). We were given life as an option. Instead we chose the other. Because that's the point, isn't it? God will always give us that choice. Do we choose life, or do we pursue anything/everything else? Choose ye this day whom you shall serve, eh?

Death and Hell and Life and Heaven aren't really things that happen at the end. They are moment-by-moment choices. And those choices have real implications.

In Luke 14:25-27, Jesus talks about taking up a cross. In Luke 9:23, Jesus talks about taking up a cross. In Mark 8:34-38, Jesus talks about taking up a cross. In Philippians 3:7-11, Paul talks about taking up a cross. What is interesting about Paul's mention of the cross here is that he doesn't use the word, nor does he stop with the cross. He completes the thought with saying, "When there is a cross, there is resurrection."

Olam in the New Testament isn't just eternity. It is life. It is resurrection. *Olam* in the New Testament is to live *from*, not to be striving towards. This is the point and definition of resurrection. Once we have obtained this life, we have no longer to fear anything. We are in Eden with God once more. The new Heaven and new Earth are future events and things, yes. But they are also here and now. They are amongst us.

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life," Romans 6:1-4.

Our very salvation constitutes that we are now in heaven and on earth together at the same time. Eternity is not after death. It is here and now. It is with us, amongst us, giving us energy and life and love and freedom. "We are seated with Him in heavenly

places,” Ephesians 2:6. Jesus talked to Nicodemus about being in heaven and earth (John 3:13).

The true reality is from the Garden and City of God, not between the trees. The world we see and know is temporal, no matter how impressive. Persecution is momentary and light and temporal. Everything is brought into this reality when we see it. If we can truly believe this truth, we cannot be the same.

If we look at Hebrew 12:1 in the context of Romans 6:8-9, then we start to see something fascinating. The Church is not a building. It is the Universal people of God. It is a unified Body - now, past, and future.

The Incarnate God

There are two different words for the number one in Hebrew. The first is achath (ah-kath). The second is echad (eh-kod). The first is singular, the second plural. The Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4) is recited by devout Jews every day. It starts with, “Hear, oh Israel, the Lord – the Lord your God – the Lord; He is one.” The word here for one is echad. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.” Once again: echad. The whole scene of Sinai, with the smoke on the mountain and the Ten Commandments, is written in wedding language. God wished to be wed with His people. His desire was to become echad (one) flesh with His people.

We see in Exodus 25 the layout for the Tabernacle. Within this, we also find a very peculiar display of our salvation and uniting with God. The outer court had no roof. It had an altar of sacrifice. It had washing basins. This denotes our initial salvation.

The inner court was closed off to the sun. You can’t use worldly wisdom to find your way through. It was lighted by a 7-branch candlestick (menorah). There was showbread and an altar of incense. This is symbolism of our spiritual worship.

Yet, there is a deeper place still: the Holiest Place. This contained the ark of God. The ark was made from acacia wood, overlaid in gold, had four rods to carry it, and contained the Testimony (Ten Commandments), manna, and Aaron’s rod. On top was the mercy seat. This was made of gold, and there sat two cherubim on either side facing each other and looking down to the mercy seat. Their wings touch. And God said, “There, between the cherubim, will I meet with you,” Exodus 25:22.

We are the cherubim. These two angels are merely symbols of a bigger truth. They are on opposite sides, possibly denoting opposites like male and female, black and white, Jew and Gentile. They are one with each other and with God. They are *echad* with each other and God. Marriage is a symbol for this as well.

The definition of intimacy is belonging to or characterizing one’s deepest nature; of a very personal nature. Intimacy is revealing the deepest, most personal depths of who you are. Sex and intimacy, no matter what some might want you to believe, are not the same thing. Sex is not intimacy without being naked. Naked is the display of our deepest

beings. Naked sex is marriage (can you follow that?). And this is what God asks for – intimacy, that is: James 4:8, Psalm 27:8, Psalm 46:10.

In Genesis 4, the word *knew* is used in the King James version of the Bible to say that Adam and Eve had sex. The Hebrew word is *yada* (yah-dah). It is used 947 times in the Old Testament. Here are a few examples: Psalm 9:10, 14:4, 18:43, Proverbs 1:23, Isaiah 1:3, and Isaiah 6:9. *Yada* comes from a deep soul searching of one another. The actual literal translation of *yada* is “to probe.” The Greek parallel in the New Testament would be *ginoska*. It is used in John 17:3, 22-23.

Jesus says, “This is eternal life: to know You.” He says later in the same prayer, “Let them be one, as you and I are one.” The word used here is *heis*. It would be the same as *echad* in Hebrew. Jesus’ prayer is that we would be one with God and with each other. We should be able to say, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. I and the Father are one.” We are the incarnate God, the Body of Christ. This is the new Exodus; humanity and God have been married.

Though we aren’t God, He is in us, and we are in Him. This is the definition of incarnate. We are partakers of His throne, because we’ve been adopted heirs. We are God incarnate, though we would never say we are God. Those who claim they are God are not of God, but of the flesh. Let them be accursed forever.

The Apple of Deception

The plot thickened with a little critter called “the serpent.” This “serpent” in Hebrew is *nachash* (nah-kash). The noun means serpent, and the verb root of the three Hebrew letters means “to practice divination.” What is interesting is that the noun has a double meaning. It could also mean “whisperer.” In ancient culture, a whisperer would be called a “trickster.” A trickster is something (whether human or something else) who shares knowledge with God that is hidden from mankind, and uses it to deceive. The promises of the trickster are double edged: Adam and Eve gain knowledge, but lose Eden.

Now, one thing to note about Hebrew is that it is poetic. The little we know about the language tells us that there are only about 80,000 words. Compare this to English where the Second Edition of the 20-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* contains 171,476 words in current use. Some claim that a language can’t have over 200,000 words, but others say that Greek has about 500,000 words. Whoever is correct in this debate, the point is that whether we’re using our English or reading our New Testaments in Greek, there are at least double the amount of words that can be used.

Therefore, Hebrew needs to rely on poetry to paint a picture. When you want to say something is next to you in Hebrew, you would say it is to the hand. To the face means in front of. Someone’s arm could mean their arm, or it could mean their influence, power, prestige, and family line. So, when the word *nachash* is used, it literally means serpent. Yet, it could be speaking metaphorically of something deeper. You have to look into the culture of the time; you have to see the original language and all of its possible translations; you have to look at who is being spoken to (and where they might be); you

have to ask who is speaking; you need to do a study on the word to see where else it appears in the Bible. All of this helps paint the bigger picture.

At the time that Genesis was written, and in the area that it would have been given (mainly, modern day Middle East), a snake would have represented danger, death, magic, secret knowledge, rejuvenation, immortality, and sexuality. All of this gets planted into the metaphor of a snake speaking to the woman. Moses would have known the gods of this land, for he was a shepherd in this area for 40 years. He knew that a snake would be a parallel with the goddess Qetesh.

Qetesh was the goddess of fertility for the Canaanites. She was also adopted by Egypt, and she is a hybrid of the goddess Asherah (for those of you who know that name...). Her temple was located in Kadesh of the Hittite land, and the name means holy. Qetesh's picture is a woman holding a rose in one hand (fertility/sexuality), and a snake in the other (magic, secret knowledge, immortality, rejuvenation).

This whispering serpent (whatever it was) spoke to the woman, and she didn't marvel at its speaking. This in itself brings about a whole new set of questions. Once again, I stand upon the poetry of the story, not necessarily it being literal. It is possible, but it isn't provable that there was a snake that spoke and that it was absolutely normative and natural. (Even if my personal opinion is that they did speak.)

The snake asked a question. In all good judgment, the question is rather stupid, seeing as the answer is obvious. But this was the point. That is why the serpent was "more crafty than any other beast of the field." What is interesting is that neuro-linguistic-programmers (hypnotists) use this technique while counseling. It draws out from their patients the "desired end" (namely, their deepest darkest secrets, and then causes the patient to believe all is well when nothing has been resolved).

The woman plays into it. She answers the serpent's statement about what God actually said. "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the Garden?'" For all practical purposes, Eve answered correctly: "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" Satan then questions *her* response. Once again, hypnotism and deception is used to get Eve to doubt God.

Eve says, "If we eat of that tree, then we'll die." The Hebrew word is *muth* (mooth). Satan then responded with "temootoon" (not *die*, *die*). This is called Hebrew parallelism to drag out the point. Just like we would repeat this to show emphasis, Satan repeats the word to tell Eve that it isn't really physical death, so it really isn't death at all. Death was separation from Eden: out of Eden instead of "in Eden" or "from Eden."

The Rise and Fall of All We Are

The woman, in her deception, eats the fruit. She then gives to her husband, and he eats the fruit. Then their eyes are opened and they see that they are naked. This is a phenomenal thing. They didn't even know what naked or nudity was. *Now* they see. *Now* they feel shame. Nakedness and shame go hand in hand throughout every point in

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