

**PREFACE**

In our last session we began our look at the last three verses of Chapter Three, vv22-24. I'd like to begin *this* session with a quick review of our initial discussion of v22. First, however, let's read these three verses.

**Read Genesis 3:22-24.**

**v22**

*Then Yahweh God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us to know good and evil..."*

Based on the common—and sensible—interpretation of the *second* part of this verse, I agree with Leupold, who alone (at least in my reading) hears not sarcasm or irony or fear in the words of the first part, but instead, *sadness*. It *grieves* their Maker that His children are no longer innocently good, but now, in an instant, are already well versed in both good and evil. Obtaining the knowledge of both, they immediately chose evil, and this brings profound sadness to the Godhead.

*"and now, lest he send forth his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever—"*

This sadness (on the part of the Godhead) produces not more wrath, but mercy. God has poured out His justice, His punishment on the man and woman and serpent for their decisions and actions—all sprinkled with grace—but now He dispenses mercy.

They have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; that is done, and cannot be reversed. But, as far as it is recorded in the text, they have not yet eaten from the tree of life—a tree the eating from which would grant them immortal life. Considering their present condition—a fallen, sinful, depraved state—just imagine what that immortal life would be like. It would not be eternal bliss, but eternal misery.

Let's spend some more time on this "tree of life."

The tree of life is mentioned only in two books of the Bible: Genesis and the Revelation. “A tree of life” is used metaphorically four times in Proverbs to refer to righteous qualities, but has no connection to “*the* tree of life.” In the Revelation the tree of life is mentioned in 2:7, by Christ Jesus Himself, and in 22:2, 14, and 19. Let’s read the first few verses of Revelation 22.

**Read Revelation 22:1-3.**

Much has been made of this river and its accompanying tree by expositors and commentators. The river seems to hearken back to the prophecy about a river flowing out of Jerusalem after the world has been reshaped and Christ returns to rule in the Millennium (Zechariah 14:7-8)—which is why not a few interpreters say this moment in the Revelation *is* the Millennium. The imagery is, of course, similar, but this is a different sort of “river.” And the tree reminds us of the “tree of life” mentioned in the Eden narrative as situated in the center of the garden in Eden. Some say this is the heavenly version of that same tree.

It is possible that both of these—the river and the tree—can be interpreted literally: an actual crystalline river running down the center of the street in the new Jerusalem from the thrones of “God and the Lamb,” and a literal tree bearing year-round fruit. But I believe the better interpretation is that both of these—the river and the tree—are visions representing timeless truths—both of which pertain to redemption and eternal life in Christ, spoken of throughout Scripture.

In Scripture the idea of “living water” moves from obedience to Yahweh to faith in Christ Jesus, both associated with a good life in the present and, in Christ, a good life for all eternity. In the gospel of John, Jesus speaks to the woman at the well of “living water.” She thinks He is speaking of water to drink, but Jesus goes on to explain that

**Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst—ever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.” (John 4:13–14)**

Perhaps the most clarifying statement from the Lord about this is found in Revelation 21:6.

**Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.”**

Those last two words set the context: this “water of life” is not obtained by obeying the Law, nor is it obtained by good works, but is given by grace, freely, to those who thirst for it—referring clearly to salvation in Christ, resulting in eternal life with Him.

The pattern set in God’s word is that “water of life” or “living water” is a picture of eternal life, flowing from the throne of God, as John Walvoord writes,

This future river which is in the new Jerusalem...speaks of the power, purity, and eternal life manifest in the heavenly city. This river corresponds to the present believer’s experience of the outflow of the Spirit and eternal life.

And the tree has a similar lineage. The qualities of the “tree of life” in the garden are explained in v22 of our text:

**Then Yahweh 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.”**

That is, the tree of life, like the “river of the water of life,” is all about eternal life—an immortal life with Christ and Father God. It may be that these are literal elements in Eden’s garden and in the new Jerusalem come down out of heaven; but especially in John’s vision, they both serve to represent the unending life in God for those residing there.

*“and now, lest he send forth his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever—”*

K&D: From the [the Hebrew] *gam* (also, as well) it follows that the man had not yet eaten of the tree of life. Had he continued in fellowship with God by obedience to the command of God, he might have eaten of it, for he was created for eternal life. But after he had fallen through sin into the power of death, the fruit which produced immortality could only do him harm. For immortality in a state of sin is not [what] God designed for man, but [would be] endless misery, which the Scriptures call “the second death” (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; Rev 21:8).

therefore Yahweh God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.

While it is clear from Chapter Four that “his wife Eve” was sent out from the garden along with “the man,” the actions of Yahweh God in vv23-24 refer to the man alone, because he is the corporate head of the first family—indeed, of mankind itself.

There is a difference between being in an establishment—say, a retail store or saloon—and having the manager say to you, “You are not welcome here. Please leave.” And having the bouncer pick you up bodily and literally throw you out the door. I think we see that difference between v23 and v24.

All of our common versions agree on the two verbs: In v23 it is “Yahweh God **sent**” the man out (only the original NIV has, instead, “banished,” but this shares the same meaning); while in v24 it is “He **drove** the man out.” The first, in v23 (Hebrew *shalach*) has almost a judicial or legal tone to it—the equivalent of the manager asking one to leave the premises. It has a detached feeling to it, almost as if one received a notice in the mail. In contrast, the second, in v24 (Hebrew *garash*) has a more physical, hands-on feeling to it. Back in the nineteenth century one did not *ask* cattle to move from Colorado to the Kansas City stockyards—one *drove* them, one had to physically force them to make the journey.

There is one more difference between the two verses: The *reason* the man is sent from the garden in v23 is for him “to cultivate the ground,” whereas the reason in v24 is clearly to banish him from the garden and prevent his eating from the tree of life.

Now, specific to v23, the man is sent out from the garden “to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.” And someone might say, “Wait a minute. I thought the man was created in the garden.” Well, no. Look at Chapter Two.

### Read Genesis 2:7, 15.

Verse 15 confirms that the first man was made either outside the garden—or, more likely the garden was created *after* the man, since it is created in v8, after the man in v7.

**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.**

One more time let me add a word of caution about imagining thoughts and circumstances that are questionable under the light of Scripture. And, one more time, sadly, my illustration is David Guzik.

*Guzik:* Though Adam and Eve and their descendants were prevented from eating the fruit of the tree of life (by God's mercy), they could still come there to meet God. This was their "holy of holies."

Guzik bases this presumptuous statement on the presence of the cherubim (multiple cherubs), which, in his words, "are always associated with the presence and glory of God (Eze 10:1-22, Isa 6:1-13, Rev 4:1-11). When cherubim are represented on earth (such as in the tabernacle, Exo 25:10-22), they mark a meeting place with God." Guzik is not incorrect in stating that they are typically associated with the presence of God, but he doesn't mention that they also serve to guard and protect. Guzik sees them as beings inviting or conducting one into the presence of God, whereas I believe a more fitting way to describe them is as frightful supernatural beings that serve as a "palace guard" so to speak around the throne of God.

In any case, Yahweh God places a number of cherubs on the east side of the garden—they could also have been the ones who "drove the man [and woman] out"—and He gives a flaming sword as a visible weapon; it is typical to see this flaming sword as representing the glory and/or angel of God (Exodus 13:21; 14:19-20).

Once again for this passage I find balance and common sense in the commentary of K&D.

*K&D:* The Cherubim are creatures of a higher world, which are represented as surrounding the throne of God... as occupying the highest place as living beings in the realm of spirits, standing by the side of God as the heavenly King when He comes to judgment, and proclaiming the majesty of the Judge of the world. In this character God stationed them on the eastern side of paradise... "to keep the way of the tree of life," i.e., to render it impossible for man to return to paradise, and eat of the tree of life.

Hence there appeared by their side the flame of a sword, apparently in constant motion, cutting hither and thither, representing the devouring fire of the divine wrath, and showing the cherubim to be ministers of judgment. With the expulsion of man from the garden of Eden, paradise itself vanished from the earth. God did not withdraw from the tree of life its supernatural power, nor did He destroy the garden before their eyes, but simply prevented their return, to show that it should be preserved until the time of the end, when sin should be rooted out by the judgment, and death abolished by the Conqueror of the serpent (1Cor 15:26), and when upon the new earth the tree of life should flourish again in the heavenly Jerusalem, and bear fruit for the redeemed (Rev 20:1-15, 21).

One final thought: There is sad irony hidden away in this last verse of Chapter Three. Verse 24 ends with the cherubim and the flaming sword there “to **guard** the way to the tree of life.” The word translated “guard” is the Hebrew *shawmar*. This is the same word used in 2:15 when Yahweh God “set the man in the garden of Eden to cultivate and **keep** it.”

So in Chapter Two the word “keep” represents work, but also a trust; Adam is granted custodial rights over the flora in the garden. Yahweh entrusts Paradise to him.

But, sadly, by the end of Chapter Three this trust has not just been revoked, but Adam is designated a “bad actor” who has lost all rights to the garden. He is now kicked *out of* the Paradise once entrusted to him.

A sad chapter indeed.

# SESSION 32

## An Altered Existence, part two Genesis 3:22-24

### The Tree of Life

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