

## The Two Trees in the Garden

As we begin the new teaching cycle of the Torah for the year, we are again taken back to the story of the Garden of Eden in the first Torah portion. The garden is first defined for us as a good place.

Some treat the garden story as pure fantasy, an allegorical story for the ancients who lacked the enlightenment of our age. Others, including myself, consider the story to be filled with some of the deepest wisdom found in Holy Scripture. Either way, the story is well-known.

The story of the Garden of Eden is compelling to us for a number of reasons. It is part of the creation story (where everything came from) and also the earliest explanation as to why men and women are the way they are. Some of the most fundamental issues of life are first expressed in the garden story.

God formed man and woman. Man was formed from the dust and placed in the garden; woman was formed in the garden from out of man. They needed someplace to live and something to do. Life without purpose is no life at all. So God planted a garden and put man in it to keep it. This serves as the first context for purpose and duty. There were two unique trees worthy of note in the garden – the *tree of life* and the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*.

*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.*

*Genesis 2:8-9*

According to the story, the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* was prohibited as food for the man. Some people think it was a setup. By putting that tree in the garden with the man and then saying, “Don’t eat it!” some think it was an actual incentive to do it. Reverse psychology will sometimes promote a specific behavior that is the opposite of what was spoken. Even folks who are in complete agreement with God and would never question God’s word secretly ponder this question.

Let’s dismiss that little tidbit right away. I have never met a parent who warned a child about a hot stove, “Hot! Do not touch! Hurt the baby!” only to be setting the kid up for a sick joke of reverse psychology. Parents don’t do that, nor does God.

Why then did God put that tree there and then say don’t eat from it? The answer is right before us. It is about ownership of the garden. God owns the garden; He planted it. God is not playing mind games with man. It is not about reverse psychology or trying to test man. It is about who owns the garden.

The *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* proves that the garden still belongs to God despite man living there. Man only tends the garden. This one intriguing detail (the prohibition of the tree) is profound. It is just one of the reasons why the wisdom in this story lifts the story above fairy tale status. Consider that if God created the whole world, then He owns the garden. This is exactly what is expressed by King David and serves as the words spoken over the altar of God on the first day of each week.

*(A Psalm of David.) The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.*

*Psalms 24:1*

The *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* is an easement in the garden as defined by the true owner. We use the same principles in land and home ownership in our own country. I own my own home. I can plant trees, shrubs, and build anything I want anywhere on my property except where there is an easement. Every homeowner knows that he owns his home and land based on the definition of the government. The government has the ultimate control over all of its territory. The same was true of the garden with man's tenancy. God has the ultimate control and ownership of the garden.

We will talk about the other tree – the *tree of life* in a bit, but let's continue the story a bit more. Man broke the rule—he ate of the tree he was forbidden to eat. Because of the deception from an enemy, man ate of the tree and then suffered the consequences – being expelled from the garden. He could no longer eat of the other tree – the *tree of life*. Adam probably didn't understand that he had made such a choice nor the resulting consequences of not being in the garden. That meant life would be more difficult and that he could no longer eat of the *tree of life*.

*The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" – therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.*

*Genesis 3:21-24*

Let's consider another very profound element expressed in the garden story. Why exactly was man expelled from the garden? It wasn't about punishment – that was accomplished with cursing the ground for man and multiplying sorrows and conception for the woman. Here are the Scriptural reasons for the expulsion: man had become like "one part of God," and God did not want him to "*stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.*"

There are several things to consider here. God has parts? When man ate of the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* he became like a part of God? Which part?

Judaism has always struggled with this. They want God to be an absolute One, with no parts. They try to explain away these "parts" relating to other heavenly creatures, but this begs another problem since man was created in the image of God. He was not created in the image of God and other heavenly things. Man was created in the image of God, period.

Christianity has viewed this passage as a sort of confirmation of Yeshua's deity. According to them, God is three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). According to their logic, if God has "parts," then God has "persons." The problem is that this logic doesn't work. "Parts" doesn't mean "persons" and "persons" doesn't mean "parts." If this is so, then which person (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit) did man become like? No one advocates that we have become one of God's persons.

The real answer goes back to the deception using the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. It is Satan, himself, who reveals more about the tree.

*For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*

*Genesis 3:5*

Satan used this bit of truth about the tree to carry out his deception. It is true that once man ate of the tree that his eyes were opened – to his own nakedness. And, yes, we became like one part of God, not all of God. Eating from the tree caused us to gain the knowledge of good and evil, something man did not possess prior to eating it. So, how does that help us to understand what part of God we have become like?

Again, I believe the answer is simple and right before us. We became like the creator. The skill to create includes both good and evil things and purposes. This became part of the résumé of man. Man was given access to changing God's creation.

If you step back and follow the history of man, it is a history of gaining knowledge. In fact, historians try to subdivide the time periods based on the gaining of knowledge and skills, i.e., the bronze age, the iron age, etc. Today, the advances in knowledge are staggering. Take for example, the computer. I love my computers. I was one of the first engineers to bring a desktop computer into the workplace. My career skyrocketed because of it. There is a computer strategy game called "Civilization" that exploits and explains the phenomena of man gaining knowledge. It literally catalogs and sets up the game play for the gaining of knowledge mixed with culture and religion. The strategy of the game is to gain knowledge faster than your opponents to rule the world. In our present day, I have heard modern historians explain our skyrocketing technology as the "Information (Knowledge) Age." Actually, man has in every generation attempted to gain this knowledge.

Closer examination of our history shows that every advance of knowledge yields not only good things but equally bad things. At times the world tried to use only the good things they discovered but others later exploited the knowledge to create bad things as well. At other times, a new bad thing was discovered that yielded an incredibly good thing as well. Consider these past things. Alfred Nobel was the fellow who discovered (gained the knowledge of) dynamite. It was a tremendous compound of great destruction. It revolutionized canon and firearm warfare. Once he understood what he had enabled, he formed the Nobel prize fund to promote good things over the bad. He actually regretted discovering the substance. Consider the atom bomb. It was constructed purposely as a bomb to destroy to the maximum extent possible. Later, that knowledge has served as a source for electric utility. There are other examples that illustrate the same point. Transportation advances, medical advances, communications, etc. all yield both good and evil.

Man was given the power to gain knowledge of both good and evil and the ability to create things that did not exist from the original creation because of the tree in the garden. In this generation alone the most amazing things have now been created. A favorite fantasy of story tellers is based on the "time machine" theme. If you could go back in time, say 200 years, and tell them what the world is like now (and took evidence to prove it), you would not want to do it. Why? Because they would burn you at the stake believing you were some kind of demon. Truly, this generation has experienced so many changes in technology that it is beyond the imagination of past generations.

Man is now able to work with the smallest of building blocks (particles within the atom) to make entirely new substances. They are experimenting with nano machines (very small mechanical devices at the molecular level). Digital technology and computers are the discoveries of this last generation; however, every bit of this comes with good and bad results.

When man left the garden of Eden, he carried with him the seed of the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. The seed is in the fruit. Man ate the fruit. It is like that small seed has now grown into a great tree, and it is bearing fruit in our day. The fruit of that tree—good and evil—is so ripe that it is rotten ripe,

spoiling even the good fruit.

Let's go back to our garden story. Man was forced from the garden for two reasons: becoming like one part of God and to prohibit him from eating the fruit from the *tree of life* and living eternally. But wait! What is the problem of us living eternally? Isn't it God's plan to save us from the results of inheriting our father's seed of the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* so we can live eternally with Him? So, why did God prohibit man from eating of the *tree of life* there in the garden?

The answer to that question is a little bit more complex. God does want us to partake of the *tree of life*, but some changes must be made first. Death cannot be mixed with life.

God has defined the world to us in specific terms. There is holy and profane. There is clean and unclean. He said that certain opposites cannot be together; they must be separate. Life and death cannot exist at the same time in the same context. In the examples given here profane, unclean, and death prevail over holy, clean, and life. The prohibition of mixing opposite elements is a fundamental commandment in the Law of God. They are to remain separate for life to be sustained. If you mix the unclean with the clean, it all becomes unclean. If you mix death with life, it causes what is alive to die.

However, consider the separation of light and darkness. They cannot exist together either. When light comes in the darkness yields and shrinks back. Darkness does not overcome light. Light overcomes darkness. This is why we are separated from God. Our sinful nature is considered darkness. We cannot exist in His presence. Also, eating from the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* brought death. Eating from the *tree of life* was life – eternal life. They cannot be eaten together.

Which brings us to our present situation. We have all partaken of the tree of knowledge and good and evil through our father Adam. We cannot be in the garden because we are all subject to death. But, we all have the basic instinct to want to live and to sustain life. Mankind is hoping to find a way to live using the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. The problem is that we have the wrong tree. It requires the *tree of life* to solve that problem. We will never solve our problem of eternal life unless God overcomes our death first.

Let us now examine the other tree in the garden – the *tree of life*.

Somehow, that tree had the ability to regenerate for man so he could live eternally. Maybe this is why the writer of Proverbs drew a direct comparison to the Torah and the *tree of life*.

*Her ways [the teaching of the Torah] are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens.*

*Proverbs 3:17-19*

This Scripture is actually part of the liturgy when a Torah service is conducted in a Synagogue. But beyond the liturgy, the Torah not only tells the story of the garden; it tells the very rules of the garden. Any path back to the garden must be a renewal of keeping God's commandments, even those given in the garden.

*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls.*

*Proverbs 11:30*

The product of keeping God's commandments is eating again from the *tree of life*. Helping others so they can eat of the *tree of life* is wisdom of the highest order.

Here we are at the end of the ages and with the final fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Yeshua described our world to us a long time ago. He knew what the end result would be.

*He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"*

*Matthew 13:24-30*

Two seeds are competing for the life of mankind. One is a life that leads to death (weeds) and one is a life (wheat) that leads to eternal life.

Brad Scott, the leader of Wild Branch Ministries, has a brilliant set of teachings which explore the Biblical theme of these two seeds. His studies illustrate the conflict between the Messiah and Satan in the stories of Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob to the conflicts of this very day.

The *tree of life* was intended to be eaten daily for its regenerative powers. The Torah does the same for us today to support our spiritual health.

I have tried to share with others how essential Torah teaching is compared to other teachings, such as the history, psalms, prophets, and gospels. Some brethren have been taught a couple of those areas. I know some Christians who have never studied the Torah. With the exception of recounting Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob they know nothing of the first five books. It is tragic. No wonder they cannot tell the difference between a deceiving spirit and the Holy Spirit. They can't tell the difference between something clean and unclean.

The Torah is as essential to a spiritual man as water and air. But many times water and air are taken for granted until they lack it. This is getting us closer to the real definition of the *tree of life*. The *tree of life* wasn't an extra tree in the garden to spice it up. It was essential that man have that tree. Torah isn't an extra goody for our faith in God and Messiah; it is essential to have faith in God and the Messiah. Consider the words of Yeshua in this comparison.

*For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?*

*John 5:46-47*

While Yeshua's words were directed at religious leaders of His day, the question remains for believers today. How can you understand or believe Yeshua's words if you do not first believe what Moses wrote? The words of Yeshua are the same words and teaching given in the Torah. The words of Yeshua

are life! The words of the Torah are life!

When Moses gave his final discourse and handed the Torah over to Joshua and the priests, he offered these words.

*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.*

*Deuteronomy 30:19-20*

The *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* leads to death; the *tree of life* leads to life. One is a curse; one is a blessing. The Torah has defined these things for us. Obviously, Moses was pleading with Israel to make the choice for life, blessings, and the Torah.

Today, many brethren see the story of the garden with the two trees as merely part of the evolution / creation debate. Little do they understand that the teaching of eternal life is there. Nor do they understand the words of Yeshua the Messiah linking Himself to the Torah scroll and the *tree of life*. He will have the *tree of life* planted in the New Jerusalem alongside the river of living waters.

---

*YAVOH, He is Coming* is a monthly newsletter published as an outreach ministry of Lion and Lamb Ministries

The ministry is a non-profit organization with an end time prophetic message in a Messianic Jewish context.

Subscription to *YAVOH, He is Coming* is without cost and supported only by donation.

Permission is granted to reprint any article in *YAVOH, He is Coming* with attribution given to *YAVOH, He is Coming*.

Editor - Monte Judah

Electronic Editor - Ephraim Judah