

# The Provocation *and* Provision



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Genesis 1–3.*

**Memory Text:** “Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’” (*Genesis 3:9, NKJV*).

**A** toy company produced a doll called Cindy Smart that spoke five languages, read well, told time, and could do simple math. Cindy was the first doll that would do what it was told. Those who first met Cindy were a little spooked. How could a doll do all these things?

The answer is good computer programming, a 16-bit microprocessor in the belly, and an optical scanner that allows it to recognize numbers or letter-shaped objects. In many ways Cindy Smart was just an advanced version of Chatty Cathy, one of the first pull-string dolls that could *speak*.

Yet, no matter how complicated or even intricate Cindy Smart is, the doll is still just a computer, programmed to do what it's told. Free will is not an option for Cindy, no matter how *smart* the doll is.

In contrast, we're not just quantitatively different from Cindy in that we can say more, but qualitatively different: We have been given moral freedom, something totally alien to Cindy. This issue of free will is the crucial difference, one that gets to the heart of the matter as we look at the rise of sin—and its cure.

**The Week at a Glance:** **Why, in order to love God, must we be free? Why must freedom entail the possibility to do wrong? How did God respond to the fall of Adam and Eve?**

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 1.*

## To Love God

**Read the following texts: Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, John 15:9-11. What are they all admonishing us to do, and why must we have freedom, moral freedom, in order to obey?**

Students of the Bible are familiar with the record that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He was not dependent on preexisting matter or conditions. He brought everything into being by His word, His *logos*, which is the expression of His mind (*Ps. 33:6, 9; John 1:1-3*). Infinitely perfect Himself, He made everything flawless and beautiful. God is love, and everything He does is consistent with His perfect love and infinite wisdom. Upon His intelligent beings He bestowed the noble attributes of personal individuality and freedom of choice. But choice, by its very nature, involves the option of choosing between right and wrong. Hence, the risk of human rebellion was there from the beginning.

At the same time, God desires us to have personal, mutually satisfying fellowship with Him (*Ps. 36:5-10*). He also endows us with wisdom, knowledge, love, and the capacity for joy. These relational qualities can have real existence only in beings who have freedom of will, something not found in Cindy Smart.

**When was the last time you ever heard of a happy computer, a joyous PC, or a loyal and loving laptop? Why can't these things, which can do amazing intellectual feats, ever be happy, loving, or loyal?**

To love God, we have to be free. It's as simple as that. Love cannot exist without moral freedom, and moral freedom can't exist without the capacity to do wrong.

“God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34.

**A science-fiction story is told about a man who, having lost his wife, had her replaced by a robot that looked, talked, felt, and acted exactly as his wife did. If he hadn't known any better, he would have had no idea that this wasn't she. In the end, however, he sent her away, because the experience wasn't the same. What do you think was missing, and what does that have to do with the day's study?**

## Satan's Defection *(John 8:44).*

**Scripture** informs us that Lucifer rebelled against God. What factors led him to choose this path of opposition, and with what effect? *Isa. 14:12-14, Ezek. 28:14-17.*

Lucifer, Ellen White tells us, gradually becoming self-infatuated, withdrew from loving his Creator and began to covet supreme power and authority. Jealous of Christ, who is the Creator and coequal with the Father (*Heb. 1:1-3*), Lucifer began a campaign of subversion, maliciously insinuating that God was autocratic, His laws arbitrary, and His expectation of worship and service from the creation unreasonable. Ingratitude, egotistic ambition, self-love, covetousness, dissatisfaction, hostility, deceit, malice, and a craving for worship and power were the fruits of Lucifer's pride. God created Lucifer a perfect being without any propensity toward moral confusion or failure. Yet, as a free moral agent, Lucifer was at liberty to diverge from harmony with the God who brought him into existence and gave him his exalted station.

Attitudes and actions, of course, have consequences. Departure from God's law is sin (*1 John 3:4*), and the wages of sin are death (*Rom. 6:23*). Lucifer was "full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty," "perfect in [his] ways" from the day he was created (*Ezek. 28:12, 15*). He dwelt in the very presence of God as the anointed cherub, the chief communicator of divine revelations to the universe. Thus, he stood entirely without excuse for his seditious estrangement from the Lord. Through his crafty misrepresentation of God, Lucifer (renamed Satan, or "adversary," after his fall) seduced one-third of the angelic host into siding with him (*Rev. 12:4*).

Satan's representation of God and His way could not be treated as acceptable. Truth and righteousness are not a matter of subjective opinion but of absolute, unalterable revelation that shapes character and conduct.

**"In great mercy, according to His divine character, God bore long with Lucifer. The spirit of discontent and disaffection had never before been known in heaven. It was a new element, strange, mysterious, unaccountable. Lucifer himself had not at first been acquainted with the real nature of his feelings; . . . yet he did not dismiss them. He did not see whither he was drifting. But such efforts as infinite love and wisdom only could devise, were made to convince him of his error. . . . He was made to see what would be the result of persisting in revolt."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 39. Notice: An all-wise, all-powerful God would not forcibly stop Lucifer's moral slide. Why not? What does that tell us about the sanctity of moral freedom?**

## Satan's Earthly Exile

**Read** Luke 10:18, Revelation 12:4-9. What happened to Satan after his rebellion in heaven?

Revelation 12:12 tells those on earth to beware, because the devil has come down to us having great wrath. And though that warning was given in the context of the Cross and the doom that the Cross spelled for Satan, the Eden story nevertheless presents us with a prototype, a model, on how the devil, who “deceiveth the whole world” (*vs. 9*), works to deceive each of us even now.

**Read** Genesis 3:1. Compare it with Genesis 2:16, 17. What ploy did Satan use to set his trap?

How fascinating that Satan used a mixture of truth and error. He took a direct command from God and simply rephrased it in a way that sounded almost as if he were repeating what God said, only he put a different spin on it. In other words, he mixed just enough truth with error in order to make it sound right.

**Read** Genesis 3:2,3. What does it say about Eve's knowledge of God's command and, thus, her responsibility for her action?

Though deceived (*1 Tim. 2:14*), Eve, by her words, showed that she knew what God had told her to do. That's a powerful lesson for us: We could save ourselves a lot of heartache, sin, and deception if we simply obeyed the clear commands of God, no matter how much we might not understand a certain situation or all the variables in it. Deplorable as Eve's sin was, Adam transgressed with eyes wide open. Even amid their ignorance, they could have saved themselves from deception simply by obeying God, trusting that His way was the best way, even when they didn't fully understand it.

**Read** Genesis 3:6. What were the things about the tree that led Eve to disobey? What principles were at work there? How are these same principles manifested today?

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**“Ayecah”?** (*Gen. 3:6-23*).

Bewitched by Satan’s subtle and not-so-subtle lies, the human race fell. Instantly, the whole relationship between heaven and earth changed. The paradigm of Paradise radically shifted. The harmony, the peace, and the balance of Eden shattered. At that moment, the history of the universe altered. Satan’s rebellion, once confined only to himself and the fallen angels, had now gained a foothold in a new world. The issues at stake had become momentous.

**Read Genesis 3:9. What is the first thing that the Bible records as said by God to fallen humanity, and why are those words so important even for us today? What do we see foreshadowed in them?**

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The Hebrew word *ayecah* translates into “Where are you?” Thus, the first thing that God communicates to His fallen creatures is a question, a question that, in a sense, He has been asking ever since. He doesn’t ask it in order to know; He asks it in order to force Adam and Eve to confront what they had done.

“Ayecah?” What we see here is not a condemnation but already the first of what will be endless pleas to Adam and Eve and all of their descendants to acknowledge their sinful position, to acknowledge their need, and to acknowledge that God is here to save them.

“Ayecah?” God comes to them. God is seeking them out. Though we often view Genesis 3:15 as the first gospel promise, already here, in this simple question, “Ayecah?” we see the beginning of what will end only at the close of probation: the Lord seeking us out and taking the initiative to save us.

**Read the following texts: John 3:16, Rom. 8:3, Gal. 4:4, 1 John 4:10. In what way do they reflect what we’ve seen in Genesis 3:9? What principle do we see in these verses, and how have you experienced this principle in your own life?**

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## God's Intervention and Gospel Foreshadowed *(Gen. 3:15)*.

Almost immediately after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they recognized their fatal mistake. A chill crept over their cold souls, and they knew that something vital had died within them. Their beautiful garments of light and glory, exhibiting their natural harmony with God, disappeared (*Gen. 3:7*). As they stood naked and ashamed, gone was their customary joy over God's daily visit with them for fellowship and instruction (*vs. 8*).

**How** did Adam and Eve attempt to cover their nakedness? *Gen. 3:7*. **What spiritual lesson does this point to, concerning mere human effort to remedy the effects of sin and improve our moral condition?** *Isa. 64:6, Rom. 10:3*. **How was this same principle seen in Cain's offering?** *Gen. 4:3*.

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The fall of Adam and Eve hadn't taken God by surprise. No sooner did they fall and no sooner had He gotten a confession from both of them (*Gen. 3:12, 13*), then He proceeded to give them the great hope found in Genesis 3:15, understood as the first gospel promise.

**Read** Genesis 3:15. **What is it saying that offers the fallen couple hope against the serpent?** *See also Rom. 16:20, Eph. 6:11, 2 Tim. 2:26, Heb. 2:14, 1 John 3:8, Rev. 20:10*.

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Notice, too, how, when dealing with the serpent, the Lord asked no questions and sought for no confession (*Gen. 3:14*). He simply condemned the serpent while, in the next verse, He offered the promise of hope to Adam and Eve. This promise included the termination of sin and its originator, Satan. Thus, the glory of God's everlasting gospel was disclosed in this judgment setting, a setting in which He definitively reveals the mysteries of His will and the marvels of His grace.

**How would you respond to the charge, "Why was God so harsh with Adam and Eve? After all, what did they do other than eat a piece of fruit?" What is being missed in this charge?**

**Further Study:** Read Joshua 24:15, Job 1:6-12, 38:4-7, Revelation 22:17, and Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 33–43.

“God permitted Satan to carry forward his work until the spirit of disaffection ripened into active revolt. It was necessary for his plans to be fully developed, that their true nature and tendency might be seen by all. . . .

“It was therefore necessary to demonstrate before the inhabitants of heaven, and of all the worlds, that God’s government is just, His law perfect. Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe. The true character of the usurper and his real object must be understood by all. He must have time to manifest himself by his wicked works. . . .

“Had he been immediately blotted out of existence, some would have served God from fear rather than from love. . . . For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, he must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, and that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might be forever placed beyond all question.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 41, 42.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① Dwell carefully and prayerfully on the last sentence in the Ellen White quote above. What is she saying? What do these words tell us about the character of God? From a human perspective, with so much suffering and anguish, wouldn’t it have been better for God simply to have destroyed Satan from the start? If not, why not?
- ② Compare Genesis 3:15 with Revelation 12:17. What parallels do you see? What message is in there for us, today?
- ③ What lessons are there for us in the fact that sin could arise in such a perfect environment as heaven?

## “Make Me a Muslim Again!”

by Barbara Huff

Almira was born into a Muslim family in Russia. A few years ago Almira’s nine-year-old son became ill with severe allergies to almost everything. Almira took the boy to many doctors, but they could not help him. Someone suggested that she go to Nizhney Novgorod, a city some distance away, to seek medical help.

When they arrived in the city, Almira heard about evangelistic meetings being held nearby. Curious, she and her son attended. She heard that a baptism was scheduled, and again she decided to go, just to watch.

While the two stood beside the river watching the baptism, Almira’s son screamed, “Mama, get baptized, and I will be well!” Almira tried to quiet the boy, but he continued shouting for her to be baptized.

Those helping with the baptism heard the boy shouting about baptism and assumed that Almira had come to be baptized too. Almost before Almira realized what was happening, someone had put a white robe on her and was leading her toward the river. She was too stunned to resist.

When she realized the magnitude of what was happening, her heart was hardened and she became upset. She didn’t say anything to those who were leading her to be baptized, but in her heart she prayed, *OK, if there is Anyone in heaven, heal my son. My son says that if I’ll be baptized, You will heal him.* She says this was not a humble prayer, but a prayer of anger.

After the baptism Almira and her son returned home. That night she started crying. “God, I don’t want to be a Christian,” she said. “Make me a Muslim again.”

That night she dreamed that she saw Jesus coming back to earth to take His children home. She had never heard of the Second Coming, nor had she ever held a Bible or a Koran in her hands. She wondered what her dream meant.

Three days later her son was completely well.

With her reluctance now gone, Almira studied the Bible with the pastor and became an active, dedicated Seventh-day Adventist in her home church.

Usually God speaks with a still, small voice, but sometimes He works through a child’s screams to get a person’s attention!

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