

ViralStJames Bible Study #9: The Tree of Life

The Background: Returning home

Genesis 2:8-17; Revelation 22:1-5

Last week's study of Psalm 42 was focused on exile. This week, we look at the Tree of Life to discover that exile is not what God wants for us. Starting at the beginning, in Genesis, we will finish in the last book of the Bible, Revelation, where we see the Apostle John trying to find the words to describe what the resurrection life will be like when heaven and earth are reunited.

The Tree of Life is first mentioned in Genesis 2:8-9. At this time, creator and created were in the garden together (3:8) and the role of Adam was to take care of the garden, with only one thing forbidden (2:15-17). Adam and Eve chose to break the rule and found themselves exiled from the garden and the Tree of Life. Whilst some people take the story literally, others see it as a metaphor, a description of how we all choose to disobey God and follow our own ways.

The Passages

Genesis 2:8-17

Gen. 2:8 And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant 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. 2:10 A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; ¹² and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Gen. 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Revelation 22:1-5

Rev. 22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴ they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

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The Questions

- 1) What does this story tell you about the relationship God wants between humans and himself? Does it also tell us anything about the role he envisaged we would play in his creation?
- 2) Why does it all go horribly wrong and what are the consequences? Do you blame it all on Adam and Eve, or can you identify with the choice they made?
- 3) Jesus talked a lot about trees, perhaps because as a master story teller, he was able to take objects that were familiar to his listeners and use them to point to larger truths about the Kingdom of God – for those with ears to hear! Often there may be more than one meaning to a parable. Read Matthew 13:31- 32. What do you think Jesus was trying to convey through this story? What do you think 'The Kingdom of Heaven' (v. 31) is?
 - *Think of Covid19 Support Initiative in Devizes – could this be seen as a tree supporting many people, but growing from a small seed?*
 - *Birds of the air nesting in its branches – perhaps reference to Psalm 84:3 – the birds that nested in The Temple seeking proximity to the altar are now nesting in the growing tree of the Kingdom of Heaven – God is no longer to be found in a physical Temple, but in the way of following Jesus?*
- 4) The Jewish leaders thought they had dealt with Jesus by nailing him to a tree. Peter obviously thought otherwise. Read Acts 10:36-46. What do you see as the benefits that the resurrection offers us? Do you see any connections to the story in Genesis?
- 5) Revelation is the last book of the Bible, and is an attempt by the Apostle John to explain a vision (revelation) that he receives. Chapters 21 and 22 describe 'the new Jerusalem', where heaven (the place where God rules) and earth (his creation) are once more brought back together. Read Rev 22 v 1-5. Bearing in mind that this is an imaginative attempt to describe the indescribable, what encourages you about this passage?
- 6) How is the Tree of Life described? What do you think its purpose is?
 - *The Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil is not mentioned – in the coming together of the restored earth and heaven, it is not required – evil has been defeated and has no place.*

