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## **Research Paper: The Fall of Adam**

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## INTRODUCTION

Every branch of systematic theology (e.g., soteriology, Christology, anthropology, or eschatology) must draw its foundational principles from the early chapters of Genesis. If our interpretation of Genesis is wrong, it handicaps the rest of our system, as Bill Versteeg has well-noted:

We need to understand what is happening here [in Genesis] if we want to understand the rest of scripture. If we misunderstand this beginning of the story, our understanding of all of the story of scripture will be distorted.

Every attempt to understand the Genesis account of the Fall immediately encounters a complexity of interdependent issues. It is like a picture puzzle, with lots of pieces that will only fit together (correctly) in one way. The Old Testament saints did not have all of the pieces, nor did they have a clear idea of what the redemptive picture was going to look like after it was finished. The rest of the pieces did not arrive, nor was the big picture available, until Christ appeared. Now we have the finished redemptive picture to look at while we work on the puzzle. That makes our job a whole lot easier, but it still does not make it simple.

The first step in any puzzle assembly is to find all the edge-pieces that form the frame of the picture. Once the frame is in place, assembly of the rest of the pieces may begin. In regard to the *Fall of Adam* puzzle, the framework is our concept of the ultimate destiny of the redeemed.

For instance, Dispensational Premillennialists insist that at the end of redemptive history God will remove the physical curses, give us eternal physical life, and restore us to the physical paradise here on earth. However, Amillennialists, Historicists, Preterists, and some Premils and Postmils suggest a different framework. We believe that heaven (not earth) is our ultimate destiny after the second coming, resurrection, and judgment.

That is the framework (or paradigm) within which I am working here, i.e., that man's ultimate destiny was always (before and after the Fall) to go to heaven to be with God for eternity. After we discuss this framework briefly, we will then look at some of the major pieces in the *Fall of Adam* story, and suggest how they may fit into the overall redemptive picture.

It was not possible in this paper to deal with the concept of *original sin* and how Christ dealt with it. The scope had to be narrowed to cover a few aspects well, rather than cover many aspects only a little. Suffice it to say that Christ Jesus has "finished" our redemption from the original sin of Adam when He died on the Cross and was raised from the dead.

Here are the points that we will be covering in this paper: (1) The Ultimate Destiny of Mankind, (2) Adam's Original Condition at Creation, (3) The Tree of Life, (4) What if Adam Had Passed the Test?, (5) The Probationary Period, and (6) The Kind of Death They Died "on that day".

## 1. The Ultimate Destiny of Mankind

Unless we wish to insult the *Immutability* of God by suggesting that God changed his Divine Plan when Adam and Eve sinned, it would be much safer to assume that whatever the New Testament reveals about our ultimate destiny, must have been pre-planned by God before the foundation of the world. God did not change his plans at the Fall.

The ultimate destiny of redeemed man was not as clearly revealed in the Old Testament as it is in the New (Eph. 3:5). Nevertheless, it was there in seed form from the beginning, as we see not only in the Protoevangelium (Gen. 3:15), but even before in God's implied blessing of Eternal Life if Adam remained faithful to the covenant that God made with him (Gen. 2:15-17). God threatened *death* if he ate from the forbidden tree, which implies that he would *never die* if he did not eat from it. So from the beginning, even before the Fall, the ultimate destiny of the faithful was *eternal life*.

On the other hand, it may not have been very clear at the beginning *where* this eternal life would be enjoyed. Adam and Eve might have thought that it would be in the Garden of Eden on earth. It is not certain that they knew about the heavenly paradise. Nevertheless, from Exodus 24 onwards, it seems very clear that the Israelites knew about a heavenly temple and paradise, of which the earthly temple was only a copy or shadow. G. K. Beale does a marvelous job of showing the typological connections between the earthly paradise/temple and the heavenly paradise/temple (*The Temple* 44). There is no space here to look at his excellent material, but I would highly recommend it for the interested reader.

The New Testament leaves no doubt about our ultimate destiny. In hundreds of texts in all the apostolic writings we find clear references to our heavenly home. For example, we see it in Phil. 1:23 ("depart and be with Christ...very much better"), Heb. 6:20 and 9:24 ("Christ [entered as a forerunner for us]...into heaven itself"), Heb. 10:34 (you have...a better possession and a lasting one"), Heb. 11:16 ("they desire a better country...heavenly one"), and many others. Paul made it clear in 1 Cor. 15:50 that the heavenly life would not be in a physical body when he

said, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." According to Hebrews 12:22-23, the "New Jerusalem" is the "heavenly Jerusalem" where there are "myriads of angels" and "the spirits of righteous men made perfect."

The four references to the tree of life in the Book of Revelation (2:7; 22:2, 14, 19) show that all the redeemed will have access to that tree and will all partake from it. What was once forfeited by Adam and Eve and denied to their posterity and what has been hoped for and anticipated by saints of all ages will be fully restored and realized in the New Jerusalem (22:2). (Wong 212-213)

The point of this discussion about our heavenly destiny is to remind ourselves what Adam would have received if he had passed the test and never eaten from the forbidden fruit. He would have received his eternal reward in heaven immediately at the end of his earthly test, without having to die physically. Augustine taught this:

If Adam had not sinned, he would not have been divested of his body, but would have been clothed upon (superinvested) with immortality and incorruption, that his mortal (body) might have been absorbed by life; that is, that he might have passed from his natural body to the spiritual body. [Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione*, I, 2. Quoted in Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1962. p. 171]

When Adam sinned, it did not change his ultimate destiny of heaven, but it did change *how* and *when* he would get there. Instead of going there directly without physical death at the end of his successful probation, he would now have to die physically and wait disembodied in Hades until the Redeemer came to accomplish atonement, at which time he would finally be raised out of Sheol to receive his new immortal body and go to live in heaven with God forever.

Gen. 3:22 shows that Adam, after the Fall, could still have lived forever on earth by simply eating from the Tree of Life, but God clearly did not want him to live forever on the earth, especially in a sinful and condemned state. This tells us that eternal physical life on earth was never the ultimate destiny before the Fall, or afterwards.

Heaven was always the ultimate destiny of God's people, and it had to have been in place before the Fall, otherwise we would have to believe God's original plan for his creation was flawed, and had to be replaced with a better plan after the Fall. That idea attacks not only the Immutability, but also the Omniscience, Omnipotence, Foreknowledge, Foreordination, and Sovereignty of God. Not a safe place to venture theologically.

God did not change his plan at the Fall. He knew the Fall would occur, and already had His plan in place to rescue man from his fallen state. His plan always included a heavenly destiny for His elect people. Our ultimate destiny both before and after the Fall was always to go to heaven to live with God forever.

## 2. Adam's Original Condition at Creation

Was Adam created mortal or immortal, or neither? Adam was formed from the ground outside the garden and then placed in the Garden (Gen 2:15). He was made of dust. This fact is hugely significant, as *Keil and Delitzsch* have pointed out: "A body formed from earthly materials could not be essentially immortal." (*Keil and Delitzsch*, comments on Gen. 2:17) Apostle Paul affirms the same when he says "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (1 Cor. 15:50 NASB). Paul shows that there is a radical difference between mortal fleshly (earthly) bodies and immortal (heavenly) bodies. The fact that Adam could die, and did die physically later on, shows that he was not immortal yet.

If Adam before the Fall was created already immortal ("unable to die" by etymology and definition), then there would have been no additional benefit in eating from the Tree of Life, nor any danger in eating the forbidden fruit. He was already "unable to die," no matter what happened. The test of obedience would have been pointless: nothing to gain or lose. However, the mere fact that God tested his obedience and threatened him with death, shows that he was "able to die" and would not gain immortality unless he passed the test. Thomas Boston sums this up well:

A promise of life in case of continued obedience. For the threatening manifestly implies another proposition... 'If thou eat not of this tree thou shalt live.' Besides, the license the Lord gives him to eat of every other tree in the garden, and so of the tree of life, imports this promise. (Boston Part 1 Point 3)

The test of his obedience implied that Adam could either sin and die, or succeed and live forever. Living forever (immortality) would obviously not be his until he passed the test, so he could not have already been immortal (unable to die).

However, this does not automatically imply that Adam was created mortal (in the fullest sense). Full mortality means that one is already *subject* to physical death and *destined* to die physically. But we know that Adam was created innocent, and not yet subject to physical death, since that is what was threatened by God. There would have been no point to the probationary test if Adam was already destined to die anyway. Physical death is what he hoped to escape by remaining faithful to the test. So he was not "mortal" in its fullest sense (already subject to death).

Adam's pre-Fall body was neither mortal nor immortal in the fullest sense of those words. Rather, it had the potential to become either, depending on how Adam handled the test. He was created with two potentials: (1) mortal

in a limited sense (able to die), but not yet mortal in its fullest sense (destined to die, or subject to death), and (2) able to gain immortality (able to not die) if he remained faithful to the test, but was not yet immortal (not able to die). A. H. Strong described it this way:

The one slight command best tested the spirit of obedience. Temptation did not necessitate a fall. If resisted, it would strengthen virtue. In that case, the *posse non peccare* [possible to not sin] would have become the *non posse peccare* [not possible to sin]. ...If Adam had maintained his integrity, the body might have been developed and transfigured [i.e., changed], without intervention of death. In other words, the *posse non mori* [possible to not die] might have become a *non posse mori* [not possible to die]. (Strong 526-527)

So far in our study we have seen that Adam was created able to die, but not yet subject to death, and able to gain immortality if he passed the test. And we know that he had an eternal home in heaven waiting for him, which was the ultimate destiny of all saints, planned by God even before the Fall.

We might be wondering, at this point, how the physical Tree of Life functioned in Adam's pursuit of immortality and the heavenly reward.

### 3. The Tree of Life

What was the role of the Tree of Life in the test of Adam's obedience? Was it there merely for him to see as a symbol of the immortal body and heavenly reward that he would gain after perfect obedience? Was it only there to be an uninvolved witness of his struggle to resist temptation? Or was Adam actually eating from the Tree of Life and gaining something useful from it besides mere daily physical nourishment?

Why was it called the tree of "life"? What kind of "life" did it provide, physical or spiritual? Did that "life" come after only one eating, or with a regular eating which supplied renewal of their "life"?

Many interpreters of the Genesis account of The Fall hold the idea that the Tree of Life only had to be *eaten once* in order to gain immortality. To prove this, they would assert that since Adam and Eve did not have immortality yet when they fell, they could not have eaten from the Tree of Life already, not even once. Here is their reasoning:

**Major Premise:** Eating once from the Tree of Life gains immortality

**Minor Premise:** Adam and Eve did not have immortality at the Fall

**Conclusion:** Therefore, they did not eat even once from the Tree of Life

There are at least two fallacies embedded in their logic here:

- (1) They confuse *immortality* with mere physical longevity. Living forever in a physical body on earth is not the same thing as living forever in an immortal body in heaven. Apostle Paul made this clear in 1 Cor. 15:50 when he flatly stated that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." We are talking about two different kinds of bodies here: an earthly body versus a heavenly body. Even a casual glance at Gen. 3:22 reveals that the words "live forever" only refer to longevity of the physical body, and not to immortality in heaven, since eating it after the Fall could not have given them immortality in heaven. Eating from it then (after the Fall) could only have extended their physical lives forever on earth, and that would have been miserable to live outside heaven forever. The Tree of Life could not provide immortality in heaven. It was only designed to provide physical body longevity on earth. This one fallacy alone negates their syllogism. But there is more.
- (2) Notice that their major premise includes the "eating only once" idea in it. They are assuming what they need to prove. They have not proven that eating once is the only option. They are assuming it to be true. What if it took more than one eating of the Tree to gain physical body longevity? Gen. 3:22 does not rule out the possibility of continual eating. Furthermore, both Gen. 2:16-17 and 3:2f imply continual eating when God told Adam that he may "eat freely" from all the trees in the Garden including the Tree of Life (as long as he did not eat from the forbidden tree). Notice that the Tree of Life is included in the list of trees from which he could "eat freely" (Gen. 2:9; 2:16; 3:2). It was not specified as a "never eat" tree or a "once only" tree. It was an "eat freely" tree. Nor was it an apple or orange tree. It was a "Life" tree. That means in order to gain the kind of "Life" that the tree offered, one must "eat freely" from it. We know from Gen. 3:22 ("eat and live forever") that it could only provide physical longevity. So now we have all the pieces of the tree puzzle in place. It was a physical longevity tree from which they were allowed to "eat freely" (daily, continuously) even before the Fall. Evidently the daily eating from it sustained their health and extended their physical lives while they were undergoing the test. Once the Fall occurred, they were not allowed to continue eating from it, because they would have then lived forever on earth in a fallen state. Separation from the Tree of Life would now force them to eventually die physically.

The statement "eat and live forever" in Gen. 3:22 implies two things about the Tree of Life: (1) that eating from it would extend their lives forever, and (2) that by not eating from it they would surely die physically. Since there is nothing in the context to suggest that this was a new condition of the tree, nor any indication that it suddenly changed its nature and function at the Fall, then we are safe in assuming that it was able to extend their physical

longevity before the Fall as well. It also means that since it was not able to give them immortality after the Fall, it was not able to give them immortality before the Fall either. This clearly opens the door wide for the idea of a continual eating of the Tree before the Fall, and forever shuts the door on the suggestion that the Tree of Life could ever have given them immortality.

There is not a hint anywhere in the Genesis account that the Tree of Life ever was able to impart immortality. Its nature and function was always (before and after the Fall) to sustain and extend physical life until Adam and Eve successfully passed the probation period. Then they would have graduated to heaven and received their new heavenly immortal bodies that were fitted for life in the unseen spiritual realm.

A. H. Strong and Adam Clarke both agree that the fruit and leaves from the Tree of Life may have prevented disease, promoted healing, and extended physical life:

Science shows that physical life involves decay and loss. But means were apparently provided for checking this decay and preserving the body's youth. The means was the "tree of life" (Gen. 2:19). (Strong 527)

Yet by the use of these trees of life – those different vegetable medicines, the health of the body may be preserved for a time, and death kept at a distance. Though the exposition given here may be a general meaning for these general terms, yet it is likely that this tree of life which was placed in the midst of the garden was intended as an emblem [symbol, or type] of that life which man should ever live, provided he continued in obedience to his Maker. And probably the use of this tree was intended as the means of preserving the body of man in a state of continual vital energy, and an antidote against death. This seems strongly indicated from chap. iii. 22. (Clarke, comments on Gen. 2:9, bracketed info mine, ees)

The tree of life, as we have already seen, was intended to be the means of continual preservation. For as no being but God can exist independently of any supporting agency, so man could not have continued to live without a particular supporting agent; and this supporting agent under God appears to have been the tree of life. (Clarke, comments on Gen. 3:19)

### **Answering Objections:**

Gen 3:22 can easily be understood as implying that Adam had already eaten from and knew the value of the Tree of Life. From the context (Gen. 2:16) we know that God had already told Adam before the Fall that he could eat freely from the Tree of Life, but "now" after the Fall, he must be restricted from eating it. The statement of God can be understood as implying, "We can not let him continue eating from the Tree of Life NOW (any longer) like he was before." The "now" implies a change in habit. It seems more likely that Adam and Eve would feel the effects of the expulsion and severance from the Tree more acutely if they had already been enjoying the rejuvenating effects of it. It is hard to "miss" something you have never experienced. If they had never eaten, they wouldn't know what they

were missing. A change in habit is implied. And just such a change would only have been significantly felt and sorely missed if they had already been accustomed to eating it.

Not only was there no restriction from eating from the Tree of Life before the Fall, but even more importantly, there was the clear permission to "freely eat" from it (Gen. 2:16). But suddenly "now" after the Fall, access is cut off. This restriction after the Fall does not prove that they were eating of it before the Fall, but it certainly allows for the possibility that they were, and the "once-for-all" theory can never negate that possibility.

Another reason I prefer the "continual eating before the Fall" theory is because of the way God defined which trees they could eat from. Notice the statements in Gen. 2:8-9 and 2:15-17 --

The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow **every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden**, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 2:8-9 NASB, boldface mine, ees)

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "**From any tree of the garden you may eat freely**; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Gen. 2:15-17 NASB, boldface mine, ees)

Notice the way the Tree of Life is included right along with all the other trees that were "pleasing to the sight and good for food." This Tree of Life was something that was "good for food" just like the other trees, with the implication that they could "eat freely from any tree of the garden" including the Tree of Life. The only tree they were forbidden to eat from at all was the Tree of Knowledge. The phraseology here in the Hebrew unquestionably leaves room for the possibility that they were eating from the Tree of Life on a regular basis before the Fall, and I believe almost demands it.

Some have argued that the Tree of Life could not have provided any life-sustaining and longevity-extending benefits, because from his very creation onwards man was already destined to die because he was created from dust and would therefore have to return to dust (Gen. 2:7 and 3:19). They assume that the only way for Adam to get off this earth and go to heaven at the end of a successful probation period was through physical death. However, this objection ignores three other possibilities: (1) the life-extending benefits of the Tree of Life, (2) the idea of a fixed probation period (their testing would not last forever), and (3) the possibility of a bodily "change" and "catching up" at the end of the probation.

If Adam and Eve were going to die anyway, with or without eating from the Tree of Life, why did God cut off access to it (Gen. 3:22-24)? The expulsion from the Garden certainly teaches that eating from it would have

extended their physical lives forever. And if it was available to them to "eat freely" before the Fall, there is every reason to believe that they did "eat freely" (regularly) from it and did derive that very benefit. If they had remained faithful to the test, their physical lives would have been extended long enough to reach the end of the probationary period, at which time they would have been "changed" and "caught up" to heaven (like Enoch and Elijah) without having to experience physical death.

If the Tree of Life was only meant to be eaten "once-for-all", then we have to ask: (1) How would Adam and Eve know when the "once-for-all" time had arrived? (2) Where did God ever indicate when the proper time would be? (3) Why then did God tell them to "eat freely" from all the other trees in the Garden including the Tree of Life? (4) Why didn't God put a prohibition on the Tree of Life so they could not accidentally ("freely") eat of it until the "once-for-all" proper time?

You see, if God was saving the Tree of Life for some special occasion when they would eat it "once-for-all", he certainly did not communicate that to Adam and Eve. They were told to "eat freely" of it. The "once-for-all eating" theory simply does not harmonize with the "freely eat" context.

Since God gave no "once only" restriction, nor any specific teaching about a "once-for-all" eating from the Tree of Life, and since it was lumped in with the other trees that were "good for food" and from which they could "eat freely," the implication is clear and strong that they could eat from it as often as they wished to sustain their health and extend their longevity.

### **Typological Connections:**

In addition to the above internal exegetical and contextual considerations, there are external *typological* ideas associated with the Tree of Life, which also suggest a daily eating for the purpose of extending their health and longevity:

1. The manna (daily bread) which God provided to the Israelites in the wilderness could easily be pointing back to, and following the same pattern of daily eating, as the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. The manna certainly kept the Israelites healthy and alive until they could finish the forty-year trial in the wilderness and enter the promised land. There is a three-point similarity in these two events.
2. In Rev. 22:2, a picture of the Tree of Life emerges which is typologically incompatible with the idea of a "once-for-all" eating. There in the heavenly paradise, the new Tree of Life (the Antitype of the original Edenic tree) is a constant source of health and life, not just a "once-for-all" eating. In Revelation 22 we see God's people

among all the nations coming to the Tree of Life continually month by month to eat the new fruit and be healed by its leaves. This is not just a once-for-all eating from the Tree. It is this typological use of the Tree in Revelation which very effectively negates any thought of a "once-for-all" eating. That is not the way it functions in the New Paradise, so it must not have functioned that way in the original Garden. God expelled Adam from the original garden so he could not "eat of the Tree of Life and live forever." That "live forever" was clearly physical. The normal Biblical pattern in Biblical typology is to introduce the physical first as a type of the spiritual antitype. That would work real well here for the physical Tree of Life in Genesis to be a physical type of the spiritual tree in the book of Revelation. We eat from Christ (the Anti-Type) and renew our life in Him on a daily basis, so it would be perfectly logical to assume that the original Type (the physical tree in the physical garden) was a continual eating as well. Does Christ just want us to taste of Him once and go our merry way, or does He want us to eat from Him daily and hourly and continually? How is our spiritual life sustained, by a once-only eating or a continual feasting at the Table of Christ?

3. Jewish writers also refer to the Tree of Life typologically. They compare the study of Torah to the Tree of Life as a source of daily nourishment and strength, implying that the original Tree of Life was the same kind of daily source of health and longevity:

Observe how powerful is the might of the Torah, and how it surpasses any other force. For whoso occupies himself in the study of the Torah has no fear of the powers above or below, nor of any evil haps of the world. For such a man **cleaves to the tree of life, and derives knowledge from it day by day** ... so that [God] may annul the evil decreed against him ... [so that it] no longer threatens that man in this world. Hence it is incumbent upon a man to occupy himself in the study of the Torah **day and night without cessation** ... "and thou shalt meditate therein day and night" (Jos. I, 8); and if he abandons such study, it is as though he **abandoned the tree of life**. (*Zohar A* page 11a] (boldface mine, ees)

Until he sinned, man was gifted with the wisdom of celestial illumination, and **he did not for an instant quit the Tree of Life**. But when he was seduced by his desire to know what was below, he weakly followed it until **he became separated from the Tree of Life, and knew evil and forsook good**... (*Zohar A* page 52a, boldface mine, ees)

Assuredly, had Adam **held fast to the tree of life** ... **he would not have brought death** upon himself and upon the rest of the world. (*Zohar A* 131b, boldface mine, ees]

These selections from the Jewish writings (*Zohar*) show that orthodox rabbis who were devoted to daily study of the Torah understood that daily relationship as being typologically similar to Adam's daily eating from the Tree of Life before the Fall. In other words, daily Torah study is just like eating daily from the Tree of Life. Both were a daily source of health and life. Neither of these were a "once-for-all" eating. So it seems clear from these

analogies and typology that Adam and Eve ate freely from the Tree of Life, which renewed their health daily so that they could remain alive for the duration of the probation.

So we have seen what the ultimate destiny of man is, and what Adam's original condition was at creation. And we have seen what role the Tree of Life played in the test of Adam's obedience in the Garden. Now let's look at what might have happened to Adam and Eve if they had not sinned.

#### **4. What If Adam Had Passed the Test?**

Before discussing the length of the probation and the meaning of the phrase "in the day" (Gen. 2:17), I want to consider what would have happened to Adam's physical body if he had remained faithful to the test.

If heaven was Adam's ultimate destiny, and heaven requires a new kind of body, how would Adam get that new body without the death of his old physical body? If he never sinned, he would have never died. Wouldn't that mean that a faithful Adam would have remained on earth forever under the test? There seems to be no way for Adam to get out of the test and go to heaven without sinning and dying.

Some interpreters try to bail out of this dilemma by insisting that Adam would have eventually died physically even if he had never sinned, while others believe faithful Adam would have continued living on earth, still subject to the test until the new heavens and earth arrived.

The solution to this dilemma involves two concepts which are taught right here in Genesis, but which have been overlooked by many interpreters. The first is the probation period. Adam was not required to be faithful forever. That would have been "temptation beyond what he was able" (1 Cor. 10:13), and God does not put anyone through that. There was a definite time limit set for his obedience (which we will discuss in the next section). If he remained faithful for that length of time, he would have received his heavenly reward immediately at the end of the probation period.

Secondly, is the concept that Adam's physical body would have been changed or replaced by a new spiritual body without having to shed the physical body by death. If Adam had not sinned, he would not have died physically. He would have continued eating from the Tree of Life which would have extended his physical life until the probationary period was over. Then his physical body would have been "changed" (transformed) and "translated" (caught up) to be with God in heaven without having to experience physical death.

The snatching away of Enoch is a glimpse into what would have happened to Adam if he had not sinned. Adam would have been transformed and translated without having to experience physical death. In Enoch's case,

however, he did not get his new immortal body yet, nor did he get to reside in the highest heaven with God until the rest of the saints would be given that same privilege:

And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect. (Heb. 11:39-40 NASB)

Nevertheless, Enoch did not have to experience physical death in order to enter the unseen spiritual realm, and that is what would have happened to Adam if he had not sinned. He would not have died physically, since the Tree of Life would have sustained him until the end of his probation, at which time he would have been changed and translated to heaven.

Interestingly, this is exactly what some of the rabbis in the *Midrash* commentary on Genesis believed about Adam's ultimate destiny. Note the point that R. Berekiah is making here. He compares Adam to Elijah, and says that Adam would not have died if he had not sinned, implying that he would also have been taken to heaven like Elijah:

...R. Berekiah said in R. Hanina's name: Like Elijah: just as he did not experience the taste of death, so [Adam] too was not meant to experience death [but for his sin (footnote)]... (*Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 21:5)

Adam and Eve could have simply "walked with God and be no more" on one of their daily walks with God in the "cool of the day" like Enoch did. Their "mortal body" would have been "changed" to an "immortal" body without ever experiencing physical death (cf. 1 Cor 15:52-54). They would have simply "put on" immortality and incorruptibility over the top of their mortal body, which would have swallowed up their mortality without having to die (cf. 2 Cor 5:4). If they had successfully passed the probationary period, they would have been "changed" and "taken" to heaven.

The point is that there was another way to get to heaven without physical death, and it makes a lot more sense than believing "perfect" Adam and Eve would have had to eventually die even without sinning, or remain on earth still subject to the test until the new heaven and earth finally arrived. Neither of those ideas would have been an appropriate way to reward their faithfulness. It seems more likely that they would instead have been "changed" and taken to heaven at the end of the probation period.

Some might remind us that the command to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" was given before the Fall. Therefore if there was no physical death before the Fall, and man had never sinned, then there would have eventually been an over-crowding population problem on earth. But this also ignores the ideas of probation period, change, translation, and ultimate heavenly destiny. Man was never destined to remain forever on earth, even without

sinning. He was always destined to go to heaven, even if he passed the probationary test. So if Adam & Eve had continued faithful until the end of the probation period, God would have "changed" their earthly bodies into heavenly (spiritual) bodies, and taken them to heaven. That would have prevented the over-crowding problem on earth.

Others will argue that since Adam was made from dust (cf. Gen. 2:7 and 3:19), he would have automatically returned to dust (Heb. 9:27), and could not have lived forever on earth, even if he had never sinned. First of all, that assertion flies straight in the face of God's statement in Gen. 3:22 that if they ate from the Tree of Life (even after the Fall) they could have lived forever on the earth. Secondly, as we discussed above in the section on ultimate destiny, it was never God's intention to leave either sinless or fallen Adam forever on the earth. There was always a heavenly destiny appointed for him (with or without the Fall). And thirdly, the Tree of Life could easily have sustained a sinless Adam (so he would not have died) until the end of his probation period, at which time two things would have happened: (1) his body would have been "changed" from corruptible into incorruptible (immortal) without experiencing physical death, and (2) he would have been "caught up" like Enoch to live forever in the heavenly Paradise of God:

(1) The Change:

...If Adam had maintained his integrity, the body might have been developed and **transfigured** [i.e., changed], without intervention of death. (Strong 527, boldface mine, ees)

...what would have happened to Adam if he had been obedient. He was created a "natural," "earthly" body, but might have **attained a higher being, the "spiritual," "heavenly" body**, without the intervention of death. (Strong 658, boldface mine, ees)

If Adam stood the test, this life would be retained not only, but would cease to be amissible, and would therefore be **lifted to a higher plane** [i.e., changed to immortal]. (Berkhof 213-214, boldface mine, ees)

(2) The Catching Up:

...after the time of his trial was over, he would have been **transported, soul and body, into the heavenly paradise**, there to abide for ever. He would not have always lived in the earthly paradise, where he was to eat, drink, and sleep, but have been **carried to the celestial paradise**, where the happy inhabitants live as the angels of God. (Boston, Part 2 Thirdly Point 3, boldface mine, ees)

This covenant of works had a promise annexed to it... "Do this and live." In case man had stood, it is probable **he would not have died**, but would have been **translated to a better paradise**.... (Watson 129, boldface mine, ees)

...[Adam before the Fall] was, in every respect, happy; his life, therefore, had alike respect to his body and his soul, since in his soul a right judgment and a proper government of the affections prevailed, there also life reigned; in his body there was no defect, wherefore he was wholly free from death. His earthly life truly would have been temporal; yet **he would have passed into**

**heaven without death, and without injury.** (Calvin, *Commentaries*, on Gen. 2:17, boldface mine, ees)

But alas, Adam sinned, and therefore had to die. His free pass on death was taken away. He was removed from the Tree of Life which would have kept him alive. And so, with no rejuvenating help from the Tree available now, Adam began his descent toward physical death. Before we talk about the kind of death that God threatened, we need to look at the Probationary Period and see if we can discern how long it would have lasted if Adam had been faithful to the end of it.

## 5. The Probationary Period

The purpose of this section is not to prove that there was a probationary test of Adam and Eve (which just about everyone admits), but more importantly to discuss how long that probationary test might have lasted if Adam and Eve had remained faithful to the end of it.

It is easy to see that God tested Adam's obedience with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That was indeed a probationary test. It is amazing that anyone would deny it, yet there are some who do. For a good article affirming the fact of a probationary period, see "Was There a Covenant of Works?" by Justin Taylor (full reference in the Sources Used at the end of the paper).

Adam was placed in the Garden with a covenant to keep (a test of character, or probation). Under the probationary terms of that covenant he was to "cultivate and keep the garden" (Gen 2:15), and to "eat freely" from all the trees including the Tree of Life (Gen 2:16) except the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen 2:17). The prohibition of eating from that one tree had a death-threat attached to it: "*in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.*" Note the phrase "in that day." We will be focusing our attention on that here in this section.

We noted above that if Adam had not sinned, he would not have remained on earth still subject to a perpetual test. There would have been an end to the testing, as Thomas Boston explains:

[Adam's obedience had to be] Perfect in duration or continuance, without interruption, while God [had] him in the state of trial, Gal. 3:10. **This state could not have been for ever, without rendering the promise of life fruitless**; for to make a promise necessarily implies that a time is set for obtaining the reward promised to the obedience; and if Adam was to continue in a perpetual state of trial, he could never have obtained the reward of his obedience. (Boston, Part 2 Secondly Point 2, sub-point 4, boldface mine, ees)

How long would that "state of trial" have lasted if Adam had remained faithful the whole time? Most Christian commentaries, with good reason, are reluctant to speculate on its length, since there does not appear to be

very much clear revelation about it in Scripture. However, when we dig a little deeper into the sub-surface background of Genesis and Jewish tradition, we might be surprised at what is there.

One of the questions that we need to ask in a study like this is, how did conservative orthodox Jewish interpreters before Christ understand Genesis? Although many Christian scholars, with good reason, minimize the value of Jewish concepts, some nuggets of pure gold can often be found there, which makes the effort worthwhile. I believe this topic is a case in point.

When I began to search the Talmud, Midrash, Zohar, Legends of the Jews, Dead Sea Scrolls, Pseudepigrapha, and Jewish commentaries for information about the Genesis account of the Fall of Adam and its consequences, I was amazed at what I discovered.

In this section we will be looking at how Jewish scholars originally understood the length of the probation period. This has not been done by very many conservative Christian theologians. The few who have written on it have been critiqued and marginalized by the Dispensationalists because it does not fit their idea of a renewed physical paradise on earth. However, as we noticed in our first section, it was never God's intention for mankind to dwell forever on the earth. It was always his desire (and eternal plan) to take us to heaven to dwell with him, and with that, many of the Jewish writers will agree.

Some might question why we bother trying to determine what the length of the probation period was supposed to have been, since it seems to be a moot issue now that Adam and Eve failed to remain faithful that long. However, there is a method to the madness. The length of the probation period is directly connected, in Jewish writings at least, with the "day" on which Adam and Eve sinned, and thereby related to the kind of death that they died "in that day" (Gen. 2:16-17). We will look at that connection in our next section. Suffice it to say that there is a significant reason why we are looking at the length of the testing period. It will help us in our study of the kind of death that Adam and Eve died "in the day" they ate from the forbidden fruit.

It is also significant that both Jewish and Christian interpreters use Job 14:5 to show that God has fixed the length of each person's life: "...his days are determined, the number of his months is with You; and his limits You have set so that he cannot pass." On that basis alone, there is reason for believing that the length of Adam's lifespan (his probation period) was fixed in advance by God. This means that the length of the probation period is not only directly related to the length of Adam's lifespan on earth, but also co-terminus with it. So if we can determine from

scripture what the upper limit of Adam's lifespan was, then we will also know what the length of the probationary period was supposed to be.

Jewish sources offer some helpful ideas on all this when they discuss the meaning of the phrase "in the day" found in Gen. 2:16-17 –

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for **in the day** that you eat from it you will surely die." (NASB, boldface mine, ees)

As we shall see below, some Jewish (and Christian) writers say that the "day" mentioned here is one of God's days (i.e., a thousand years), and that if Adam sinned anytime within that one-thousand-year "day" he would also die within that same one-thousand-year "day." This, of course, is difficult for modern western-thinking Christians to wrap their mind around. However, I trust that it will not seem as incredible after we look at how they explain it.

The book of *Jubilees* alludes to the idea that the lifespan of Adam, which was his probationary period, was originally set to be a thousand years (one day in God's time). When Adam sinned, it meant that he would "not complete the years of this day" and would have to die sometime during that one-thousand-year day, i.e., before he reached 1000 years of age. He would not live out his full (probationary) lifespan:

And at the close of the nineteenth jubilee, in the seventh week in the sixth year [930 A.M.] thereof, **Adam** died, and all his sons buried him in the land of his creation, and he was the first to be buried in the earth. **And he lacked seventy years of one thousand years; for one thousand years are as one day in the testimony of the heavens and therefore was it written concerning the tree of knowledge: 'On the day that ye eat thereof ye shall die.' For this reason he did not complete the years of this day; for he died during it.** (*Jubilees* 4:29-31, boldface mine, ees)

On the day of Adam's sin, angels conversed with God about what would happen to Adam now that he had sinned. The *Midrash* on Genesis records that alleged conversation (boldface mine, ees):

*Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 19:8

R. Levi and R. Isaac differed in their interpretation. R. Levi said: [The ministering angels were exclaiming], 'He of the garden is dead [and gone].'**(3)** R. Isaac said: [They exclaimed]: '**Does he still go about!**'**(4)** Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to them: [**He will die**] LE-RUAH HA-YOM,' [**"in the cool of the day"**] i.e. le-rewah ha-yom (after the day's respite): 'behold, I will give him the day's respite. For thus spoke I to him: "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Now ye do not know whether that means one day of Mine or one day of yours. But behold! I will grant him **one day of Mine, which is a thousand years** [Ps. 90:4], and **he will live nine hundred and thirty years** and leave seventy for his children,' as it is written, The days of our years are threescore years and ten (Ps. 90:10).

Note what the Midrash says about the length of time that God originally allocated for the lifespan of Adam. It implies that a "day" of a thousand years was the amount of time God had appointed for him to live on earth. This

implies that he would only be subject to the test for that length of time. If he remained faithful for that length of time, afterwards he would no longer be left on earth. It does not say what would have happened to Adam if he had lived faithfully to the thousand-year mark, but it does imply that a thousand years was the original length of his lifespan on earth if he remained faithful. This implies that the probation period was co-terminus with Adam's appointed lifespan, which was one of God's days (i.e., a thousand years in man's time).

If Adam sinned, that very day (i.e., his lifespan of a thousand years) would be cut short, and he would die "in the cool of the day" (i.e., near the end of the thousand years). Just like God did not come to Adam and Eve until near the end of the day (i.e., "in the cool of the day" which is near sunset), so it seemed to the rabbis that the death sentence would not be executed upon Adam until near the end of the millennial day (God's day).

That is exactly what happened. Adam lived almost the whole millennial day. He died just before the end of it, leaving only a small portion (70 years) unused. God gave Adam almost a full day (in God's time) to live. However, this was only a temporary respite (reprieve, postponement, delay, or "stay of execution") from the death penalty, since death would surely come before the end of his millennial day.

It seems that the book of *Jubilees* and the *Midrashim* were pointing toward a Son of Adam (i.e., the Son of Man, the Last Adam) who would arrive on the scene at the end of 70 generations to complete the final 70 years of Adam's "day" and thus rescue Adam somehow. It is interesting that Luke's genealogy of Jesus designates Him as the 70th generation from Adam. It seems unlikely that was mere coincidence. It is also fascinating that from the birth of Jesus down to the destruction of Jerusalem was 70 years. The book of *Enoch* talks about a great destruction of the wicked by the Son of Adam (Son of Man).

There are at least two more references in the Midrash which contain the same idea about the thousand-year probationary lifespan of Adam: *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 22:1 and 22:2).

Larry Crutchfield, in his analysis of the second century apologist Justin Martyr (Crutchfield 383-385), noted that "at one point in the *Dialogue*, Justin quoted Isaiah 65:17–25 'concerning the millennium' and came to the following conclusion":

Now, by the words, "For as the days of the tree of life, so shall be the days of My people, and the works of their hands shall be multiplied," we understand that a period of **one thousand years** is indicated in symbolic language. When it was said of Adam that "**in the day that he eateth of the tree, in that he shall die** [Gen. 2:17]," we knew he was not a thousand years old. We also believe that the words, "The day of the Lord is as a thousand years [Ps. 90:4; II Pet. 3:8]," also led to the same conclusion. (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue* ch. LXXXI, boldface mine, ees)

It might also be noted that the *Epistle of Barnabas* and some of the apocryphal apocalypses take this same approach to the thousand-year-day concept. So it was not just Jewish writers who believed this. Several Christian writers taught it as well, and they seem to have borrowed the idea from Jewish sources like *Jubilees*, *Enoch*, *Midrash*, and other ancient traditions.

These references show that God originally gave Adam one thousand years to live on earth. That was the length of his probationary period. If he remained faithful to the covenant, he would have lived out the full one thousand years on earth.

This immediately raises the question about what would have happened to Adam if he had remained faithful to the end of the probation period. Would he have died? In previous sections we have noted that Adam, as he kept the covenant faithfully, would have been allowed to continue eating from the Tree of Life, which would have sustained his health and extended his life until he reached the end of the probation. Then he would not have died, but would have been "changed" into his immortal body and taken to heaven. It was never God's plan for Adam to live forever on the earth. There was always an eternal life in heaven destined for His people.

Unfortunately, Adam failed to keep the covenant, and his sin brought with it a whole new set of consequences for his body and his life in this world. It was called "death" and our next section will deal with it.

## **6. The Kind of Death They Died "on that day"**

God warned Adam and Eve that if they ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would die "on that very day." Did they die on that day, and if so, what kind of death was it? We will focus on these two questions in this section.

Because Adam and Eve did not die physically "on that very day," critics have worked overtime ridiculing the Genesis story and blaspheming God for not keeping His Word to kill them on that very day. However, both Jews and Christians have provided several excellent solutions to this overblown dilemma, and we will look at what I believe are the best of those theories.

First, we need to look at the different kinds of death that are mentioned in the Bible, before we start trying to decide which of them is "the death" that Adam and Eve died "in that day." There are at least *three kinds of death* mentioned in Scripture:

1. **PHYSICAL DEATH:** This, of course, is simply dying physically – death of the physical body.
2. **SPIRITUAL DEATH:** This is talking about our condition or status before God (spiritually, morally, judicially, and covenantally) when our relationship to God has been broken by sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were now under condemnation. They no longer stood innocent and righteous in His presence. They were *condemned* (dead in their trespasses and sins) and *separated* from the Garden where they had enjoyed close fellowship with God.
3. **ETERNAL DEATH:** This is eternal conscious punishment in the unseen spiritual realm (after physical death) for the wicked and unredeemed. It is their eternal separation from God in Gehenna after physical death. It is the "second death" (the ultimate destiny of the unredeemed). This would have been the ultimate destiny of Adam and Even unless God had intervened through Christ.

Obviously Adam and Eve did not suffer either physical death or eternal death "on the day" they ate, so that appears to leave only one other kind of death they could have died "on that day" (i.e., spiritual death). However, there are at least four other ideas (down below) that we need to take into serious consideration before we hastily conclude that spiritual death is the only possible solution.

Every interpreter of Genesis 2-3 has struggled with the fact that Eve (in her conversation with the Serpent) apparently understood the threatened death as physical. Even a child can see that upon a superficial reading. It seems very clear both that God indeed threatened physical death, and that Eve definitely understood the threat as physical death.

And it is just as obvious that Adam and Eve already knew what physical death was, before God threatened it, since He did not pause to explain it to them. But did they understand all three of the above kinds of death, and have them all clearly in mind when they were faced with Satan's temptation? Probably not.

Judging from Eve's statements to the Serpent, it does seem apparent that she understood the threatened death as being physical death. Adam and Eve could easily have been aware of animal death outside the garden. Adam and Eve (inside the garden) were able to avoid physical death by eating from the Tree of Life. But that would not have applied to the clean animals inside the Garden, nor to the unclean animals outside the Garden. All animals were made from the dust of the ground, just like Adam was. If they did not have a source of renewal available to them like the Tree of Life, they would eventually have succumbed to the effects of natural mortality (i.e., "the way of all flesh"). Dust would return to dust unless the Tree of Life intervened.

In view of their awareness and understanding of physical death, it would be hard to support the Dispensational view that there was no death of any kind happening inside or outside the Garden before the Fall. If that was the case, we would have to wonder how Adam and Eve understood the idea of "death" at all. And if they did not understand it, God would have needed to explain to them what death was, so that they would fear it and avoid it at all costs. Fear of physical death seems to be the primary reason why Eve avoided eating of the forbidden tree. When that fear was overcome by Satan's lie, she easily gave in to the temptation.

Satan certainly knew what kind of death God had in mind. And he took advantage of Eve's naïveté and innocence. Satan only told part of the truth. This is a classic case of "Don't ask, don't tell." What he said and implied was, "You are not going to die [physically by eating from this tree]," or "Eating from this tree is not going to kill you." However, they would eventually die physically, as an indirect consequence of eating from the forbidden tree, after they were cut off from the Tree of Life. This is what Satan conveniently forgot to tell Eve. This was the deliberate half-truth (total lie) which deceived Eve into eating.

All trees were believed to be "good for food" (except the one which caused "death"), and even that deathly tree was perceived by Eve to be "good for food" after Satan assured her that it was safe to eat it without suffering physical death. So it seems clear that the main kind of death that Eve was concerned about here, was physical death.

Well, they ate from the Knowledge Tree, but they did not die physically "in that day." Since it is apparent that Adam and Eve understood the threat as physical death, and since God surely would not have left them with that impression unless it was the correct understanding, how do we explain the fact that they did not die physically "in that day" as God had threatened?

If God knew in advance (and surely He must have) that they would not die physically "on that day," then why did He threaten to kill them "on that day"? Was it an empty threat? Did God lie, or intentionally deceive them? Was God trying to manipulate or intimidate them into obedience? An omniscient and omnipotent God would not have to resort to such wicked tactics. Was Satan correct (or only half correct) when he told Eve that she would not die (from eating the fruit of that tree)? These are all very serious questions that deserve our best critical thinking and exegetical efforts.

Now that we have a keen sense of the problem, we need to look at some viable solutions. Here are six of the best ones I have seen (one Jewish and five Christian).

### How They Died "on the day they ate"

There is no intention to list every solution that has ever been proposed. We will only deal with the ones which I believe have viable possibilities.

For instance, one of the views we will not recommend for serious consideration is the idea that Adam was created *immortal*, and that "on the day" he sinned, he *died* by losing his immortality and becoming *mortal* (subject to physical death). However, we showed above in the section "What was Adam's original condition when created?" that Adam could not have been immortal before passing the test. In fact, that was the whole point of the probation in the first place. If he kept the covenant faithfully, he would have gained immortality. Immortality is not something that we can lose. Once you have it, it is yours forever. So this definition of death (losing one's immortality) is not a valid possibility for consideration.

Here are the six options, the last of which is a combination view, allowing us to solve the problem using two or more of the first five possibilities. We will begin with the Jewish view, which I deem to be the least probable, but which has some interesting concepts that could be combined with some of the other views. From there we examine some increasingly more helpful views.

#### 1. JEWISH VIEW –

The Jews (based on the book of *Jubilees* and other Rabbinical statements) had a different definition of the "day" here in Gen. 2:17 than the usual 24-hour day. They believed it was one of God's days (i.e., a thousand years), as we discussed in the previous section. If that concept of the "day" is correct, it would mean that Adam and Eve did die physically "on the very day" that they ate the forbidden fruit. So this is one of the viable possibilities that we need to keep in mind. Some Jewish writers would combine this idea with options 2 and 4 below, so that at the Fall, Adam and Eve were *condemned* to die physically, and their loss of the Tree of Life literally began their descent toward physical death. And they have no problem with the "spiritual death" idea either (option 3 below). They believed that the death spoken of here was primarily physical, but certainly had spiritual implications in this life, as well as definite eternal implications in the afterlife.

When we broaden the definition of "day" as Jewish writers have done (i.e., a thousand years), then the threatened "death" could easily have included actual physical death (not just the onset of mortality), since Adam actually did die during the "day" of his one-thousand-year lifespan (probation period).

## 2. BEGAN TO DIE PHYSICALLY –

They became fully mortal "on that day" – not just "able to die," but now destined to die physically, subject to death). This view would say that the "death" threat was actually a "mortality" threat – that God only threatened "mortality" on that day (subject to eventual physical death), not physical death itself.

The physical death sentence was passed upon them that very day. They were condemned that very day to eventually die physically. Because they lost access to the Tree of Life, Adam and Eve *began to die* physically on that day. The full force of their mortality was now engaged, no longer restrained by the Tree of Life, so that physical death now became inevitable.

Physical death was only an indirect consequence of Adam's sin. Adam could still have lived forever physically after the Fall if they had stayed in the Garden and continued eating from the Tree of Life. The only thing that changed physically was their access to the Tree of Life. Indirectly they began to age and die physically because they lost access to the Tree of Life.

Their covenant relationship with God was broken (or died) on that day. They were driven out of the Garden. They no longer had access to the Tree of Life whereby they could have sustained their physical life forever. So, their eventual physical death was the indirect result of their disobedience.

Here is how Matthew Henry explains this particular option:

“...Thou shalt be debarred from the tree of life ... become **liable to death** ... **mortal** and capable of dying ... the harbingers and forerunners of death shall immediately seize thee, and **thy life, thenceforward, shall be a dying life...**” (Henry, comments on Gen. 2:17)

## 3. SPIRITUAL DEATH –

By sinning they immediately died spiritually ("dead in their trespasses and sins" Eph. 2:1), and were under God's condemnation. They were "dead even while they liveth" (1 Tim. 5:6). Or, like the statement of Jesus, "Let the (spiritually) *dead* bury the (physically) dead" (Matt. 8:22). Adam and Eve did not die physically "on that day," but they did die that very day in their relationship to God (spiritually, morally, judicially, and covenantally). They had broken the covenant, and were now under condemnation. They no longer stood innocent and righteous in His presence. They were *condemned* and *separated* from the Garden where they had enjoyed close fellowship with God. The Fall killed Adam and Eve spiritually in their relationship to God. The most important kind of death that Adam suffered "on that day" was spiritual. The focus in redemptive history was on reversing that spiritual death, and the *eternal death* to which it ultimately leads.

#### 4. CONDEMNED TO DIE PHYSICALLY –

Death "on that day" merely meant that "whenever you eat, you are at that very moment under the death penalty, but that penalty may not necessarily be executed on that same day." There was a merciful *stay of execution* until a later date, so that God could bring a redeemer and still accomplish what He had originally set out to accomplish. God exercised His divine prerogative as Judge to delay the execution long enough to accomplish His foreordained plan to create for himself a people for His own possession. If He had executed the guilty pair "on that day," there would have been no one to enjoy His Presence in heaven forever. Satan would have succeeded in defeating the ultimate plans of God. Satan would have held the disembodied souls of Adam and Eve forever separated from God in eternal death (second death) in the Lake of Fire.

This fourth option (stay of execution) makes a lot of sense, because it actually gives a judicial and soteriological reason why God did not physically kill Adam and Eve "on that day." It assumes that physical death was definitely threatened, but that it was delayed by God the Judge for his own judicial and redemptive purposes, as we will explain below. First, we need to define some legal terms:

- (1) *clemency, amnesty, or pardon*: ...one who is granted clemency does not have the crime forgotten, as in amnesty [lit. "not remember"], but is forgiven and treated more leniently for the criminal acts. Clemency is similar to pardon inasmuch as it is an act of grace exempting someone from punishment. ... In theory, an amnesty is granted before prosecution takes place, and a pardon after. ... The granting of a pardon to a person who has committed a crime or who has been convicted of a crime is an act of clemency, which forgives the wrongdoer and restores the person's civil rights. This definition found here: <<http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/>>
- (2) *commutation, or commuted sentence*: ...the substitution of a lesser punishment for a greater one. Contrasted with clemency, which is an act of grace eliminating a sentence or punishment, commutation is the modification or reduction of a punishment. This definition found here: <<http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/>>
- (3) *stay of execution*: a court-ordered delay in inflicting the death penalty... A term during which no execution can issue on a judgment. ... no execution shall issue for a certain period ... A stay of execution postpones the enforcement of a judgment against a litigant who has lost a case. This definition found here: <<http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/>>

God was the injured party in this lawsuit. His right to have the guilty party executed for breaking the covenant could not be taken away. The Law of Sin and Death could not be broken. Clemency, amnesty, pardon, or commutation were out of the question. The full penalty for sin had to be paid, and that penalty was death. It could not be forgiven, forgotten, pardoned, or lessened. However, since God was also the Judge, he had the right to impose a *stay of execution* (delay in the execution of that death penalty). The term of that stay of execution could not be forever. It eventually had to be executed at the end of whatever term the Judge mandated. I believe this idea may partly explain why Adam and Eve were not executed on the day they ate.

This *stay of execution* idea is unacceptable to many interpreters, since it means that God did not carry out His threat to kill them "on that very day." However, when this idea is combined with the next one (Physical Death in the Substitute), that problem is removed completely, as we will see.

Those who contend that this option makes a liar out of God forget that the Judge (God in this case), always reserves the right to delay the execution, at his discretion. However, because the immutable Law of God (i.e., the Law of Sin and Death) was involved, the penalty could not be pardoned nor its severity lessened. The death penalty eventually had to be executed. But the Judge could delay the execution for a definite period of time. It was within God's right to delay the execution, as long as there would eventually come a reckoning day (the final judgment) when the death sentence would finally be executed (i.e., "paid in full"). Jesus, the Son of Adam, and the Son of God, paid that price in full on the Cross.

God was clearly within His legal rights as Judge to allow a "delay of execution" if He wished. That would not be breaking his word. His word would only be broken if he never executed the death penalty. The terms of the covenant threatened death "on the day" that they broke the covenant. Since God is the injured party in that covenant, he certainly was within His rights to demand execution of the death penalty "on that very day." However, the Judge (also God in this case) was also within His rights to delay the execution, if it would better serve Divine justice and His Divine redemptive plan. The time of execution was always at the discretion of the Judge (God). What God could not do, however, was to nullify the death sentence altogether, or lessen its severity. Death still had to be meted out, but on God's schedule and at His discretion and for the accomplishment of His own Divine purposes, and for His own Glory and Kingdom.

Think about this: Who would have benefited if the death penalty had been executed on that very day (Satan or God)? That was exactly what Satan wanted. Satan was not only the *tempter*, but also the *accuser* and the *executioner*. It was his plan to bring God's human creation to ruin. The death of Adam and Eve on that day would have been victory for Satan. God delayed the execution until a substitute could be arranged to pay the penalty for them. This very effectively robbed Satan of His victims and crushed his evil plan.

It was physical death (the first death) that was the doorway to the real death (eternal death, or the second death). They had to die physically first before the eternal death penalty could be executed. But God even delayed the execution of eternal death until a redeemer could come and rescue His elect people from Sheol. So under this theory, God delayed the execution of both physical death and eternal death penalties.

Here is how Gleason Archer explains it:

On the day Adam was disobedient, **the sentence of physical death was imposed**; but by God's grace **the execution of that sentence was delayed**. ...their **execution was to be delayed** for some gracious purpose..." (Archer, comments on Genesis 2:17)

## 5. PHYSICAL DEATH BY SUBSTITUTE –

This is my favorite of all the theories mentioned so far. If I had to pick just one, this would be it. However, when we combine this option with the three previous ones (Began to Die Physically, Spiritual Death, and Condemned to Die Physically), it becomes even more comprehensive and compelling. None of these theories are totally antithetical to all the others. Each of them can work in conjunction with at least one or more of the other options.

When God killed a sacrificial animal to provide skins for Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness, that sacrificial Lamb *died in their place*. They **"died with"** the lamb on that day, and **"put on"** the skin of that lamb to cover their guilt and shame. They also died spiritually, covenantally, or judicially in the sense that they were now condemned, separated, and mortal (subject to death and destined to die). But when the lamb *died physically on that day*, they "died with" it, just like we **"die with" Christ** on the day of our conversion. They "put on" the skins of the sacrificial lamb in the same way we **"put on" Christ** in our conversion, which points forward to the time when we will **"put on" our new immortal bodies** and go to heaven.

We can only imagine the horror that gripped the emotions of Adam and Eve as they watched God slay the sacrificial lamb in front of them "on that day." They saw its death tremors, as the last drops of blood spurted out of its veins, and it died. *Adam and Eve "died with" that lamb on that very day*. They knew that the death which the lamb suffered was what they themselves deserved. The innocent lamb died in their place. They were now fully mortal (subject to death, and destined to die physically). Their souls would go to Sheol or Hades, and their bodies would return to dust permanently. Someday, at the time of the End when the Son of Adam would crush the serpent's head, God would raise their disembodied souls out of Sheol and give them new immortal bodies, with which to live in heaven with Him. The skin of the lamb pointed to their new immortal bodies which God would provide through the death of His Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29, 36). The prophet Isaiah (53:7-8) points to this very thing ("**...like a lamb...cut off...for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due**"). And Revelation 5:6 pictures Christ before the heavenly throne as **"a lamb**

standing as if slain." God provided the sacrificial Lamb for Himself (Gen. 22:8). When we "die with" Him and "put on" the garments of Christ, we are given hope of life in heaven with a new immortal body.

God promised a redeemer, and the sacrificial system was instituted on that very day to bear witness to the coming Son of Adam who would be the Lamb of God to take away the power of sin and death. They "died with" that lamb "on that day," and thus began the redemptive drama through the substitutionary sacrifice system. Adam and Eve still had to die physically, but a human substitute would come to actually die in their place and give them real covering for their spiritual nakedness and the very kind of immortal body that they needed to live in heaven with God. Christ was not just a physical sacrifice. He was also a spiritual sacrifice, slain to provide not only a covering for our guilt and shame here in this life, but also to provide eternal clothing (new immortal bodies like His) to cover our sins forever in heaven. Those skins proved that a sacrificial death had taken place to cover their sin. They were testimony to both their guilt and their forgiveness. They were signs of a covenant based on substitutionary sacrifice.

At least two writers have suggested similar ideas, John Rucker and Darwin Chandler. We will also quote some interesting comments by Adam Clarke which move in this same direction. Here is what Rucker had to say in the *Scripture Research* magazine:

...The obvious question should be, did Adam and Eve actually die a physical death the day they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as God had said? ...God Himself settled the issue for them in Genesis 3:21 (*AV*), where we read: "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them." We might ask, where did God procure the skins with which he clothed Adam and Eve? Did He just find them lying about, ready to hand out for His purpose? The answer is, He took the skins from animals which He obviously *slew* for the specific purpose of clothing Adam and Eve, to cover or atone for their sin. And so the *animals died that day*, INSTEAD or *in place* of Adam and Eve, who were *reckoned to have died physically* in THAT VERY DAY in the death of the sacrificial animals. The animals represented a type of Christ. Just so we too who are alive in this age have been *reckoned* to have died with Christ when he died upon the cross. We are alive now, even as Adam and Eve, who continued to live then in the flesh. This is the first sacrifice revealed in the Bible. The death Adam and Eve were *reckoned to have died that day* was truly a physical death, not a spiritual death, just as the death of the animals was a physical death, not spiritual. And so we find that God is true, and the pundits are in error again. Adam was not created with a spiritual body, but with a soulish or fleshly body, and he will never have or enjoy a spiritual body until subsequent to resurrection. [John Rucker, article entitled, "The Truth of Discipline" found in the *Scripture Research* magazine, Volume 4, Number 10, pages 4-6. Riverside, California USA: Scripture Research Inc. Italics and ALL CAPS were original to Rucker. Downloaded from the *Scripture Research* website on 6/9/2011: <http://www.scriptureresearch.org/SRV4,%20N10.pdf>]

Darwin Chandler affirms the same idea in a lot less words. Notice his emphasis on the idea of a "sacrificial substitute," or "substitute victim," which "represented the death owed by the man":

In harmony with God's preplanned arrangement for atonement, physical death was **required** "in the day" of the sin, and was just as surely **given!** An animal was slain from which clothes were taken in the form of skins. It must be so that the slain animal was the substitute victim for Adam and Eve. Physical death came into Eden "in that day," but it came upon man's sacrificial substitute. When the animal was slain, it **represented** the death owed by the man. [Darwin Chandler. "The Fate of Innocence" (article title) found in the *Expository Review* (vol. 1, no. 10, Oct. 1982) found at the Expository Review website on 6/25/11 -- <http://www.expositoryreview.com/old-ter/backissues/vol01-10-fateof.htm>]

Adam Clarke notes the extreme typological, soteriological and redemptive significance of this occasion for the institution of the sacrificial system. Although he does not affirm that Adam and Eve "died with" the sacrificial substitute "on that day," he does indicate that the animal death was "an emblem and type of that death which should conquer Satan":

*God made coats of skins.* It is very likely that the skins out of which their clothing was made were taken off animals whose blood had been poured out as a sin-offering to God; for as we find Cain and Hebel offering sacrifices to God, we may fairly presume that God had given them instructions on this head; nor is it likely that the notion of a sacrifice could have ever occurred to the mind of man without an express revelation from God. Hence we may safely infer, that as Adam and Eve needed this clothing as soon as they fell, and death had not as yet made any ravages in the animal world, it is most likely that the skins were taken off victims offered under the direction of God himself, and in faith of HIM who, in the fullness of time, was to make an atonement by his death. And it seems reasonable also that this matter should be brought about in such a way that Satan and death should have no triumph, when the very first death that took place in the world was an emblem and type of that death which should conquer Satan, destroy his empire, reconcile God to man, convert man to God, sanctify human nature, and prepare it for heaven. [*Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, comments on Gen. 3:21]

This fifth option offers a realistic solution to the problem of physical death on the very day that they sinned in the garden. Using this substitutionary sacrifice approach, it is easy to see how God was working in all this to accomplish His marvelous plan of redemption. It presents a perfect typological picture of Christ at the very beginning of man's existence.

It is also worth pointing out that the Protoevangelium (Gen. 3:15), God's promise to bring forth a kinsman-redeemer from the seed of Eve who would crush the serpent's head, is further acted out in the substitutionary sacrifice that God performed in front of Adam and Eve. This certainly had to be the beginning of the sacrificial system, and the origin of the sacrificial lamb motif that recurs constantly throughout both old and new testaments. For instance, we see the ram (lamb) caught in a thicket on Mount Moriah, the Passover lamb in Egypt, the statement of John the Baptist about Jesus being the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and preminent of all, that marvelous text in Revelation (5:6) where John saw "a Lamb standing, as if

slain." I am sure that Adam and Eve will recognize that Lamb as the one who was typified to them in the garden on the day that they died with him and put on his skin.

#### 6. COMBINATION of two or more of the above ideas.

I see no reason, in view of the five options above, to lock down on any one of them as the only possible explanation. The best solution may very well be a combination of them, as John Calvin, Adam Clarke, and several other interpreters have done (as we will see below). All five of the above options are in harmony with scripture and sound hermeneutical principles. Even the Jewish solution is compatible with Biblical typology as it is developed throughout both testaments, and could easily work right alongside the other four Christian ideas. So, I see no reason to exclude it as impossible. We are not forced here to take an either/or position. I suspect it is a both/and situation. In fact, as I noted above under option number five, the combination of views two, three, four, and five produces an extremely comprehensive and compelling solution to the problem of no physical death on the day that they ate from the forbidden tree. If I had to pick a combination view that I would feel totally comfortable with, then it would at least include options two, three, four, and five (especially).

Adam and Eve did not personally suffer physical death, nor eternal death "on that day", but they did begin to die physically (option 2), and died spiritually in their relationship with God (option 3), and were condemned to eventually die, with the execution of that physical death delayed until the final judgment (option 4). But most significantly of all, they physically "died with" the sacrificial lamb on that very day (option 5). In addition, if we define "in the day" the same way the Jewish writers do (as one thousand years), then Adam and Eve definitely died physically "on that day" (option 1).

Below I have listed several authors who take a *combination* approach, along with a quote of their comments about it. In the heading for each one, I note the particular options (e.g., options 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) which that author uses in his combination (look at Calvin especially):

#### **NET Bible Notes: (Combination of options 2, 3, 4)**

Regarding the phrase "in that day" in Genesis 2:17, the *NET Bible Notes* make the following remarks.

Notice how it combines three of the options above, showing how they are all viable for consideration.

If one understands the expression to have this more precise meaning ["in the very day, as soon as"], then the following narrative presents a problem, for the man does not die physically as soon as he eats from the tree. In this case one may argue that **spiritual death** is in view. If physical death is in view here, there are two options to explain the following narrative: (1) The following phrase "You will surely die" concerns **mortality** which **ultimately results in death** (a natural

paraphrase would be, “You will become mortal”), or (2) God mercifully **gave man a reprieve**, allowing him to live longer than he deserved. (boldface mine, ees)

**Keil & Delitzsch: (Combination of options 2, 4)**

Formed out of the dust, he shall return to dust again. This was the fulfillment of the threat, “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” which **began to take effect immediately** after the breach of the divine command; for not only did man then become mortal, but he also actually **came under the power of death**, received into his nature the germ of death, the maturity of which produced its **eventual dissolution into dust**. The reason why the life of the man did not come to an end immediately after the eating of the forbidden fruit, was ... that **the mercy and long-suffering of God afforded space for repentance**, and so controlled and ordered the sin of men and the punishment of sin, as to render them **subservient to the accomplishment of His original purpose and the glorification of His name**. (Keil and Delitzsch, comments on Gen. 3:19) (boldface mine, ees)

**John Calvin: (Combination of options 2, 3, 4)**

But it is asked, what kind of death God means in this place? It appears to me, that the definition of this death is to be sought from its opposite; we must, I say, remember from what kind of life man fell. He was, in every respect, happy; his life, therefore, had alike respect to his body and his soul, since in his soul a right judgment and a proper government of the affections prevailed, there also life reigned; in his body there was no defect, wherefore he was wholly free from death. His earthly life truly would have been temporal; yet **he would have passed into heaven without death, and without injury**. Death, therefore, is now a terror to us; first, because there is a kind of **annihilation, as it respects the body**; then, because **the soul feels the curse of God**. We must also see what is the cause of death, namely **alienation from God**. Thence it follows, that under the name of death is comprehended all those miseries in which Adam involved himself by his defection; for as soon as he revolted from God, the fountain of life, he was **cast down from his former state**, in order that he might perceive the life of man without God to be wretched and lost, and therefore differing nothing from death. Hence the condition of man after his sin is not improperly called both the privation of life, and death. The miseries and evils both of soul and body, with which man is beset so long as he is on earth, are a kind of entrance into death, till death itself entirely absorbs him; for the Scripture everywhere calls those dead who, being oppressed by the tyranny of sin and Satan, breath nothing but their own destruction. Wherefore the question is superfluous, how it was that God threatened death to Adam on the day in which he should touch the fruit, when he long **deferred the punishment**? For then was Adam **consigned to death, and death began its reign in him**, until supervening grace should bring a remedy. (Calvin, *Commentaries*, on Gen. 2:17, boldface mine, ees)

**Adam Clarke: (Combination of options 2, 3)**

Note how Clarke uses "mortal" in its fullest sense, i.e., subject to physical death, destined to die physically:

*Thou shalt surely die.* twmt twm *moth tamuth*; Literally, a death thou shalt die; or, dying thou shalt die. Thou shalt not only **die spiritually**, by losing the life of God, but from that moment thou shalt **become mortal**, and shalt **continue in a dying state till thou die**. This we find literally accomplished; every moment of man's life may be considered as an act of dying, till soul and body are separated. (Clarke, commentary on Gen. 2:17) (boldface mine, ees)

## CONCLUSION

So, what is my solution to the "death on that very day" dilemma? I like the combination of options 2, 3, 4, and 5, with the emphasis on option 5. I would have no objection to the Jewish view (option 1) combined in with the other four options, as long as option 5 is the emphasis and focus. I really believe the "physical death by substitute" idea (option 5) is the key piece of the puzzle. Once that is in place, the rest of the pieces work very well with it.

Adam was created "mortal" (able to die), but as long as he continued to be faithful he would not have died physically or spiritually. If he had successfully passed the probation, he would have been "taken" to heaven without having to experience physical death. Even though Adam failed the test, God still ordained a way to save his people and ultimately take them to heaven. The reason God removed them from having access to the Tree of Life, was so that they would not live physically forever on earth in a condemned state. This was an act of mercy on God's part.

God who is rich in His mercy and grace, did not execute either the physical or the eternal death sentences upon them that very day, even though He had every right to do so. On that very day, the sentence of death (physical and eternal) definitely passed upon them, but it was not fully carried out that very day. Execution of the physical death sentence was delayed so that man could be sanctified and prepared for eventual life in heaven. At physical death they would be sent to Sheol, the place of eternal separation, but they would not have to stay there forever. Eventually a Kinsman-Redeemer (the Son of Adam, Son of David, Son of God, and "seed of woman" Gen. 3:15) would come to atone for their sin, resurrect them out of Sheol, and take them to heaven.

Christ paid the penalty for spiritual death, so that we could escape eternal death. Christ made it possible to escape the spiritual and eternal aspects of death, but not the physical death. We still have to die physically because of our own individual sin (not Adam's). The wages of sin is death (i.e., the law of sin and death). But the spiritual and eternal death consequences of that sin have been covered by the Cross of Christ. Death no longer reigns over us. We no longer have fear of death. Death is now the doorway to eternal life. Praise the Lord!

### **The Law of Sin and Death**

The reader who remains unconvinced by the previous discussion about the kind of death threatened against Adam and Eve, might legitimately ask: "If Christ died in our place, then why do Christians still have to die physically?" This is an extremely important question, which every systematic theology needs to deal with. But alas, few of them ever answer it clearly and convincingly. For what it is worth, here is my answer to the question:

Christians no longer die because of Adam's sin, but rather because of our own individual sin. This has to do with the Law of Sin and Death which applies to every man, not just to Adam.

The Law of Sin and Death is summed up by the principle that if you sin, you will die. No escape, no excuses, no avoidance. It is an unconditional Law with no exceptions. Anyone who sins, must die physically. Sin leads to death. Sin demands death, and necessitates death. Sin is the serpent's bite and venom that leads to death. No escape. The venom of that serpent will lead to physical death irreversibly and inescapably.

This Law of Sin and Death was a permanent fixture in God's relationship with mankind from the very beginning. We see it set up with Adam in the Garden with regard to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. "If you eat (sin), you will die (physically)."

The Law of Sin and Death was very much like the unbreakable "decrees" of Nebuchadnezzar and the "Law of the Medes and Persians." Those laws could not be overlooked or waived. They had to be executed. We see this explicitly illustrated twice in the book of Daniel, in chapters three and six.

The "decree" of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:10, 15, 28) required Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to be put in the fiery furnace because they would not worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Nebuchadnezzar tried to get them off the hook by giving them a second chance to worship the image, but they would not do it. So, Nebuchadnezzar had no choice but to obey the law and put Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in the fiery furnace. But God kept them from being harmed by the fire. So the law was kept, but God rescued his people from the fiery consequences.

The same is true about Daniel and the lion's den. The government officials tricked King Darius into signing a formal injunction ("according to the law of the Medes and Persians") against anyone who prayed to any other god or man besides Darius for thirty days. If they broke that "law of the Medes and Persians" they would unavoidably have to be put into the lion's den (Dan. 6:7-9, 12-15). There was no escape. King Darius tried to find some loophole in the law and rescue Daniel from the lions, but there was no getting around it. The law was unavoidable and inescapable.

Since Daniel continued praying to the God of Israel, he therefore had to be thrown into the lion's den. But God protected him and shut the lions' mouths. The unbreakable law of the Medes and Persians was kept when Daniel was put into the lion's den, but God kept Daniel safe from being harmed by the lions.

Both of these incidents are types of the kind of deliverance that Jesus Christ accomplished for us when He died for our sins. We still have to die physically because of the unbreakable Law of Sin and Death. However, that is only the first death. There is nothing about the second death mentioned in the Law of Sin and Death.

Sin in the flesh leads to death of the flesh, but it does not necessarily lead to the second death (eternal separation from God in the Lake of Fire). Because Jesus paid for those sins by His death on the Cross, we are now reconciled to God, and protected from the fiery furnace and the lion's den (the second death) that Satan has waiting for all those who are not in Christ.

Because of Jesus' death on the Cross, His blood now covers our sin and relieves us from the ultimate "power of sin and death" that Satan had over us. Satan can no longer separate us from God and hold us captive in Hades forever after we die physically. Jesus broke the bars of Hades and set the captives free. Jesus legally (forensically, judicially) cannot stop us from dying physically (i.e., like being put into the lion's den and fiery furnace), but He can strip the Second Death (i.e., like the lion's den and the fiery furnace) of its power to separate us and harm us.

We still have to die physically because of the STING of death (which is sin). But we are no longer subject to the POWER of that sin to separate and destroy us forever in the Lake of Fire. That is why we no longer fear physical death like the saints before Christ did. We no longer have to be separated into Hades and face ultimate destruction in the Lake of Fire like they did. Christ has delivered us from the power of physical death to separate us and destroy us. Physical death no longer has that power over us. God saved Daniel and his three friends from physical death as a type of the spiritual salvation Christ would bring through His death for us.

Sin still leads to physical death, and it always will, since it is one of God's Laws which cannot be broken, waived aside, or nullified. It is an eternal law that still applies to every man, even after the Cross and the Parousia. But Jesus has stripped that Law of its power to separate us and harm us in the unseen realm after physical death. Sin still causes our physical death, but Christ rescued His blood-covered saints from the Second Death by raising his pre-70 saints out of Hades in AD 70, and by preventing post-70 saints from going to the Lake of Fire (the Second Death). We still have to die physically (the first death, according to the Law of Sin and Death), but we no longer dread death, because the power of sin and death to separate and destroy us has been taken away by Christ at the Cross. It cannot separate and destroy us in the afterlife. Physical death is all it can do. Physical death is no longer our enemy, because it is no longer the doorway into disembodiment, eternal separation in Hades, and eternal

condemnation and punishment in the Lake of Fire. For the saints in Christ, physical death is now the gateway to life in Paradise with our new immortal bodies. We have the victory over physical death. It has been stripped of its power over us beyond the grave.

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