

## Genesis 2:8-9

Last week we started our study of the first toldot of Genesis, the what became of the heavens and the earth. This toldot starts in Gen 2:4 and ends with Gen 4:26. We noted it was divided into three sections,

- a. Man in the Garden, 2:4-2:25
- b. The Fall, 3:1-24
- c. Cain and Abel, 4:1-26

Last time, we started with the 1<sup>st</sup> section of the toldot, Man in the Garden, and noted that it too could be divided into the following sections,

- a. The Creation of Man, 2:4-7
- b. The Garden of Eden, 2:8-14
- c. The Edenic Covenant, 2:15-17
- d. The Creation of Woman, 2:18-25

Last week we covered the Creation of Man, and this week we will cover the Garden of Eden.

### **The Garden of Eden, 2:8-14**

*Vs 8, Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made (NLT).*

Verse 8a notes the *Lord God planted a garden*. The point is God out of all he had made, now creates a special place for man to inhabit. The word *Eden* means watered. So, it is a watered special place. Then the verse describes the placement of the Garden. The ASB is probably a better translation, which states, *and Jehovah God planted a garden eastward, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed*. This reading indicates the garden was placed in the eastern part of Eden; so, we can conclude Eden was a larger territory and the Garden was placed in the eastern part of it. Where this is, is anybody's guess but many speculate it was in Mesopotamia, or the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers although many argue that the flood of Gen 6 so altered the topography that it will be forever unknown.

*Vs 9a, The Lord God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit.*

Now God created all kinds of trees, but the trees that God put in the Garden were beautiful and bore fruit. This again confirms what verse 5 made clear which is there were not yet grains or thistles.

*Vs 9b, In the middle of the garden, he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

Verse 9b mentions two specific trees that had been placed in the middle of the garden. Note they were at the center. They were what the garden was designed around.

These two specific trees were the *tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. They were both fruit bearing trees and were next to one another.

## What is the Tree of Life?

What are these two trees? First, let us look at the Tree of life. It is also mentioned in Gen 3:22-24, Rev 2:7, 22:2, 22:14, and 22:19, and in Prov 3:18, 11:30, 13:12, 15:4, but in the Proverbs the tree of life is linked to some human virtue,

Prov 3:18, (wisdom) is a tree of life to those who take hold of her.

11:30, the fruit of the righteous (a righteous life) is a tree of life.

13:12, hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled (hope realized) is a tree of life.

15:4, the soothing tongue (appropriate words) is a tree of life

So let us look at the other verses to see if we can get some more clues.

Gen 3:22, *Then the Lord God said, "Look, the human beings<sup>[e]</sup> have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!"* The verse makes clear that had Adam and Eve eaten from the tree after sinning they would have lived forever. So why would God be so protective of it? As Dr. John Phillips in his book, *Exploring Genesis*, says "If Adam and Eve, in their fallen condition, had eaten of that tree, they would have lived forever in their sins. They would have become like the fallen angels, incapable of death and forever locked into the guilt and penalty of their sins. It would have been impossible to renew them to repentance". This is why God placed a sword wielding cherubim to guard against this happening as noted in verse Gen 3:23-24, *So the Lord God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made.*<sup>24</sup> *After sending them out, the Lord God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.*

Rev 2:7, *Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.* Some translations (KJV, NKJV) have *in the midst of the Paradise of God*—which is meant to be the middle—just the same as the Garden! Here, John is speaking to the church at Ephesus and says that he who is victorious, in other words, he who sticks it out, he who is faithful, he who stays and abides with the Lord till the end, God will give that person fruit from the tree of life—which is in the middle of Paradise. So, the tree gives eternal life.

Rev 22:1-2, *Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*<sup>2</sup> *It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit,<sup>[e]</sup> with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.* In Rev 22 we have a picture of the New earth following the Millennial Kingdom and we see there is a river of life flowing from the throne of God and on each of its banks is a tree of life. Note its leaves are to heal the nations. The Greek word for healing here means giving health. Since sin has been removed, we can assume this leaf in some way augments our experience of heaven.

Rev 22:14, *Blessed are those who wash their robes. They will be permitted to enter through the gates of the city and eat the fruit from the tree of life.* Here we have a picture of those who are admitted to the New Jerusalem. They are the ones with washed robes, in other words, their sins have been forgiven,

and what do we see –they will be permitted to enter and eat of the tree of life.

Rev 22:19, *And if anyone removes any of the words from this book of prophecy, God will remove that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book.* This is the last mention of the tree of life in the Bible and this verse is a warning not to change the words of it. But again, note the association of the tree with eternal life.

So, what can we say about the tree of life?

- a. Eating of the tree of life is to partake and receive spiritual sustenance from God. Adam and Eve needed more than biological food. They needed a daily diet of God himself. This same principal is listed for us in Deut 8:3, *He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*
- b. Eating the tree of life is also associated with eternal life. It is a reward for faithfulness and perseverance.
- c. With its placement in the center of the Garden and along the banks of the river of the water of life, the tree of life points to God as the source of eternal life.
- d. When Adam and Eve fell, the penalty of death changed the paradigm: no longer would the tree provide spiritual sustenance, rather it would fix their sinful state for eternity.
- e. After the fall, God in his mercy, prevented Adam and Eve from eating of the tree for otherwise they could never have been redeemed.

### **What was the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil?**

This tree is mentioned only here, and in verse 17. It is referred to in Gen 3 but not explicitly mentioned. This tree, like the tree of life, was both pleasing to look at and had good fruit. But unlike the tree of life, it was prohibited by God to eat. This commandment carried a consequence as noted in verse 17, *for when you eat from it you will certainly die.* Adam and Eve did not know the meaning of evil and they did not know the meaning of death. They had no reference for either. But eating this tree would give them knowledge of both. It was a test, and for some time they obeyed God and refrained from it. But we are a little ahead of ourselves for we want to know what the tree means.

The phrase, *the knowledge of good and evil*, is a merism. A merism is a literary device that uses a pair of opposite or contrasting terms to present the entirety of something, For instance, the heavens and the earth describe the entirety of the universe; or the four corners of the earth speak to the entirety of the world. The knowledge of good and evil then is knowing the entirety of moral choices.

This knowing needs some explanation. There are two ways to know something, informationally or experientially. One can know something informationally (or factually). For example, I know there are 50 states. But it is another thing to have lived in those states; to know their geography and people, their traditions and history, and what it fully means to reside there. This is a deeper type of knowledge; this is the knowledge of experience. Knowing of a state and experiencing that state are two different types of knowledge. This is a benign example for there are no adverse consequences for having either type of knowledge.

But the world of morality is much different, for the choices we make and how we acquire moral knowledge, whether through informational knowledge or experience, has a profound impact on our lives. Here is a general rule: It is far better to gain experiential knowledge of morally good things, and informational knowledge of morally bad things. It is a good thing to experience the joy of giving, or helping, or extending mercy to someone. We want to experience good moral things like love, justice, courage, generosity and the like. Where life gets hard is when we chose to learn of bad moral things though experience; the pain of adultery, or addiction, of using someone for my advantage, of lying, or cheating, or throwing others under the bus; for these things have terrible consequences. I want to know about such things informationally without having to experience them.

Adam and Eve understood the facts of good and evil for God had mentioned them, and most likely they had gained morally good knowledge through experience; they shared food, they helped each other with the chores of the garden, but they did not have a complete informational knowledge or any experiential knowledge of moral evil.

When you know both you can discern one from the other. For example, God surveyed what He had made in chapter 1 and declared it “good”. He surveyed Adam’s loneliness in 2:18 and declared it “not good”. In other words, God fully understood the entirety of his creation, both physically and morally, and could discern what is good and not good, for He knows both, and has the authority to exercise judgement and a provide a remedy.

We also see this in human terms. Solomon in 1 K 3:7-9 asks the Lord for wisdom to discern or judge good and evil, *Now, O Lord my God, you have made me king instead of my father, David, but I am like a little child who doesn’t know his way around. <sup>8</sup>And here I am in the midst of your own chosen people, a nation so great and numerous they cannot be counted! <sup>9</sup>Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?*

The author of Hebrews in chapter 5 longs for the church to grow in maturity so as to discern good from evil, *But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil (5:14).*

So, the knowledge of good and evil, in and of itself, is not an inherently bad thing to have. In fact, it is the opposite. It is a good thing as the examples above illustrate. But notice in the above two examples God granted discernment to Solomon as a gift and he would grant it to the believers in Hebrews if they applied themselves to spiritual growth and maturity. The problem in Adam and Eve’s case is the way in which they learned of moral evil. Instead of waiting on God to teach them informational knowledge of morally bad things, they decided to learn it experientially. They seized the prize prematurely.

The intention in the garden was that through prohibition, Adam and Eve would learn discernment. For example, if you tell your child not to touch a hot stove, they have a choice; they can either touch it or not. If they refrain, with time and maturity they will understand the stove is hot and they will have gained discernment through obedience. But if they touch it, they will learn it is hot through experience, and pay the consequences of a burned finger or hand. Adam and Eve knew good (most likely both in an

informational and experiential way) but they did not know evil. As in our example with the hot stove, they were intended to learn of evil through obedience. As Delitzsch says in his commentary,

“The tree of knowledge was to lead man to the knowledge of good and evil; and, according to the divine intention, this was to be attained through his not eating of its fruit. This end was to be accomplished, not only by his discerning in the limit imposed by the prohibition the difference between that which accorded with the will of God and that which opposed it, but also by his coming eventually, through obedience to the prohibition, to recognize the fact that all that is opposed to the will of God is an evil to be avoided, and through voluntary resistance to such evil, to the full development of the freedom of choice originally imparted to him into the actual freedom of a deliberate and self-conscious choice of good. By obedience to the divine will, he would have attained to a godlike knowledge of good and evil, i.e. to one in accordance with his own likeness to God. He would have detected the evil in the approaching tempter; but instead of yielding to it, he would have resisted it, and thus have made good his own property acquired with consciousness and of his own free-will, and in this way by proper self-determination would gradually have advanced to the possession of the truest liberty. But as he failed to keep this divine appointed way, and ate the forbidden fruit in opposition to the command of God, the power imparted by God to the fruit was manifested in a different way. He learned the difference between good and evil from his own guilty experience, and by receiving the evil into his own soul, fell a victim to the threatened death. Thus, through his own fault the tree, which should have helped him to attain true freedom, brought nothing but a sham liberty of sin, and with it death, and that without any demoniacal power of destruction being conjured into the tree itself, or any fatal poison being hidden in its fruit.”

So in summary we have two trees in the middle of the garden. One a tree of life upon which Adam and Eve could feast on daily, signifying how God sustained them daily—and the obvious question to our lives today, is what are you feeding upon?

Then there is another tree, the tree of good and evil, the tree Adam and Eve have been commanded not to eat for else they will die. And the principle is they were to learn the full understanding of good and evil through prohibition and obedience. They were to grow into it, yet they prematurely seized the prize and like a child touching a hot stove got their hands burnt. However the penalty was much more severe than a burnt finger or hand, it was a separation from the life giving tree, and from the giver of that tree, God himself. We will see this story unfold in chapter three. In the meantime, what is it in your life that you are about to touch with your finger, that you know you should not touch. Prov 25:26 says *to give in to the wicked is like polluting a fountain or muddying a spring*. It will always mark your life.