

# WISDOM IS THE TREE OF LIFE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

**A**nd the woman saw that the tree was good..." Thus begins the central part of the narrative of the Fall, the story that explains why the world around us is in the condition we see it today.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, what the first woman evaluated as "good," turned out to be "not good," and worse than that, an irreversible evil not only for herself and her family, but for all of God-created humanity. Cataclysms evoked by natural forces and disasters caused by human fault, diseases that overcome individuals and epidemics that haunt entire nations, envy and encroachment on one's neighbor's possessions, hostility between the closest of people and fratricide, deprivation and moral decay – all of these are the consequences of Eve's erroneous evaluation of the forbidden fruit. She, having broken God's command, allowed a new sinful principle to enter the world God created, which from then on "lies in the power of the evil one" (1Jn 5:19).

For modern people the story still leaves many unanswered questions. What kind of mysterious trees were there in the garden of Eden, the fruits of which either endowed humans with eternal life (Ge 3:22) or boded una-

<sup>1</sup> The Bible does not explain how evil came into the world. According to Walter Brueggemann, "The Old Testament is never interested in such an abstract issue. In fact, the narrative gives no explanation for evil. The Old Testament characteristically is more existential. It is not concerned with origins but with faithful responses and effective coping. The Bible offers no theoretical statement about the origin of evil. And, indeed, where the question of theodicy surfaces, it is handled pastorally and not speculatively" (Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982], 41). Therefore, the narrative about the first people is a story about human disobedience and the consequences that disobedience evoked.

voidable death (2:17)? Were there real trees in the middle of the garden, or is this just figurative language that the author uses to convey some important principles? If so, what are those principles? Why did God put such a strong accent on the tree of knowledge of good and evil, not permitting its fruit to be eaten under any circumstances? What was so alluring about the tree that the woman dared to disobey God and make an independent decision? Why did the consequences turn out to be irreversible?

This article will examine the principles behind God's commandments allowing or prohibiting humans to do certain things, and, in particular, behind the prohibition of eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The main attempt will be to show that even today, regardless of the fact that in the Garden of Eden God closed off access to the tree of life, people can still reach it and enjoy its fruit.

## 2. THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

### 2.1. The innocuous serpent

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field...” Thus begins Ge 3, recounting the event that totally changed the course of human history. If the first segment of Genesis starts with the words, “In the beginning God...”, then the third chapter starts with the words, “The serpent was more crafty...” If, in the first case, God is the subject of the sentence, it is not surprising that in the first chapter we find creatures in the condition of «†ôb» or «† bf mô'ôd»

(“good” or “very good”); in Ge 3 the snake is the subject, and consequently we can hardly expect anything to be «†ob». He appears on the scene quite unexpectedly, as if from nowhere, but is immediately modified by the definite article, like something that has been introduced before, or is already well known to everyone. Although there was no prior mention of the serpent in the text, it is obvious that the author expected the reader to be familiar with this image. Of course, the author did not count on the modern reader, in whose mind the snake from the Garden of Eden is unambiguously associated with the devil, or Satan. This idea was developed only in the NT, where we read: “And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Rev 12:9).<sup>2</sup> In the OT one cannot find a clear image of the devil. At the same time many places in the OT, particularly the texts about creation, hint that according to ancient belief there was a certain force that resisted God and His creative process. This force is usually represented by the image of a serpent (the Septuagint often translates this word as *drakwn*, Job 26:13; Ps 74:13), or sea monster, and is a synonym of the word “proud.”<sup>3</sup>

However, the serpent presented in the beginning of Ge 3 is at first glance a rather innocuous creature that could hardly be associated with

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ro 16:20 and Ge 3:15.

<sup>3</sup> See Job 26:12-13; Ps 74:13; 89:9-10; Isa 27:1; 51:9. For more detail about the snake see John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 31-32.

a dragon or sea monster rebelling against God. He is merely one of those “beasts of the field which the Lord God had made.” From the first chapters of Genesis it is very clear that everything God created bore the stamp “good.” The only thing that marked this creature apart from the other God-created beings is a certain distinguishing feature: “more crafty than any beast of the field.” However, the word -𐌆𐌹𐌸 (ôrôm), “crafty,” which the author uses here, does not necessarily bear a negative character in the Bible. As Victor P. Hamilton notes:

This in itself is not pejorative. The same word is used in Proverbs eight times (12:16.23; 13:16; 14:8.15.18; 22:3; 27:12), and translates there as “the prudent [man],” who is contrasted with the “fool” in the first four of these references, and with the “simple” or “naive” in the remaining four. It is no wonder that Jesus said we are to be as wise as serpents (Matt. 10:16).<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the same word sometimes has a negative connotation (e.g. Job 5:12; 15:5; Ex 21:14).<sup>5</sup> In both cases, whether 𐌆𐌹𐌸 is translated as “prudent” or as “crafty,” it is being spoken about a person who has a sharp mind, is able to orient himself in any situation; in a word, “someone with a head on his shoulders.” However, the way he will use his ability and skill can only be determined from the context, by exam-

ining his words and deeds. In this way the snake, appearing in Ge 3 with the description “more crafty than any beast of the field,” attracts the rapt attention of the reader, who needs to decide what the snake is, and what one can expect of him.

Moreover, the word -𐌆𐌹𐌸 (ôrôm [crafty]) not only attracts the reader’s attention, but also puts him on guard, because it sounds like the word -𐌆𐌹𐌸𐌹 (ôrômmôm [naked]) in Ge 2:25: “And the man and his wife were both naked (-𐌆𐌹𐌸𐌹) and were not ashamed.” It is obvious that the author purposefully uses this alliteration to draw the reader’s attention. Concluding the previous cycle describing the creation, he accentuates the fact that absolute security, harmony, and utter openness reigned in the Garden of Eden. People had nothing to hide from each other or from God. The author’s emphasis that they “were not ashamed” depicts the first people as naive, without the least hidden motive. They are like children who can be “naked and unashamed” at any place or time. One gets the impression that they do not suspect that anything could ever threaten them, or affect or change their form of existence, and consequently they are very vulnerable in the face of whatever danger might occur.

Here the reader is introduced to people who still “have no knowledge of good or evil.” Later this phrase will also characterize a new generation of Israelites on the threshold of entering the Promised Land: “Your little ones who you said would become prey, and your sons who this day have no knowledge of good or evil shall enter there, and I will give it to

<sup>4</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 43-44.

<sup>5</sup> The Russian Synodal Version translates the word as “deceitful” and “treacherous” in these verses.

them and they shall possess it” (Dt 1:39). It was precisely these inexperienced, unsophisticated young people who had a realistic chance of entering the Promised Land. They were like a sheet of blank paper, building their relations with God from zero. They did not have to look far ahead, counting all their future steps, or think about how all their problems would be solved. All they had to do was simply trust and obey God.

This also describes the situation of Adam and Eve. That is why the description of the snake as “crafty” puts the reader on guard right away. “Crafty,” in this case, might be a threat to the naive.

## 2.2. Veiled craftiness

The snake did not keep anyone waiting long. His distinguishing feature, craftiness, becomes apparent as soon as he addresses his question to the woman: “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” (Ge 3:1). His question appears rather naive and it seems that he wants to appear to Eve as harmless. It is as if he is saying, “I heard that you are forbidden to eat the fruit of the trees. Is that really true?” He appears as tender-hearted and compassionate, as though he is on the humans’ side and is trying to express his astonishment that God is so unfair to them. But, as a matter of fact, his seemingly innocuous question is treacherous, throwing down a challenge to God Himself and to His power of creation. What is the challenge?

“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made,” proclaims Ps 32:6. And not only the heavens. The domi-

nant phrase of Ge 1 describing the divine process of creation is: “And God said...” The author stresses that God, by His word, initiated the existence of the universe and all that is in it. “For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps 33:9).<sup>6</sup> It is in the word of God that all His power and might are shown. It is to this power that the snake throws down a challenge with the question: “Indeed, has God said?”<sup>7</sup> His question is not directed to the receiving of information, as though he really wanted to know whether God said such a thing or not. By his question – and this is proved by the following discussion – he raises doubts about the fairness of what God said.

Secondly, his deceitful craftiness is seen in the fact that he addressed his question to Eve, as to the weaker, or perhaps less-informed participant of these events, and not to Adam.<sup>8</sup> From Ge 2 it is apparent that the commandment about the tree of knowledge of good and evil was given to Adam before Eve was created. Most likely the woman received this commandment from her husband. It is very probable that later God repeated the prohibition to both of them, although the author does not mention it. Therefore, according to the author’s telling, Adam, not Eve, received this commandment from the primary source and could have bet-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jn 1:1-3.

<sup>7</sup> Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Евангельский словарь библейского богословия* (The evangelical dictionary of biblical theology) (St. Petersburg: Библия для всех, 2000), 82.

<sup>8</sup> Concerning whether Eve was, indeed, the weaker, or, on the contrary, whether this dialogue reveals her dominant role in comparison to her implicitly consenting husband, see Hamilton, p. 45.

ter answered concerning exactly what God said, and why. It is Adam who should have passed along the commandment to Eve and then ensured that it was kept.

It is not clear where Adam was at the moment Eve was speaking to the serpent. Why is it that the first people, living in perfect harmony, suddenly were not together?<sup>9</sup> Or were they together, but the woman took the initiative while Adam just silently agreed? First he agreed with what Eve was doing, and then himself took part in the action: “And she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate” (3:6). However it may have been, God put the responsibility for what happened on Adam, as is apparent from the following part of the narrative. It is to him that the Lord addresses his questions in the course of the rest of the narrative. This can be explained partially by the fact that the woman was deluded (v. 13) and therefore was unable to evaluate the situation objectively. But overall, in the context of the entire Pentateuch:

The Mosaic Law teaches that the husband is responsible for those vows which his wife has made. The author of the Pentateuch allows the reader’s knowledge of the Mosaic Law to guide the reading of this passage. In Numbers 30, if the husband hears his wife make a vow and does not speak out, he is responsible for it. It may be important, then, that the author states specifically in Genesis 3 that the man was with his wife when she ate of the tree, and that he

said nothing in reply to the serpent or the woman. His silence may be a clue as to why the man must bear the responsibility for the actions of his wife.<sup>10</sup>

But that is not all. In the serpent’s approach there is one more detail pointing to his veiled craftiness which should be noted here. As Brueggemann noted very well, in the dialogue between the serpent and the woman:

God is treated as a third person. God is not a party to the discussion but is the involved object of the discussion. This is not speech to God or with God, but about God. God has been objectified. The serpent is the first in the Bible to seem knowing and critical about God and to practice theology in the place of obedience.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, using his distinguishing feature, craftiness, by means of just one question the snake was able to pull naive Eve into dialogue. We get the impression that, whereas in general she was not in agreement with what the serpent told her – “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat” – in some things she agreed with the “compassionate” serpent. When she answers the serpent she exaggerates the restrictions imposed on them by God, and by so doing agrees to some extent with the serpent’s main idea, that God prohibits them too much.

The serpent, as if he has just discovered a weak spot, boldly presses further, suggesting that Eve look at

<sup>9</sup> Though in the NIV, v. 6 reads, “who was with her,” in my judgment the phrase *lka'it HM[ji Hvjal-  
-t !TtT* does not necessarily mean that the man was with her, only that he ate with her.

<sup>10</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 105.

<sup>11</sup> Brueggemann, 48.

God's commandment in a new way. First, he is trying to convince Eve that her disobedience will not have any consequences: "You will not surely die!" (3:4). As John Davis has put it: "It is instructive that the first doctrine to be denied was that of judgment."<sup>12</sup> However, the serpent does not stop there. Having cast into Eve's heart the thought that this act is not so dreadful, he continues his speech: "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:5).<sup>13</sup> He does not say that God just doesn't know, or that He is not well-informed. On the contrary: "For God knows..." There is a participle in this verse, "knowing" ([dʰ] yōdō<sup>a</sup>), as if emphasizing that it is one of the characteristics of God, it is a part of His identity. That is, God actually knows; He has knowledge, and, as Davis expressed it, one gets the feeling "that the knowledge of good and evil was what made God, God."<sup>14</sup> However, the whole issue is that God does not want you to know the things He knows. As Sailhamer writes:

The snake implied by his questions that God was keeping this knowl-

edge from the man and the woman (3:5), while the sense of the narratives in the first two chapters has been that God was keeping this knowledge for the man and the woman (e.g. 1:4.10.12.18.21.25.31; 2:18).<sup>15</sup>

And if God keeps something good from you, how can you trust such a God?

### 2.3. The first independently-made decision

In summary, the snake convinced Eve not to rely only on faith, but to try what is actually good and bad on the basis of personal experience. She looked at the tree one more time and suddenly "saw that the fruit of the tree was good" (3:6). Before that, the expression "saw that it was good" (or "not good," 2:18) belonged exclusively to God. He evaluated everything. And his evaluation was based not on certain subjective, exclusively personal judgments and criteria known to Him alone. The previous material indicates that "good" in the sight of God applied only to those things that were good for humanity and benefited them.<sup>16</sup> Now Eve took over this function for herself, not trusting God, and took responsibility to determine independently what is good or not good.

<sup>12</sup> John Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 89.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Sailhamer, 103.

<sup>16</sup> An excellent observation about this idea is made by Sailhamer: "The 'good' that the author had in view has a very specific range of meaning in chapter 1 – the 'good' is that which is beneficial for man. Notice, for example, how in the description of the work of the second day (vv. 6-8), the narrative does not say that 'God saw that it was good.' The reason is that on that day there was nothing created or made that was, in fact, 'good' or beneficial for man.

The heavens were made and the waters divided, but the land, where man was to dwell, still remained hidden under the 'deep.' The land was still *tohu*; it was not yet a place where man could dwell. It was only when, on the third day, the sea was parted and the dry land appeared that the text could say, 'God saw that it was good' (v. 10). When, and only when, the land was ready for man could God call it good. Throughout this opening chapter God is depicted as the one who both knows what is 'good' for man and is intent on providing the good for him" (Frank E. Gabelein, gen. ed. *Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 2* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990], 26).

But what was so “good” about that tree? Genesis 2:9 says that, “And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.” In other words, all the trees in the garden were «†ōb». In this chapter the author intentionally emphasizes that fact to make it clear that God did not disregard human needs. Understanding the human aspiration for enjoyment, pleasure, and the satisfaction of needs – which He, Himself put into human beings – God made all kinds of trees grow in the garden that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. The only characteristic, which at first sight they lacked – but it seems that it was precisely the feature that attracted the woman – was knowledge. “In the day you eat from it... you will be... knowing...” and consequently will be like God.

For people of the twenty-first century it may appear odd that the question of life and death for the first humans was dependent on whether or not to eat of the fruit of a tree. The trees in the Garden of Eden, at least the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life, are presented here as endowed with some magical qualities. This element makes the story look like a fairy tale. How-

ever, in the context of the OT, food had a much more essential significance than it has today. In taking food a person identifies himself with something or someone. Food, in the process of being eaten, becomes a part of one’s identity and therefore, at a spiritual level, as it was believed, could either bless or desecrate.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore one should not think that the fruit of the trees themselves possessed any supernatural qualities. Rather, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolized the willful act of a person who decided to identify with something, or get to know something from which God wanted to isolate him. As Derek Kidner writes:

In the context the emphasis is on the prohibition, not on the characteristics of the tree. For us it is forbidden. There is no sense in asking what it might mean in and of itself; that was Eve’s mistake. Being forbidden, it was an alternative to obedience: it meant being responsible to oneself alone, taking one’s knowledge, satisfaction, and values from the created world in disobedience to the Creator (cf. 3:6). ... In all of this the tree plays its role in the opportunity it presents, not in the qualities it possesses; like a door with a sign on it that indicates whatever is behind it.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Leviticus gives much attention to the commandments about clean and unclean foods. In addition, there are many prohibitions in the Pentateuch referring to the use of the blood and fat of sacrificial animals, and the Passover prescriptions allow eating only unleavened bread. The problem of using or not using something for food was so serious that it came up in the early church, where many believed that eating certain kinds of food was equivalent to worshiping idols (Ro 14; 1Co 8). In all of these cases food did not only satisfy the body, but

had certain symbolic meaning and therefore influenced relations between God and humanity. For example, a sacrificial meal was an expression of close mutual relations, and, depending to whom that sacrifice was devoted, the meal could result in God’s blessing or be an expression of disobedience to God (Ex 32:6; Nu 25:2; cf. 1Co 10:16).

<sup>18</sup> Derek Kidner, *Комментарии на книгу Бытие* (Genesis: An introduction and commentary) (unpublished manuscript for coursework at St. Petersburg Christian University, 1994), 35.

Thus, knowing human nature pretty well, the serpent threw them some sure-fire bait. He was not mistaken. “You will be like God.” But what does it mean to be like God? Eve could hardly have thought that she would obtain the creative power of God and have the ability to create (Bôrô)<sup>19</sup>, and therefore do as she pleased. The fruit of the forbidden tree became for her an irresistible desire because it opened a way “for gaining wisdom.” It might be that at a certain moment the woman saw the advantages of the serpent – he was `ôrôm and appeared to know what he was talking about – and she also wanted to have that characteristic. Of course, she could not imagine that the result of her action would be `ôrôm, and not `ôrôr, i.e. a curse (cf. 3:1 and 3:14). Later, when asked by God why she did such a thing Eve replied: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (v. 13). She did not say “lied,” but avî (nôsô’), “deceived,” i.e. he offered something good, pleasant, very attractive, knowing that it was not good in its essence.<sup>20</sup> However, this understanding came to her too late. At that moment she wanted to obtain knowledge that would open to her divine resources.

Human beings do not want that much, only to be able manage their own life, to know when and how to act in order to achieve their own goals. These are the very features the snake suggested deceitfully to the people: “You will be like God, knowing good and evil.” It is knowledge

that will make you like God, who, as the serpent noted earlier, has knowledge but does not want you to have it. However, you also have a chance to become “knowing,” to become “like God.”<sup>21</sup>

The impassioned desire to become like God, to have knowledge like God’s, and consequently to become independent of God, outweighed trust and the obedience to God’s commandments that flowed from it. Without thinking it over, the woman “took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened” (v. 6-7). But what did they see?

#### 2.4. The consequences of “knowledge”

The attempt to question the order God had determined resulted in the destruction of harmony and turned everything into chaos. As a result the people were banished from the garden; not removed, but banished. This means that they were deprived of the dwelling place that God had determined for them and now had to go in a direction that in reality was no direction at all. Their way was absolutely uncertain and unknown, without any goal at the end. That was the way the first people began their independent life. They also lost the provision of the garden. Now the man had to get what he needed “by the sweat of his face” (v. 19). They lost the dominion over living creatures

<sup>19</sup> The Hebrew verb Bôrô` (arB), “to create,” expresses activity that in the Old Testament is ascribed only to God.

<sup>20</sup> See 2Ki 18:29; 19:10; Jer 4:10; 29:8; 49:16; Ob 1:7 where the verb avî is used.

<sup>21</sup> Though the word -yhîl ê/ (ôlôhôm) can be translated either as “God” or “gods,” considering that Eve knew of no other gods, reference to them would make no sense in this passage.



that God had given them. Ultimately, they lost their relationship with God, and consequently the divine protection that was provided in the garden by God Himself. Now God's presence evoked fear (v. 10). Their new place was uncertain, the way back to the garden was closed, and the future was unknown. As Sailhamer writes:

The man and the woman, who has been created "like God" in the beginning (1:26), found themselves, after the Fall, curiously "like God" – but no longer "with God" in the Garden. In this subtle verbal interchange the author has shown that human happiness does not consist in being "like God" but rather being "with God," enjoying the blessings of His presence.<sup>22</sup>

Now the people who recently found pleasure in relationship with each other were ashamed of each other. Adam, who was so delighted when he saw the woman for the first time, now saw her as the cause of the destruction that had befallen them. Feelings of guilt forced the people to hide themselves from God, and when God posed the question as to why they hid, they blamed God Himself for what had happened (v. 12). The outcome of the fact that the people had believed the serpent and not God was suffering, pain and, at the end, banishment.

However, in a certain sense, the serpent did not lie to Eve. On the one hand, he assured her that their eyes would be opened, and that indeed happened. Of course, it should be admitted that he did not tell her what they would see. On the other hand, under-

standing how the verb "to know" was used in Hebrew, the phrase "you will be knowing good and evil" means "you will be participating in good and evil." The verb [dy (yôda') "to know," indicates a more empirical, not an intellectual approach. The intellectual side of knowledge, when a subject can be "known" from a distance without devoting oneself to it, did not develop until Aristotle. In the context of the OT, it was impossible to know something by remaining aloof from the subject one wanted to know. "To know" in the context of the OT meant "to have intimate relations," "to be connected with" (cf. Gen. 4:1). Therefore, in some sense, death was not a punishment from God, but rather that knowledge of good and evil that the first people so passionately wanted to obtain. In Francis Schaeffer's eloquent words:

It is true that Eve is indeed going to learn something. If she chooses to disobey and to rebel, she will have what she couldn't have otherwise—an experiential knowledge of evil and its results. So in a way Satan is telling her the truth. But what a useless, horrible knowledge! It is the knowledge of the child whose mother says, "Don't go near that fire, because if you do you will get hurt. You will catch fire and be burned." But the little child goes on in disobedience, falls into the fire and spends the next three days dying in agony. The child has learned something that it wouldn't have known experientially if it had listened to the knowledge given by the mother. But what a knowledge!<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 110.

<sup>23</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and*

*Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 83.

To say it in the words of Sailhamer:

Man's disobedience is not so much depicted as an act of great wickedness or a great transgression as much as it is an act of great folly. He had all the "good" († b) he would have needed, but he wanted more – he wanted to be like God.<sup>24</sup>

In the end, the people really did receive knowledge they did not have before. Suddenly they discovered that they were naked. It is important to note that in 3:7 the author uses a slightly different form of the word "naked" from the one used in 2:25. According to Sailhamer,

Although both terms are infrequent in the Pentateuch, the latter is distinguished by its use in Deuteronomy 28:48, where it depicts the state of Israel's exiles who have been punished for their failure to trust and obey God's word: "Because you did not serve the Lord your God..., therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies that the Lord sends against you." The effect of the Fall was not simply that the man and the woman came to know that they were -rj[(naked). Specifically, they came to know that they were -rj[(naked) in the sense of being "under God's judgment."<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, as stated above, the word "naked" (-rj[θ] sounds similar to the word "crafty" (-r[θ]), which characterized the serpent in the beginning of the narrative. It is very probable that the author uses the alliteration

intentionally one more time to show the reader that the people in the Garden of Eden, longing for independent knowledge and desiring to become like God, in the end obtained qualities more similar to those of the serpent. It helps the reader understand why, when God asks about the cause of their actions, Adam does not show repentance, but attempts to lay the blame on his wife, and finally on God who gave him the wife: "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (3:12). Adam's distorted consciousness sees the main source of the problem in God's good gift (the wife). Adam's thinking does, indeed, become similar to that of the serpent: God knows and possesses the good, but does not want people to know and, consequently, to use the good. In other words, not everything that comes from God, whether a gift or a prohibition, is good for humanity. Therefore, there may be only one solution: to become "knowing" ourselves and "to know good" independently from God. That is serpent's logic indeed.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. THE TREE OF LIFE

The question that has followed us and begged to be asked throughout the course of this narrative must be addressed at this time. How did God see the life of the people in the Garden of Eden? Did He want them to stay "naked," that is naive, throughout their whole life, knowing neither

<sup>24</sup> Gabelein, 50.

<sup>25</sup> Sailhamer, 103.

<sup>26</sup> Some scholars see a connection based on a wordplay in the Hebrew narrative between the "nakedness" (-r[θ]) of the man and woman after their eating of the fruit and Israel's "running

wild" ([rp]) after the incident of the golden calf (Ibid., p. 313). Cf. Ex 32:25 KJV: "Moses saw that the people were naked ([rp]); (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies)."

good nor evil? Did He not know that sooner or later certain questions would occur to them that would awaken their thirst for knowledge? Why did He take care of the physical needs of the people, making “all kinds of trees grow out of the ground that were pleasing to the eye and good for food,” but did not take care of their intellectual, emotional, or maybe it is better to say their spiritual needs? Or did he foresee and provide them with everything necessary for the satisfaction of all their needs? If the answer is yes, then where should people look for the satisfaction of those needs?

To answer these questions, we need to look at the previous chapter where the author describes the ideal conditions created by God in the Garden of Eden and thus, as one would expect, meeting all human needs. Ge 2:9 tells us that in addition to all kind of trees that were “pleasing to the eye and good for food,” there was one more tree in the middle of the garden called the tree of life. Genesis does not give us a detailed description of what constituted the tree of life and what role it would play in the life of people. Its name – tree of life – implies that in some way it contained life in itself, and Ge 3:22 implies that the one who ate from its fruit would live forever. One more conclusion that can be drawn from the last verses of the third chapter is that it was impossible to eat fruit from the tree of life and from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil at the same time. It appears that they presented an alternative to each other. The people could eat the fruit from the tree of life, but then should not eat from the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil. Or they could take advantage and eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but then the way to the tree of life would be closed to them. At least to keep them from eating the fruit from the tree of life, God banished the people from the Garden of Eden.

### 3.1. Closed access to the tree of life

Thus, having broken a commandment of God, humans lost their access to the tree of life. At the entrance to the Garden of Eden the cherubim was placed with a flaming sword to keep them from returning to the garden. But not just to the garden. The main task of the cherubim was “to guard the way to the tree of life” (3:24). From the text it is not clear whether the people ate from the tree of life prior to the fall. On the one hand, it can be assumed that they had eaten the fruit from the tree of life before they disobeyed God simply because they had the opportunity. In that case, on the other hand, it is not clear what the following sentence means: “He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (3:22). Did eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, conditionally speaking, nullify the effect of the tree of life and therefore its fruits had to be eaten again? The text does not answer this question, nor does it say anything specific about whether, after meeting certain conditions, the people could regain access to the tree of life. The text says only one thing clearly: The tree guarded by the cherubim

was absolutely inaccessible. In the text itself there are no hints that some day people will gain access to it again.

Some places in Scripture, as well as Jewish and Apocalyptic works, mention that the glorious age of the Messiah would be a restoration of Edenic conditions before the Fall (Isa 51:3; Eze 36:35), including, one can assume, free access to the tree of life.<sup>27</sup> Confirmation of this idea can be found in Rev 2:7 where it states that in the future certain categories of people will be given the privilege of eating the fruit from the tree of life. That will be after God once and for all establishes His Kingdom. Until then the tree remains unapproachable.

But is that really so?

### 3.2. Wisdom is the tree of life

There is a passage in Scripture mentioning the tree of life that hints that God did not entirely deprive people of access to the tree of life, and that whoever really wants to can profit from the fruit of the tree and from its blessings, even before God finally establishes His Kingdom on earth. The tree of life is approachable today through wisdom: “She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her”

(Pr 3:18). The one who eats of it will not just obtain life, but also produce life as fruit: “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life” (Pr 11:30; cf. 13:14).<sup>28</sup> Not without reason does a big part of Proverbs emphatically call the reader to look for wisdom, and “look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure” (2:4)<sup>29</sup> because “whoever finds me finds life” (8:35). The advantages that wisdom gives, according to Proverbs, are impossible to overestimate. Wisdom promises wealth and honor (3:16), security and success (2:11). And while it does not promise eternal life, as with the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, then at least wisdom guarantees long and happy years (3:2.16; 4:10).<sup>30</sup> “Nothing you desire can compare with her” (3:15). The Lord Himself makes use of wisdom and apparently benefits from it (Pr 8). Wisdom is the tree of life filling up and satisfying the intellectual and spiritual needs of humanity.

But how one can gain wisdom in such a way as to eat of the fruit of that mysterious tree? “Where can wisdom be found?... Where then does wisdom come from?” Job questioned his friends long ago (28:12.20). Is it something humans can attain?

<sup>27</sup> Frank E. Gabelein, gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 435.

<sup>28</sup> In Proverbs the “righteous one” is identified with the “wise one.” Very often these terms are used interchangeably (Pr 9:9; 11:30; 23:24); the same is true of “wicked” and “fool.” These two categories of people are contrasted with each other. Cf. 10:21; 14:9 where the righteous one is contrasted with the fool. The wise one is the one who fears God (1:7; 2:6; 3:7). The righteous one has the same characteristic. See also the following discussion about wisdom.

<sup>29</sup> Though in the given context the author is

speaking about “understanding” in actual fact these two concepts – wisdom and understanding – are used in Proverbs interchangeably, cf. 2:6; 3:13; 4:7; 9:10.

<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that the concept of eternal life is not familiar to the OT. The word  $\text{-l}^{\text{m}}$  ( $\text{'}^{\text{ol}^{\text{m}}$ ), which in Ge 3:22 and in many others places in the OT is translated as “forever,” actually means “of long duration” (Francis Brown, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers], 761); cf. Ge 6:3; 9:12; 13:15. Thus, the concept of eternal life presented by the tree of life in some sense coincides with what wisdom offers—a long and happy life.

### 3.2.1. *Wisdom is an ability*

First of all, investigating the use of the word “wisdom” (חֵכֶל [Hokmô]) we discover that literally it means “ability.” For example, in Ex 28:3 those responsible for making sacred garments were filled with the spirit of wisdom; in other words, they were endowed with special ability. Ps 106:27 mentions sailors who lose their wisdom during a storm and are therefore unable to operate their ship. Solomon, understanding that because of his youth he is unable to rule over the nation, asks God to provide him with wisdom so that he would be capable of ruling and judging his people (1Ki 3). Even the craftsmen molding idols from gold and silver in Jer 10:9 are called wise<sup>31</sup> (see also Eze 27:8; Jer 9:17).

Reading through Proverbs one begins to understand that to gain wisdom means to gain a certain ability: to be able to build strong relationships between all the members of a family, to be able to live a chaste personal life, to learn how to manage time and money, or how to hold one’s tongue – all of these reflect wisdom.

### 3.2.2. *Wisdom is the ability to live*

However, it would be wrong to say that wisdom is an ability or skill only in the technical sense of the word. Studying the Wisdom Literature, one finds that it is something more. It is a certain dynamic of life that is able to collect, sort, and skillfully put together various elements in such a way

that at the end there would be a life of harmony, filled with meaning. Wisdom is something that helps us see meaning in life, that directs life to order and harmony. In other words, wisdom is the ability to live.<sup>32</sup> That is why it is more valuable than precious stones (Pr 3:15), and a young man is emphatically called to do everything in his power to gain it.

But is this not what Eve wanted? Did she not want to pick the forbidden fruit in order to get wisdom, the ability to live, and as much of it as possible? What did she do wrong; what was her fatal mistake? Where is the right way to wisdom? How can one reach it, and with it the ability to live?

## 3.3. Ways to wisdom

### 3.3.1. *Acceptance of instruction is the way to wisdom*

According to Proverbs there is a certain established order and regularity in the world. Our life and our future do not depend on the blind course of circumstances, but are ruled by the order that God has determined. Because of this order there is a law of retribution and reward; the righteous will prosper while the wicked will perish; the diligent will have sufficiency, while the lazy will be in need of food. Therefore, to gain wisdom means to learn and to know this order, to know existing regularities and to be able to apply that knowledge correctly in practical life. It is not a quick, easy process. That is why

<sup>31</sup> NIV translates this word as “skilled.”

<sup>32</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, Lecture 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Institute of Theo-

logical Studies, Outreach, Inc., 1976), recorded lecture series.

it is believed that wisdom is inherent in older people. Sometimes this order (or regularity) is understood as laws that are passed from generation to generation: “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching (*tôrô<sup>h</sup>*)” (Pr 1:8; see also 3:1; 4:2; 7:2). The breaking of these laws, as well as any other laws existing in the universe – be they moral, physical, or spiritual – can result in fatal consequences.

But does a young, naive person, as the first people were, have the chance somehow to learn those laws? Proverbs answers this question concretely: “Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction... and gain understanding”(4:1). Moreover: “Hold on to instruction, ...for it is your life” (4:13). Otherwise, “...the wicked... will die for lack of instruction” (5:23). Thus, the key to gaining wisdom is instruction.

This has something in common with the Garden of Eden where the people were offered use of all the goods given by God and to live, or not to listen to God’s instruction and to die (Ge 2:16-17). The commandment concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not, as one might think, a ban from God, but rather God’s instruction, teaching people about existing regularities, or laws, and about the consequences that will follow obedience or disobedience to those laws. The phrase, “in the day that you eat from it you will surely die,” was not a threat from God concerning possible disobedience, but an instruction, an establishment of fact as to what will take place in case of obedience or disobedience to those laws. For example: “The hand of the diligent will rule, but the slack hand will be

put to forced labor” (Pr 12:24). This proverb expresses a reality of life; it is a regularity; it is law. A person has the right to decide whatever he wants, but he does not always have the right to choose the consequences of that decision. The consequences will be simply a result of the decision.

### *3.3.2. The fear of the LORD is the way to wisdom*

However, Proverbs discloses to the reader that gaining wisdom is not merely a matter of knowing regularities and the order established by God. In the opening section celebrating the advantages of wisdom and calling the reader to do everything in his power to gain it (Pr 1-9), the author lays the cornerstone on which a young man can build his life: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (1:7). Finishing this section at the end of Pr 9, as if after this long discussion about wisdom the reader could forget the instruction given at the very beginning, the author once more reminds us of this fundamental principle: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (9:10). By enclosing the entire discussion about wisdom as if in bold-face brackets with this statement, the author suddenly stops the young, determined man who is rushing to break into the depository of wisdom in order to grab whatever amount he needs for his practical life, and draws his attention to a small, narrow door. The one door that opens the way of wisdom to humanity, and therefore the way to the tree of life, is called the fear of the Lord. It is the fear of the

Lord that leads us to understand that life is ruled by regularities only in part. The key role in its government is played by the sovereign God, who is above, or, it is better to say, beyond any regularities, beyond any system. That is why, along with constant calls to seek wisdom and grasp knowledge, the author from time to time reminds us: “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD” (21:31); “In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps” (16:9).

The synonymous parallelism in 15:33 helps us understand what the fear of the Lord is: “The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.” It is obvious that in this passage the second part of the verse repeats and expands the meaning of the first part. Therefore, humility is a synonym for the fear of the Lord, and wisdom has something in common with honor. Confirmation of this idea can be found in Pr 3:34-35 where it says that God “mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble. The wise inherit honor, but fools he holds up to shame.” To have the fear of the Lord means to humble oneself before God, to accept and obey His will, commandments, and laws. It is not without importance that in Proverbs one finds contradic-

tion not between the wise and the fool, but between the wise and the wicked.<sup>33</sup> Hence it is emphasized that foolishness is not just lack of knowledge, or even ignorance, but disobedience to the call of wisdom.

### 3.3.3. Acknowledgement of one's humanity

Thus, the two trees in the Garden of Eden symbolize two different ways. Just as Pr 9 personifies Wisdom and Folly, each one standing on the porch of her house inviting people in, so the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the center of the garden propose a choice to each person.<sup>34</sup> Both women (Wisdom and Folly) offer food and drink to anyone who wishes. What is more, as the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil seemed to Eve “good for food and pleasing to the eye,” so does Folly offer “sweet water and delicious food” (9:17). And, just as in the Garden of Eden death awaited the one who ate that fruit, so it will be for those who answer the call of Folly: “They will go to the dead, to the depths of the grave” (9:18).

But why does anyone respond to Folly's invitation? What makes her so attractive? In the words of J. Coert Rylaarsdam:

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Pr 4:11 and 4:14 where the way of wisdom is contrasted with the way of the wicked.

<sup>34</sup> The theme of the “strange wife” (“strange” is the literal translation of the word *yrka'* [nokr ], as in KJV) introduces one of the main questions discussed in Proverbs. On one hand, this image—the strange wife—can be understood literally as an adulteress. On the other hand, in the context of Proverbs it seems appropriate to consider this a dishonorable woman whose way leads to the grave (Pr 7:17), the embodiment of Folly. In this sense she is the opposite

of personified Wisdom, competes with her and, like Wisdom, appeals to people on streets and public squares (7:12; 9:13-18). Therefore, almost all the passages in Proverbs about the adulterous woman can be interpreted literally, as well as metaphorically (See J. Coert Rylaarsdam, *Книги Притчей Соломоновых, Екклесиаста, Песни Песней Соломона* [Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon], vol. 10, *Комментарии к книгам Ветхого Завета* [Old Testament commentary series] [Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991], 30).

The answer to all these questions is in essence just one: it seems that she promises the luxury of irresponsibility and selfishness. Service to the living God requires obedience to the reality that is beyond our "I". ... "Your will be done" – that was the motto of biblical faith, in the center of which was God. Man should become a servant, "a captive of the Word of God," as Luther put it. It runs counter to the desires of man, who wants to be the master of his life himself and therefore prefers idols to the living God. An idol, regardless of the form in which man creates it, serves always for the protection of man's "I" and his will. To worship idols is to worship oneself; it is not submission, but indulgence of one's weaknesses. ... "The strange woman," as an adulteress, requires no commitment, no covenantal relations, no mutuality, as it is in marriage. An immoral person, like the one who worships an idol, wants to be his own master; he will not put on the yoke of responsibility and will not submit his life to someone else.<sup>35</sup>

Desire to obtain knowledge and wisdom in order to be able to manage one's own life, to rule without any limitation from the outside, to be one's own master, and in this sense to be a god – that is what attracted the first people to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That tree, it seemed, gave them unlimited freedom, including freedom from God's commandments.

It is interesting to note that most of the English versions of the Bible

translate the word *l'kf* (*Sôkal*) in Ge 3:6 as "wisdom": "The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom." The Russian Synodal version uses the word "knowledge," as though underlining that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as well as any other source beyond God, does not give wisdom, but only knowledge. True wisdom comes exclusively from God, and has the fear of the Lord as its beginning.

The dictionary meaning of the word, according to BDB, is "to be prudent,"<sup>36</sup> that is, to have a certain understanding, insight, to know how to act in a way that leads to success. In the context of the OT this word is translated as "to be successful" (Jos 1:7), "to prosper" (Dt 29:9), "to have discretion" (1Ch 22:12). A striking example of a prudent man in the Bible is David. It is said that "whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it successfully" (1Sa 18:5). That is the characteristic that Eve wanted to obtain.

It is also important to note that the word *l'kf* (in Ge 3:6 is in the Hiphil form, which means that the tree did not just have the quality of prudence/wisdom/knowledge, but was able to endow others with prudence or success.<sup>37</sup>

The first people did not want just "to know" good, because as Ecclesiastes (1:18) concludes, "For with much wisdom comes much sorrow;

<sup>35</sup> Rylaarsdam, 32.

<sup>36</sup> Francis Brown, ed. *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 968.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. NASB: "The tree was desirable to make one wise." It is also significant that in most

places where *l'kf'* stands in the Hiphil form, it has as subject either God Himself or His will expressed through a messenger, law, commandments, etc. However, in those passages where there is no such subject, it has a negative sense (cf. Jer 10:21; 20:11; Ps 94:8).



the more knowledge, the more grief.” They wanted “to know” good in the sense of becoming its partakers, to live and enjoy the good. It appears that by this time the people had already made the mistake of saying that if you know what is good, you will be able to profit from it. After they ate of the forbidden fruit, they really did come to know the good. Ironically, they came to know that their life in fellowship with God prior to eating the fruit was good indeed. However, they could not profit from the good anymore.

Eve’s problem was not that she sought knowledge, that is, the ability to live in the right way or to have success, but that she sought that knowledge outside of the One who alone can give such knowledge. She wanted to gain wisdom, but unconsciously sought all-sufficiency, without understanding that there is only One in the universe who has life in Himself (Jn 5:26). All living beings derive their life from Him. Ps 19:7-8 very clearly expresses this thought: “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.” Eve sought wisdom, but only the Lord and His laws endow humans with wisdom. She wanted knowledge so that her eyes would be opened, but only the commands of the Lord “give light to the eyes.”

Humanity was created in the image of God, but not as gods. At least three things to which the author calls the reader’s attention in the creation

narrative eloquently testify that regardless of the dominion that God entrusted to humans, they would “fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Ge 1:28); nevertheless, they were not all-sufficient, but needed God and had to be dependent on Him.

First, from the very beginning, God determined the identity of man as an earthly being, by calling him/them Adam: “He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them ‘man’ (-dâ[ ʾôdôm])” (Ge 5:2). Though it is hard to be fully assured that the word -dâ[ ʾôdôm) etymologically comes from the word hm(ʾā) (ʾôdômô<sup>h</sup>, “earth”), in our judgment the author wanted the reader to think that. The use of these words together in Ge 2:7, where it is said that God created ʾôdôm from ʾôdômô<sup>h</sup>, does not seem random. In 3:19 the author makes this idea even clearer, though now in other words: “For dust you are and to dust you will return.” Therefore, by calling humanity “Adam,” God determined their identity; to be Adam means to be an “earthly” being.

Secondly, the prohibition to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as stated above, was not a threat from God, but a declaration of the fact that man is not God and therefore can die. Thus, he has to live in accordance with the identity that God appointed, to live within the boundaries assigned to earthly creatures.

Thirdly, unlike God, Adam needed some help, and therefore God decided to create a helper “suitable for him”

(Ge 2:18). This fact shows still one more time that man is not all-sufficient, but a dependent, needy, earthly being.

Consequently, it was expected of man that he would agree with the identity God had determined for him, admit his “humanness,” and eat of the tree of life, thereby expressing his need and his dependence on God. However, as Thomas W. Mann observed:

The woman and the man, prompted by the serpent, do not want to be human...; they want to be superhuman, to be like God. Thus the alienation ...observed between the man and the ground reflects his willful repudiation of his natural being as a creature in an attempt to become like the Creator.<sup>38</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Thus, to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil meant to take life in one’s own hands, while to eat of the fruit of the tree of life meant to leave one’s life in the hands of God the Creator, to entrust one’s destiny to Him. In other words it meant not to be God, but to live with God. It is true wisdom; it is happiness indeed. The attempt to govern one’s own life independently, the attempt to determine by oneself what is good and what is evil, the attempt to profit from good, making this “good” by one’s own hands, is doomed to failure from the very beginning.

Ecclesiastes is a striking example for all those who still want to build

happiness with their own hands. As Philip Yancey observed very succinctly, speaking of Ecclesiastes:

He has gained great wisdom, conducted wide-ranging social transformations, accumulated more wealth than any other man before him, experienced every possible pleasure. And at the end he came to the conclusion that “everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun” (Ecc 2:11).<sup>39</sup>

The wisest man came to that conclusion because at a certain point he understood that men “cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (Ecc 3:11). “Man... cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is” (NASB, Ecc 6:10). “No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it” (Ecc 8:17).

The realization that one’s intensive efforts to reach set goals are not a guarantee of achieving desired results leads man into deep depression. He wants to rule over his own life, he wants to hold it under his own control. In other words, he wants to take on the function of God for himself, but understands that he cannot do it because, as it seems to him, everything in life is determined by “time and chance” (Ecc 9:11). What he does gain as a result of his intense effort, as the author of Ecclesiastes concludes, are sleeplessness and fear of death (2:23; 3:19; 5:17; 8:8; 9:3-4).

<sup>38</sup> Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 18.

<sup>39</sup> Philip Yancey, *Библия, которую читал Иисус* (The Bible Jesus read) (Moscow: Триада, 2001), 148.

It turns out that it is an insufferable burden for man to be a god. This is the conclusion of the author of Ecclesiastes. That is why his seemingly pessimistic reflections suddenly finish with the words: "Here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecc 12:13).<sup>40</sup>

In other words, people are not gods at all....<sup>41</sup>

...Until that moment when we recognize our limited nature and submit ourselves to the authority of God, until we entrust ourselves to the Giver of all good, despair will expect us unavoidably. Ecclesiastes urges us to reconcile ourselves to the status of created beings under the authority of the Creator.<sup>42</sup>

Here is real wisdom; here is the tree of life, available today to each person. As James Packer reflects on this issue:

People think that if they come close to God and He generously bestows wisdom on them, then they ...will come to know the true sense of all that has happened to them, and it will always be clear to them exactly how God works all things for good. ...But attempts to read God's hidden intentions in every unusual incident are something else entirely. The gift of wisdom does not imply such

ability at all; quite the contrary... it assumes that we are incapable of it....<sup>43</sup>

...Wisdom given by God is not the knowledge of everything that God knows; it is striving and readiness to acknowledge that He is wise, to cling to Him and to live for Him in the light of His Word, whatever happens.<sup>44</sup>

It is obvious that the hard choice the first people had to make was not only put before them, but is put before every person today. Each one makes this decision for himself. One may attempt to determine one's own fate, one's own future, take control of one's own life, and consequently bear the unbearable "burden of gods," accompanied by fears and anxieties. Or, one may consent to the identity determined by God, believe that all of God's deeds are directed to one's good, and entrust Him with the right to rule over one's fate. God can be trusted because He proved His love for us in that, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro 5:8). It is God who "determined appointed times and boundaries" for people, and did it so "that they would seek God" (Ac 17:26-27), because only He knows what is good and what is not good for them. It is God who "in all things works for the good of those who love him" (Ro

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<sup>40</sup> I prefer the Russian translation of this verse, which in my judgment is closer to the context of the book and better fits its conclusion. It literally reads: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for everything for man is in it." This may be paraphrased as follows: "Fear God and keep His commandments, because all that man needs is in it," i.e. in the fear of God. In this case it continues the theme of "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," the wisdom that will provide you

with everything you need. See my previous reflections about wisdom and the advantages it gives. Therefore, to fear God is not a heavy obligation or duty for man (although, of course, in some sense it is) but rather something that man wants to do for his own good.

<sup>41</sup>Yancey, 154.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>43</sup>James A. Packer, *Познание Бога* (Knowing God) (St. Petersburg: Мирт, 1997), 116.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 123.

8:28). His wisdom, His resources, and His concern for humanity are available today; they represent the tree of

life lost by people in the Garden of Eden, but returned to them now by the grace of God.

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