

God's Plan For The Ages

by Pastor Chuck Smith

The Bible says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). At some time after the initial creation, God created the angels who were assigned to various ranks. Some angels had higher positions than others, but all were under one government in the universe, the government of God.

Satan's Rebellion

At some time deep in the past before God recreated the earth for man's existence, one of the high angels-called Lucifer, Satan, Dragon, Devil, Serpent-rebelled against the authority of God. Isaiah records this rebellion, which was an attempt by a created being to exalt himself above the Creator.

"For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). Satan's claim was, "I will, I will, I will." This exercise of his will against God's will was the rebellion in the kingdom of God.

For an unknown number of years until this point, beautiful harmony existed in the universe. Now another government came into being, as Satan led a rebellion against this order of God and created within the universe a sub-government with himself in control. His is a government of death and darkness, against God's government of light and life.

Man

The Book of Genesis declares, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, but the earth became wasted and desolate; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved [brooded] over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:1-2).

In Genesis 1, God began His recreative acts, creating the earth and adapting it for man. When God had the earth ready, He "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7).

When God created man and placed him upon the earth, He created him with his spirit uppermost. Man was spirit, soul, and body. Basically a spiritual being, man was created in fellowship with God within the government of light and life.

Real Love

Had He so desired, God could have created robots. He could have created each one of us with a built-in mechanism that would automatically respond to certain impulses from God. God could project a particular impulse through the universe that would hit my brain, my arms would automatically go up, and I'd say, "I love You! Praise Your name!" Then my hands would go down.

However, could God really get love from an automatic response like that? How much love do you feel when you pull the string on a little toy doll that says, "I love you?" You know it's just an automatic response from a recorded message. You can't get much love from a mechanical object. You want a love from a freely-given response-and then the love is meaningful.

In order to have full fellowship with man and to receive real love from him, God created us as free moral agents. This means that man can do just what he pleases. No one is forcing him into a particular mold or response. Man is free to react and respond to God as he chooses.

Environmental Conditioning

God created man, placed him on the earth, and surrounded him with every benefit and gift that would make for a happy, joyful life. God gave Adam a world full of pure water, clear skies, and abundant food. There was nothing around that would harm him.

A current philosophy claims that man's problems are due to his environment. All we have to do is improve a man's environment, and he can be changed from a slob into a prince. Improving the environment won't work with a pig. Change a pig's environment and what will he do? He'll be miserable until he gets back into the pigpen that he enjoys. Sociologically we can change a man's environment, but what happens? He's miserable until he gets back into the environment that he's used to.

By nature I'm a sinner. Change my environment by putting me around spiritual people and I'm miserable. "How long is that preacher going to talk? It's uncomfortable in this place! Why did I ever come here?" When the sinner gets around the moving of the Spirit, he becomes so unhappy. He's in a beautiful environment, but what does it do for him? It makes him nervous, upset, and fidgety!

Man's environment isn't his problem. Man's problem is his heart. That's where his sin lies. Man doesn't need a change of environment. He needs a change of heart. This can only be accomplished by the Spirit of God.

Perfect Environment

Man was placed in the Garden of Eden in a perfect environment. He didn't have to work. God said, "There it is, Adam! It's all yours. Enjoy it! Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowls of the air, the beasts of the fields, and every living thing. I've made you the ruler. Be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth."

God also said, "Adam, in this garden there is a tree that you're not to touch. You're not to eat of that tree. For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. The death process will set in" (Genesis 2:17b).

We know that Adam messed up the whole thing, and God's curse came upon man and the earth. "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee... In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread..." (Genesis 3: 18a-19a). We know the result of man's failure in the Garden.

One day I was guiding a group of kids around Mt. Lemmon near Tucson. We had hiked up to the mining shaft and explored it. As we were hiking back down, one of the kids screamed out. He had brushed by an Ochoa cactus, commonly called the "jumping cactus," and it really clamped onto his wrist. I took a couple of sticks, carefully got them under the thorns of the cactus, and flipped the thing off his hand. As I was working to get the sticks underneath the thorns, this little kid was doing his best not to cry. He moaned, "That darn guy Adam!" I said, "You've had some good Bible teaching. You know where the thorns come from!"

Why did God put the forbidden tree in the Garden? Why didn't He just make a perfect environment without a tree to tempt man?

Man and Woman

When God created man, He recognized that man by himself was incomplete. God said, "It's not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18a). God created the woman so that in her man might find fulfillment. There is the beautiful completeness that comes in marriage and is ordained by God One

day, after he had rebelled against God and created the government of death and darkness, Satan came to the woman who was in the Garden of God.

"...And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Genesis 3:13).

Satan replied, "Oh, you surely won't die! Don't you realize that God is afraid that you might eat of that tree. He knows that when you do, you'll be as smart as He is. He's trying to protect Himself! You'll be amazed at how good the fruit of that tree is! Why don't you give it a try? It'll blow your mind" (Genesis 3:4-5).

Two Questions

Two questions: First, why did God put the tree there? Second, why did God leave Satan free?

The Bible says that ultimately a mighty angel will come from heaven, take a chain, bind Satan, and cast him into the abyss for a thousand years. After that Satan will be loosed for a little while and then he'll be cast into Gehenna, where he'll be out of commission forever (Revelation 20).

Since God will ultimately put Satan out of commission, since God has the power to bind Satan and bottle him up, why did God leave Satan loose in the beginning? Why didn't He bottle up Satan from the start, so we wouldn't have all these problems and troubles?

How beautiful it would be if there was no Devil! The world and the flesh could be very beautiful if Satan wasn't perverting it. The world is God's beautiful creation. "God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:25c). But Satan came along and twisted, turned, and perverted it. We see our fallen world and fallen flesh today. Why did God allow Satan such freedom?

The Test of Love

Why did God place the tree there? What did God want from man?

God wanted our love and fellowship. How could God know that we really loved Him and wanted to obey Him, if an alternative wasn't given? If there was no possible way to disobey or rebel against God, how could He know that we truly did love Him? How could God know how much we loved Him unless there was someone to exploit the alternative?

I could tell my son, "Stay in the backyard while I go to town. I need your help as soon as I get back, and I don't want to go looking for you." Then I take a big chain and bind him to the eucalyptus tree in the backyard. When I get home, my son is there, faithfully chained to the eucalyptus tree. I say, "Good boy!" I've got an obedient son, who did exactly what I told him to do.

My neighbor says, "You're only kidding yourself, Chuck. You should have heard all his screaming and cursing while you were gone. Your son was trying to break those chains!"

On the other hand, I could say, "Son, I'm going downtown now. Stay in the backyard so you'll be here when I get back." As I leave for town, I tell my neighbor, "Keep an eye on my boy, will you? I'm curious to see what he does when his dad's not around."

So I go and do my business, and my son's in the backyard. The gate is open. He's free. The kid from up the street comes over and says, "Hey, let's go to the school and shoot some baskets."

"No. My dad told me to stay in the backyard. I've got to wait for him. I'd like to go, but I can't."

"We can be back before your dad returns," the kid says. "We can watch for him, and as soon as we see him, we can beat him over and jump the fence. He'll never know you were gone. Come on, let's go!"

"No, my dad told me to stay here."

"Aw, you're chicken!"

"No, I'm not. My dad told me to stay here, and I'm going to stay here!"

So I get home and ask my neighbor, "How did it go?" He says, "You've got a good boy! Not only did he stay in the backyard, but the kid from up the street came over and did his best to talk him into leaving. Your son wouldn't follow his advice. He stayed right here the whole time. You can be proud of that boy!" I would be very proud. My son had every opportunity to go. Even the kid up the street tried to coax him, but my son remained obedient.

The Fall

God has allowed man to be free. "You're free to enjoy the whole thing, Adam!" Satan comes along to exploit it. Imagine the joy God would have received if Eve had said, "Beat it, Satan! I wouldn't think of eating that. I'm going to obey God!" God would have surrounded Adam and Eve with His great love and showered it on them. Unfortunately, Eve believed the lie of the Devil. She was deceived, she ate, and all of a sudden her eyes were opened. She said, "Wow! Adam, give this a try!"

But Adam wasn't deceived. He knew exactly what he was doing, and he decided to join his wife. So he ate, and his eyes were opened. All of a sudden Adam and Eve realized right and wrong, the knowledge of good and evil. Up to this point all they had known was good, obedience, and the love of God. But they had obeyed the suggestion of Satan, and now they knew disobedience, evil, and hate.

By taking of the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve acted in a double manner. They disobeyed God, but by the same act they obeyed Satan. They transferred their allegiance from God to Satan, from this government of God to this sub-government of death and darkness ruled by Satan.

No Return

There was no way to scramble back. God had said, "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17b). God's Word had to be fulfilled. God was bound to put them to death for their sin. He allowed the death processes to set in upon man, the breakdown within the cell structure known as the aging process. Man now lives under the government of death and darkness. He's alienated from God and finds himself with no way back.

Hope in the Darkness

God could have obliterated His entire experiment when Adam disobeyed, but He didn't give up on man. God would show His supreme love to man and bring him forgiveness. God would take upon Himself a body of flesh, live among men, take the guilt and responsibility of man's disobedience upon Himself, and die for it. Man's sin would be punished.

A New Nation

To accomplish His plan of hope, God needed a race of people through which His Son would be born. One day God spoke to a man in Babylon and said, "Abraham, I want you to leave this land of your

fathers and go to a land that I will show you. I'll make you the father of a great nation, and out of your seed the Messiah, the Savior of the world, will come."

God guided this nation by sending it prophets who revealed God's plan more and more fully. They told where the Messiah would be born, the circumstances that would surround His birth, the miracles that would be accomplished, and the things He would do. In fact, the prophets foretold the very day that the Messiah would come to the nation.

Through the prophets God prepared this nation to look for their promised Savior. "When the fullness of the time was come" (Galatians 4:4), in God's perfect timing in the city of Bethlehem, there was born to a virgin a son. By instruction from the angel, the son was called Jehovah-Shuah, "God is salvation," for He was to save His people from their sins.

God became "flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (1 John 1:1).

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him..." (Philippians 2: 6-9a).

So Jesus, Jehovah-Shuah, came as God promised. The prophet had declared, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him [Jesus Christ] the iniquity of us all"(Isaiah 53-6).

The Open Door

Man exercised his own free choice in turning his life over to Satan and leaving the government of God. When Jesus Christ took the guilt of man's sin and died in his place, He opened the door so man could now leave this government of darkness and death and come back into God's government of light and life.

Even as man exercised his free choice to leave God's government for this other government, so must man exercise his power of free choice to come out of this government and return to God's government. By the tree of knowledge of good and evil man went from God's government to Satan's government. By another tree, the Cross of Christ, man can escape from Satan's control and return to God's government.

Again, it's a matter of free choice. God won't force you to obey him or to serve Him at this point. A day will come when "...every knee shall bow... and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11) For the present time, God is giving man the opportunity to exercise his free choice. If he wants to come into the fellowship with God, the way is now made open.

This government of Satan is like a circle. You may say, "I'm a very honest person. I believe in doing the best that I can and in living morally." Great! You're so good that you're at the top of the circle. Doesn't that make you feel good? But friend, you're still in that circle! As long as you're in that circle, you're in no better shape than those at the bottom who are crawling around in the mud.

Purpose of Life

God is giving everyone the opportunity to come into fellowship with Him. This is the purpose of life. Man feels frustrated and empty until he comes again into fellowship with God.

I have an awareness that life should be higher and finer than what I have yet found it to be. I'm reaching out for something. Then I try this, but no, that's not it. So I try something else. And I'm on another desperate trip. I'm looking for something to satisfy my inner thirst to take away this frustration, and give me a sense of "Wow! This is what life is all about!"

But as long as I'm in the circle of death and darkness, there is no way that I can find the full meaning of life.

Why? Because in the beginning God created me for fellowship with Him. There will always be a void in my life until God comes in and fills it. God created me for His purposes, and I'll never be satisfied living for my own purposes.

Through Jesus Christ I can come back into fellowship with God. All I have to do is exercise my free choice and say, "Jesus, I take you as my Lord and Savior." The moment I do, I come through Jesus Christ into glorious fellowship with God, the King of light and life. Once again I can return to the beautiful sense of fulfillment, purpose, and meaning of life, because I'm walking in fellowship with God. This is what God created me for.

His Return

Very soon Jesus Christ will come back to this earth and set up God's kingdom. Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss. For 1,000 years there will be a beautiful experience on the earth, as it is restored to its Eden-like glory and Christ reigns and rules over it. For a short season Satan will be released, but finally he'll be cast into Gehenna, the lake of fire burning with brimstone (Revelation 20:10). Satan will be forever out of the way, and there'll be only one government in the universe, God's government of light and life.

Everything within the universe will be in harmony and fellowship with God. God started out "in the beginning" with one government. It's going to end one day again with one government, all in obedience and subjection to God. The question is, "Where will you be at that time?" The answer lies with you.

If you choose the government of death and darkness, of rebellion against God's authority and Word, then that's where you'll be. The Bible says that Satan and all who follow him will be cast into the lake burning with "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25: 41b; Revelation 20: 10,15). The lake of fire wasn't prepared for man. It was prepared for a rebellious Satan. However, those who have chosen Satan's government and revel with him will be thrown into that place of outer darkness.

You have a free choice. God won't force you to love Him, serve Him, or come into His kingdom. That would be violating the whole principle of free choice. God wouldn't know whether you really did love Him. The only way God can know that you want to serve Him and love Him is by your voluntarily accepting Jesus Christ and choosing to come into His fellowship.

You're the one who decides your destiny. You can never blame God for what will happen to you or to any man. God has given us all a free choice. If you so desire, you can know His fellowship and His life. God has opened the way for you to have eternal life, but it's up to you to make your choice. What will it be?

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