

*No man sins for someone else.  
—Baba Metzia, 8.*

**What fell, exactly?**

In Chapter 3 we discussed the reason why God allows “moral evil” in the world. It has to do with the fact that love cannot be imposed; it must be freely chosen. And real freedom to choose cannot exist without at least two different options to choose between. So if love is to exist, there must also be “no-love” or evil. But...

*“...what about the bad things that happen without any human decision, the so-called “natural” disasters that have caused at least as much suffering as Nero, Vespasian, the crusaders, Stalin, Hitler, and Pol Pot combined?” (TGAM)*

- ▶ See **Ge 3:14 & 17**. What was cursed along with Adam and Eve?
  - ✓ The Serpent (Satan)
  - ✓ “All the livestock and all the wild animals.” (Note that it says the Serpent is more cursed than they are, thus they were less cursed, but nonetheless cursed.)
  - ✓ The ground

Much later, the Torah contains a warning of what can still happen, even to a “land of milk and honey” as a result of one man’s idolatry. Read **Dt 29:18-19**.

- ▶ What do you think the ancient Hebrew expression “the watered land as well as the dry” meant?
  - ✓ It is similar to our “coast to coast.”
- ▶ Given your answer to the question above, what would suffer “disaster” due to this man’s idolatry?
  - ✓ Everything!

In the last lesson we saw Biblical evidence for the idea that “moral” evil is contagious across the generations. But that’s not the only effect of the Fall...

*“The New Testament teaches that the corruption Adam and Eve released upon the universe has also infected the animals, atmosphere, oceans, and land. This explains disease, hurricanes, and earthquakes. The Scriptural basis for this is first found in the Garden of Eden, where the Torah describes an environment so benign that clothing is not required and all animals are vegetarians. [See Ge 1:28-30] We are in such perfect harmony with our Creator that we feel no fear of him, no need to cover ourselves [Genesis 3:8-11 implies that Adam and Eve did not hide from God before the “original sin”]. But after the expulsion from the Garden, the Torah describes spiritual perversion spreading like wildfire. Cain becomes a murderer. Humanity challenges God with towers up to heaven. The climate becomes capable of producing a worldwide flood. Humanity and animals descend into violence and carnivorous*

**GOD LOVES  
AN HONEST QUESTION!**

(continued)

*behavior. Life spans in the Bible become shorter with each passing generation from Noah to David due to the expanding influence of violence and disease.... [See declining life spans before and after the flood in Genesis 5 and 11.] I believe these are signs of a pollution rippling out from the first sin, corrupting everything it touches.” (TGAM)*

- ▶ What is the relationship between humanity and animal life in **Ge 1:28-30**? In **Ge 9:2-3**?
  - ✓ Before the Fall, humanity is told to “rule over” creation; after the Fall, creation views humanity with “fear and dread.”
  - ✓ Before the Fall, humans and animals are all vegetarians; after the Fall, humans may eat animals (but not vice versa, see Genesis 9:5).
- ▶ See **Isa 65:23-25**. What changes does it describe? What significance does Isaiah’s prophecy attach to your answer to the question above? (Note: Due to Isa 6:17 it seems this prophecy refers to the end times. Compare **2 Peter 3:13** and **Rev 21:1**.)
  - ✓ The Isaiah passage says things will return to “normal” as they were before the Fall, with the violence and death of carnivorous behavior ended (v 25), and a lifting of the “work curse” and inherited guilt (v 23)
  - ✓ We will be cleansed not only of the spiritual effects of sin, but also of the physical.
- ▶ Read **Ro 8:19-23**. Is this passage limited to human beings and animals?
  - ✓ No. “All creation” means the whole universe. That includes the air and sea and earth, so such things as hurricanes, tidal waves and earthquakes are the “natural” equivalent of the “moral” evils people choose. All of this was unleashed at the Fall.

## Why does this matter?

“Sinfulness is not a choice, it is a condition...”

*“...If sin exists as a kind of plague upon the world, then I would expect the Scriptures to mention that it can come without warning, like a bad case of the flu. And sure enough, in Leviticus I find many references to sacrificial ritual in response to unintentional sin. [Lv 4:2, 22, 27] Leviticus also says an Israelite can become unclean, “even though he is unaware of it.” [Lv 5:2–3]” (TGAM)*

- ▶ What impact does the Torah’s concept of “unintentional sin” have on the idea that we become estranged from God purely because of the choices we make? What is its impact on the idea that we can return to harmony with God by confessing, repenting and making reparation?
  - ✓ “In these passages, the Torah says quite clearly that isolation from God is not always about the choices I make. Sometimes I am unacceptable simply because of my contact with the environment...”

**GOD LOVES  
AN HONEST QUESTION!**

(continued)

- Proof of this: even devout Christians must often choose “the lesser of two evils,” and are thus forced to do evil by their situation or environment. (Example: Lying to a Nazi about hiding Jews in the attic.)
- ✓ “I cannot simply choose to return—*teshuvah*—to harmony with God, any more than I can conquer influenza with a positive attitude.” (TGAM)
- ▶ Does the idea that Adam’s “original sin” spiritually polluted all of creation offer any comfort when considering the problem of “natural evil” versus a loving God? (Hint: remember why God allows “moral evil” in the world.)
- ✓ “This helps me reconcile a loving God with the horrors of disease or natural disasters...” (TGAM)
- ✓ If the whole world has “fallen” as the result of Adam’s choice, then “natural” evil falls in the same class as moral evil, in the sense that God cannot remove or restrain it without removing or restraining us.
- ✓ Thus God allows “natural” evil to continue for the same reason He allows moral evil: because of His good and loving desire that we remain free to choose good, which is to love.
- ▶ Se the “Lord’s Prayer” in **Mt 6:12-15**, does Jesus imply our moral choices are irrelevant in light of our sinful condition?
- ✓ No. His “forgive or you will not be forgiven” strongly implies a direct connection between our choices and our relationship with God.
  - (We will examine this connection in the next lesson.)
- ▶ Does Jesus’ teaching appear to support the idea of “unintentional sin”?
- ✓ Yes. His “lead us not...deliver us,” implies that we are in the grip of something beyond our own control.
- ▶ What solution to the dilemma of sin does The Lord’s Prayer suggest? (Compare **Ro 7:24-25**)
- ✓ His “lead us not...deliver us” also teaches that we can ask to be controlled in either direction. Either our sinfulness will be in control, or God will be in control, and our one true choice is which one it will be, thus:
- ✓ **Key point: Sinfulness is not a choice, it is a condition...which causes us to choose to sin.**
  - Note the paradox in this statement: our “choice to sin” is caused.
  - The paradox of sinfulness is resolved by the paradox of faith and works: our “choice to obey” is caused by grace through faith in Jesus and belief in his passion.
  - Through Jesus’ passion believers are freed from the condition, making us free to choose obedience.
  - “Well it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.” (Bob Dylan, *Gotta Serve Somebody*)

GOD LOVES  
AN HONEST QUESTION!

(continued)

- ▶ If all of humanity has been corrupted by evil unintentionally, is God fair to condemn us? (Hint: see **Ps 143:2** and **Luke 12:8-10**)
  - ✓ The question is moot for two reasons:
    - First, per the Psalms passage God is never faced with the possibility of condemning anyone solely for “unintentional sin” because everyone chooses to sin (see also **Prov 20:9**).
    - Second, per the Luke passage God would not have to condemn a person who never used his freedom of choice to sin (if there ever were such a person) because such a person would be saved by Jesus’ passion. By definition, such a person (who never sinned) would obey the Holy Spirit’s leading and believe in Jesus’ sacrifice, since to do otherwise is to choose to commit the unforgivable sin.
- ▶ If all of humanity has been corrupted by evil unintentionally, are we fair to condemn each other? (Hint: see **Mt 18:32-35**)
  - ✓ Everyone is corrupted alike by the moral evil in the world, so who but God alone has the right to condemn anyone else?

### What should we do?

The Torah clearly defines a process for Israel to follow in order to take some of the world back from the corruption that defiles it. Here is one example of that process:

*Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement. Purify the altar by making atonement for it, and anoint it to consecrate it. For seven days make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be holy. (Ex 29:36-37) NIV*

The word translated as “atonement” in the Exodus verse above is *kippur*, as in *Yom Kippur*, Judaism’s famous “day of atonement,” which is viewed by all Rabbinic Jews as an annual opportunity to atone for their individual and corporate sins. Why would God command Aaron and the priests to “atone” for an inanimate object like the altar? As part of the world Adam’s sin has cursed, even the uncut stones of the altar required atonement and consecration before they could be used for good by God.

- ▶ How might the idea of “making atonement” for the altar apply to human relationships? (Hint: see **Mt 5:38-48**.)
  - ✓ Atonement = Reparation, and reparation is “The act or process of repairing or the condition of being repaired” (American Heritage Dictionary)
    - To “atone” is to “repair.”
    - To repair human relationships is to love, and to love is to forgive, and to repent.

GOD LOVES  
AN HONEST QUESTION!

## The Gospel according to

# MOSES

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- ✓ Remember all of us were born into a world of sinfulness and corruption, and it is by God's grace (His love) alone that we ourselves were saved, not by our own choice, therefore who are we to condemn even our enemies? (**Mt 18: 32-35** again)
  - Love, as expressed in forgiveness or repentance, does not depend on reciprocity. We only control the part within our power, be it repentance or forgiveness. Love (atonement, reparation) exists whenever they are offered, regardless of the response.
- ✓ It is impossible to love an enemy in our own power; it can only be done by God's Holy Spirit working through us, with us surrendering to His will in humble confession of our powerlessness.
- ▶ How should this "atonement" concept guide our lives in terms of the work we do, the things we consume, our interaction with the natural world? (Hint: see **Col 3:23**, **Dt 20:19-20**, and **Lv 17:3-4**.)
  - ✓ Our work:
    - Part of Adam's curse was the world's resistance to his work. When working or playing, which is an "image and likeness" of God's creativity, do it for the Lord. (**Col 3:23**)
    - Strive for excellence, by defending/repairing God's creation from mediocrity/corruption.
  - ✓ What we consume:
    - Respect the glory of God's creation by consuming only what can be replenished, and only what He intended us to consume. (**Dt 20:19-20** above)
  - ✓ How we interact with the rest of creation:
    - Treat all life with full consciousness of its value to God. (**Lv 17:3-4** above)
    - Remember the world is God's, and behave like the guest you are.
- ▶ How can we Christians consecrate our lives (become holy, as the Lord is holy) in a fallen world? (Hint: See **Ro 7:24-25**, **Mt 6:13**, and **Prov 3:5-6**.)
  - ✓ Stop trying to choose good! So long as we are mired in a fallen world, evil will be "right there with us" (**Ro 7:21**).
  - ✓ Instead of trusting in your own ability (or "understanding") to be good, choose to be "rescued" by Jesus every day in your struggle with sin. This means "trust in the Lord with all your heart" to guide your choices, "and he will make your paths straight."
- ▶ What does a holy life "look like?"
  - ✓ **Key Point: Do not think in terms of choosing to be good, think in terms of choosing to love Jesus.**
  - ✓ For example:
    - When you are tempted to choose evil, forgive those who tempt you and ask God to do the same, rather than focusing on choosing good.

**GOD LOVES  
AN HONEST QUESTION!**

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- Ask Jesus to “rescue” you from sin, lead you not into temptation, deliver you from evil, make your way straight, etcetera, rather than reverting to the pagan idea you can be righteous through your choices.
- ✓ Note: here again is the answer to the initial question of this lesson: “Does it matter why I sin?” It matters, because until I understand why, I may continue trying to solve the problem by faith in my own willpower, instead of faith in God.

**GOD LOVES  
AN HONEST QUESTION!**