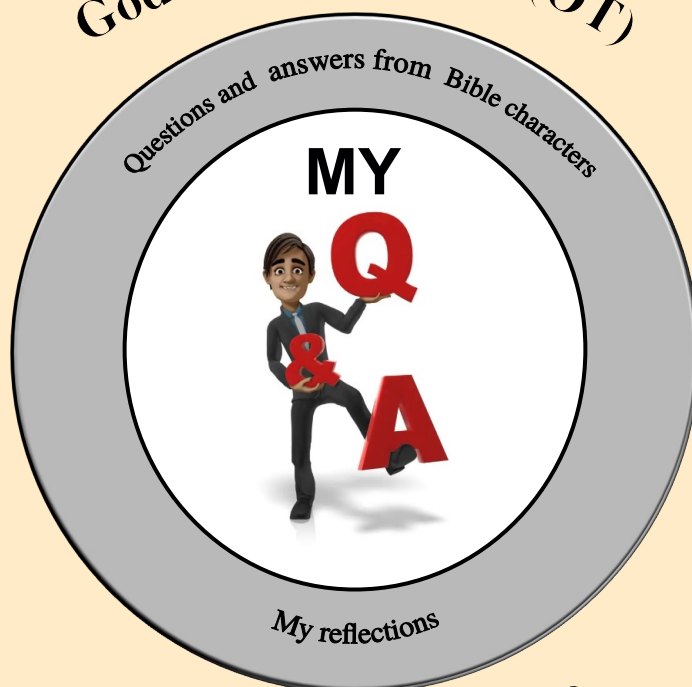




3



God's first question (OT)



Adam, where are you?

Introduction

This third MyQ&A paper investigates the first question in the Bible that was asked by God of man:

They heard the voice of the Lord God moving about in the garden in the cool (ruah) of the day (yom), and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:8-9).

God’s first question

The question follows Adam and Eve eating of the forbidden fruit and where God is described as moving about in the garden in the “cool of the day”. This traditional translation, “in the cool of the day,” became commonplace in the 16th century. However, The phrase “in the cool of the day” (*leruah hayyom*) does not occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible ([Chandler](#)). So, at this point I might ask a good question of my own. If the traditional translation is relatively recent, is there a better one?

Chandler again points out that several of the words in the passage can be translated in different ways depending on the context. For example, *ruah* can mean spirit, wind, or breeze; *qol* has a wide range of options referring to different types of sound (voice, crashing, thunder, etc.); and though *yom* typically refers to a “day,” there is also a connection to the Akkadian cognate *umu*, which can be translated both as “day” and “storm.”

[Niehaus](#) has shown several potential verses that could be better understood with *yom* taking on the Akkadian meaning “storm” (Isaiah 28:7, Zephaniah 2:2, Song of Songs 2:17, Genesis 3:8). The final word with a significant semantic domain is *hlk*, which occurs here as a hithpael participle and is usually translated as “walking” or “walking about.” However, other passages use *hlk* to reference iterative movement of some sort.

On this basis Niehaus proposes a different rendering of Genesis 3:8, as follows:

“Then the man and his wife heard the thunder (qol) of Yahweh God as he was going back and forth (hlk) in the garden in the wind (ruah) of the storm (yom) and they hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8).

A question of translation

This fits the atmosphere of the scene, where God is holding sinners to account and delivering a verdict of judgment to banish Adam and Eve from paradise. As Chandler adds, [Walton](#) shows that the only other time the words *ruah* and *qol* occur together, is in the roaring of thunder, the flashing of lightning, and the noise of wind and rain (Jeremiah 10:13, 51:16).

Hebrew	Traditional Translation	Proposed Alternative
קול (<i>qol</i>)	Sound	Thunder
מתהלך (<i>halak</i>)	Walking	Going back and forth
לרוח היום (<i>ruah yom</i>)	Cool of the day	Wind of the Storm

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A question of translation continued

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While the Niehaus' translation has its critics, none seem to be able to undermine it. Indeed, if you look at various Jewish translations of the text, such as [The Contemporary Torah](#), JPS, 2006, [The Complete Tanakh](#), and [The Israel Bible](#), you will notice that they are not identical but uniformly close to the traditional translation. So, if the critics have failed to show that the traditional reading can stand on its own merit, it's worth serious considering an alternative.

Sound of surprise

Adam hears the 'sound' of the Lord God in the garden. This is not the sound of someone walking in the Garden, but a sound that comes from all directions at once, so Adam is confronted with the inescapable presence of God. It was 'surround sound' as we say today, and Adam cannot obliterate the evidence of God's presence. He can attempt to hide, but God knows every secret place. The first lesson of this verse is that real escape from God's creation is a figment of addictive imagination ([Moen](#)).

Further, we may at first blush think that God's question "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) is about location. But 'where' in this context is not about location, but rather expresses surprise, because Adam is not found in the expected place, namely, by God's side. It was more like "What's happened? You're supposed to be here, with me" ([Moen](#)).

Hiding from God

When Adam and Eve realise that God is looking for them, they hide (Genesis 3:8-10). The last text in the Bible where people try to hide from God is Revelation 6:15-17, under the judgment of the sixth seal. There they hide in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, hiding from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. But there is no hiding? As Jeremiah put it, *Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord* (Jeremiah 23:24).

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Instead of hiding *from* God, it's best to hide *in* God. As the Psalmists said it so well:

*You are my **hiding** place; you protect me from distress. You surround me with shouts of joy from those celebrating deliverance. Selah* (Psalm 32:7). *You are my **hiding** place and my shield. I find hope in your word* (Psalm 119:114).

Note that Adam does not say, "Here I am." for the common Hebrew expression has overtones of obedience. "Here I am ready to serve you," is probably a close idiomatic equivalent. Adam is not ready to serve. He is trying to hide. He is not available to God at all.

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The naked truth

Afraid

Notice why Adam seeks to hide. “I was afraid,” he said, expressing the Hebrew as past. But, says [Moen](#), the word is imperfect meaning a continuous incomplete action. It does not suggest that at some time in the past Adam was afraid, but rather he is afraid at the very moment when God expresses surprise. In fact, Adam’s psychological experience with fear has been present to him ever since he ate the fruit.

What is under the surface of the Hebrew text, completely lost in translation, is the interplay of past and future. Adam’s current fear was generated from his past and is an announcement of his future. He already projects what he will continue to do—be afraid, and hide. Adam’s entire psychological environment has shifted. He has changed from the inside out. The old Adam, the one created as God’s regent in the world, is gone. There has been a change in the human constitution, an act of conscious disobedience, a choice that moved him out of innocence into self-conscious awareness of the power of desire over obligation. There is no return. Adam now knows what it means to be afraid—constantly. Suddenly the Garden is no longer safe.

Nakedness

Further, he is naked. Adam hid himself through fear of his nakedness. However, the nakedness in Genesis 3.7 is different from the nakedness of Genesis 2.25. Indeed, the word itself is different:

*And the man and his wife were both naked (**arom**), and were not ashamed (Genesis 2.25).*

*Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked (**erom**); and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths (**chagowr**) for themselves (Genesis 3.7).*

The common interpretation of their nakedness is bodily, that is sexual, and that the pair were now ashamed of it as they looked at their naked bodies, whereas before their sin they were not. However, there is absolutely nothing in the narrative about this at all. Nakedness is not negative here for it was part of God’s ‘good’ creation, and was a ‘natural’ condition of human beings. Clearly, after their sin, nakedness is associated with knowledge and with shame, a consciousness of guilt, a nakedness of soul ([Toler](#)). What has changed is their relationship with God as the serpent promised:

God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3.5).

As [Pett](#) says, their response to their nakedness is not said to have had anything to do with sexual awareness, and the fig leaves were not said to be placed delicately over their private parts. Rather what they wanted to do was to hide themselves, to cover themselves totally, for they were afraid of God. So, Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. Clearly the issue is not about outward appearance ([Moen](#)). Is not their situation akin to those of Moses and Elijah?

“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3:6).

The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord. Look, the Lord is ready to pass by. When Elijah heard it, he covered his face with his robe and went out and stood at the entrance to the cave (1 Kings 19:11, 13).

Is this not what God pointed out to Moses: *You cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live (Exodus 33:20)?* It seems to me, then, that if there was any part of their anatomy that Adam and Eve should have covered it was their eyes, because it was their eyes that were opened to see things, to understand things of good and evil that they had never known before.

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Moreover, Adam's nakedness is also an immediate psychological reality. He is naked. Adam hid himself through fear of his nakedness. But hadn't the fig leaves done their job? They would have covered physical nakedness, but it was not physical nakedness causing Adam to hide, but the nakedness of conscious brought about by his disobedience. For the first time in his life he is feeling vulnerable, aware of a threat to his existence. Panic and fear have set in ([Pett](#)). That's why he hides! As the writer to Hebrews states it:

*There is no creature hidden from His sight,
but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4:13).*

God now asks a second question: **Who told you that you were naked?** but Adam never answers that question and so never identifies the serpent? God now asks a third question: **Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?**

Adam retreats to blaming others for his fear. Moreover, he thought more of his psychological nakedness and shame than of his transgression of the divine command. His consciousness of the effects of his sin was keener than his sense of the sin itself. To awaken the latter God said, "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" and asked him whether he had broken His command. He could not deny that he had, but sought to excuse himself by saying, that the woman whom God gave to be with him had given him of the tree. God now asks a fourth question: **What is this that you have done?** Eve pleaded as her excuse the serpent had deceived her.

Moreover, in offering these excuses, neither of them denied the fact. But the fault in both was, that they endeavoured to throw the blame upon others as tempters, and then upon circumstances which God has ordained rather than repent of their own sin ([Keil & Delitzsch](#)).

What Adam refuses to see is that he is his own worst enemy. God's concern with Adam is not "Why did you sin?" because God never asked that question. God's concern is rather about Adam's personal psychological well-being. "Who told you?" is not an examination of guilt but rather an expression encouraging self-reflection and self-revelation. If only Adam would realise that he is the one who is telling himself that he is exposed and threatened, then perhaps restitution can begin.

But Adam does not take this path. Instead, he retreats to rationalisation not restitution, and his inner state of fear is not diminished. God demonstrates grace anyway. He clothes the couple. But the trauma has taken hold—and so it grips each of us ([Moen](#))

Conclusion

This MyQ&A paper discussed the first question that God asked the first man: *"Where are you?"*

We know that, having disobeyed God, the eyes of Adam's understanding were opened and his entire psychological environment shifted. He was permanently changed from the inside out. When God came enquiring as to his whereabouts, he was afraid of God and went into hiding covering himself so that he could not look on God. But God ripped off his mask of fig leaves.

Adam's one disobedient act was devastating. He and Eve were banned from the garden and distant from God. Far from becoming more like God as the serpent deceptively promised, they became less like Him and more isolated from Him, in an environment that was less productive and less safe.

The silver lining was the promised victory of the woman's descendant over the serpent. God is ever gracious in seeking man's restitution. The great turnaround is found in the opening page of the New Testament where we find that the first question is asked by men about Christ: *"Where is He?"*

To that question we will address in MyQ&A paper 6.

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