

# The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON XVI : GENESIS 2:8-14 – SECOND PARAGRAPH: THE PLANTING OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN

*“Following the creation of the first man (2:4-7), the narrative addresses the provision God made for him through the planting of a garden. A constant in this passage is the bounty of God’s goodness to his special creation through a beautifully complete environment with luscious verdant herbage and a land rich in water and precious stones. Eden’s glittering garden was left to human supervision as his divine charge and partnership in the exercise of earthly dominion. The garden’s location in Eden and the trees descriptive of the site are of special interest (2:8-9); details of its contours and possessions are given (2:10-14).” [Mathews, 1:200]*

*‘And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.’ (Rev 22:1-3)*

## **The Planting of the Garden of Eden:**

*‘<sup>8</sup> The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. <sup>9</sup> And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. <sup>10</sup> Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. <sup>11</sup> The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. <sup>12</sup> And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there. <sup>13</sup> The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. <sup>14</sup> The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.’ (Gen 2:8-14 NKJV)*

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

**v. 8 – And the Lord God planted / a garden in Eden, in the east;  
and there He put / the man whom He had formed.**

**v. 9 – And the Lord God made to grow / out of the ground  
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.**

**v. 10 – A river flowed out of Eden / to water the garden,  
and from there it divided / and became four branch-streams.**

**v. 11 – The name of the first is Pishon / it is the one which flows around  
the whole land of Havilah / where there is gold;**

**v. 12 – and the gold of that land / is good;  
bedellium is there / and the soham stone.**

**v. 13 – The name of the second river / is Gihon;  
it is the one which flows around / the whole land of Cush.**

***And the name of the third river / is Hiddekel***

***which flows / east of Asur.***

***And the fourth river / is the Euphrates.***

There are a number of words in this paragraph that occur thrice for the sake of emphasis or parallelism: *garden* (vv. 8, 9, 10), *tree* (v. 9), *name* (vv. 11, 13, 14), and *'the' river* (vv. 13, 14; note in v. 10 it is 'a' river). [Cassuto, 107]

**v. 8 – ‘And the Lord God planted’** — Not, ‘and He had already previously planted’ as some of the harmonizers (e.g., NIV, Vulgate). The sentence begins with a waw-consecutive, suggesting that immediately after fashioning man the Lord God planted the garden.

**‘a garden’** — The ‘garden’ is an enclosed area for cultivation; perhaps we should picture a park surrounded by a hedge (cf. 3:23). It is elsewhere called the ‘garden of the LORD’ (13:10; Isa 51:3) and the ‘garden of God’ (Ezek 28:13; 31:9), indicating God as its owner. ***The garden “denotes an enclosed, protected area where the flora flourishes. It represents territorial space in the created order where God invites human beings to enjoy bliss and harmony between themselves and God, one another, animals, and the land. God is uniquely present here. The Garden of Eden is a temple-garden, represented later in the tabernacle (The eschatological temple is compared with Paradise, Rev 20-21). Cherubim protect its sanctity (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 26:1; 2 Chron. 3:7) so that sin and death are excluded (Gen 3:23; Rev. 21:8). Active faith is a prerequisite for this home. Doubt of God’s word or character cannot reside in the garden.”*** [Waltke, 85]

**PARADISE** — The LXX and other early versions render ‘garden’ as παράδεισον [paradeison], a Persian loan word, originally meaning a royal park (this is now canonized in Western culture by John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*). Paradise was taken up by Jewish literature (e.g., Testament of Levi) as the eternal home of the righteous, as well as the NT designation for the presence of the ascended Christ (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4) and the eternal abode for believers (Rev 2:7). [Mathews, 1:201; Wenham, 1:61] An interesting side note: many commentators believe it appropriate to translate the word ‘the paradise of God’ in Revelation 2:7 as ‘the garden of God,’ especially since the context references the ‘tree of life’ which was last seen in the Garden of Eden. [Louw Nida Lexicon]

**‘in Eden,’** — *i.e., in the place called Eden; note the garden is not Eden itself.* This is perhaps the only place where Eden (as a geographical designation) is distinguished from the garden (cf. 2:10, 15; 3:23, 24; 4:16; Isa 51:3; Ezk. 28:13; 31:9, 16, 18; 36:35; Joel 2:3). Elsewhere the phrase is either ‘garden of Eden’ (e.g., 2:15; 3:23, 24) or simply Eden (4:16; Isa 51:3, etc.). [Skinner, 57; Wenham, 1:61] The meaning of the word itself is questioned; Rabbi Cassuto says the meaning of Eden according to its etymology is ‘a place that is well watered throughout, a place of abundant waters,’ and thus we read further on, ‘that it was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord’ (13:10). [Cassuto, 108] Others believe the word is derived from the Sumerian-Akkadian *edinu* meaning ‘plain, flatland, wilderness, prairie.’ It is used for the plain between the Tigris and Euphrates in southern Mesopotamia. Still others refer to it as a ‘garden of delight.’ “It is simpler to associate Eden with its homonym ‘pleasure, delight’ (2 Sam 1:24; Jer 51:34; Ps 36:9). Whenever Eden is mentioned in Scripture it is pictures as a fertile area, a well-watered oasis with large trees growing (cf. Isa 51:3; Ezek 31:9, 16, 18; 36:35; etc.), a very attractive prospect in the arid East. This lush fecundity was a sign of God’s presence in and blessing on Eden.” [Wenham, 1:61]

**‘in the east;’** — On the eastern side; *i.e., east of the land of Israel.* This would appear to locate Eden somewhere in Mesopotamia or Arabia.

***‘and there He put the man whom He had formed.’*** — “It seems likely that the man (Adam = ‘man’) had been created somewhere in the world outside of Eden, but was able to observe God in this special work preparing this beautiful garden for his home.... *Adam’s first knowledge of his Creator thus would be of one who loved him and carefully and abundantly provided for him.*” [Morris, 87] ***“God’s placement of the man in the garden suggests that humanity is meant for fellowship in the garden, with God, its Creator and Gardener. Adam and Eve’s expulsion will make them feel as castaways in a strange land.”*** [Waltke, 86]

**v. 9 – *‘And the Lord God made to grow out of the ground every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food,’*** — Note the context is the garden of Eden, and that the trees like man (v. 7) and the animals (v. 19) are created from the ‘land.’ They do not appear *ex nihilo* nor grow overnight from saplings to towering trees. The remark they were *‘pleasant to look at and good to eat’* emphasizes the abundance of God’s provision. Note also the extravagance the garden offered: *‘all kinds,’ ‘pleasing,’* and *‘good for food.’* ***“Any charge that God is stingy is unfounded, but the serpent successfully fooled his audience.”*** [Mathews, 1:201; Wenham, 1:62; Hamilton, 1:162; Skinner, 58]

***‘the tree of life also in the midst of the garden / and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.’***  
— **For a description of each of these trees, see below.**

***‘in the midst of the garden’*** — This does not necessarily mean in the exact middle of the garden; the reference may be simply the placement of one element in a larger area, e.g., 3:8, *‘the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden;* 9:21, *‘he lay uncovered in his tent;’* 18:24, 26, *‘the righteous in the city;’* 23:10, *‘Ephron was sitting among the Hittites.’* All these uses the same Hebrew word here. [Hamilton, 1:162] But Rabbi Cassuto believes it should have the sense *‘in the middle of the garden’* because it may be said that *all the trees* in this narrative were in the garden, so *‘in the midst of the garden’* would serve to define the position of the tree.

**THE ISRAELITES WERE ALREADY FAMILIAR WITH THESE ITEMS** — Rabbi Cassuto: “My hypothesis that the Israelites had an epic tradition concerning the story of the Garden of Eden before the Torah was written, and that this tradition had already received a definite literary form in one or more epic poems, finds support in a number of Biblical verses some of which belong to our section and some to other sections or other books.” [Cassuto, 72f] Some examples as to why this is probable:

- 3:24: *‘and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and the sword-flame which turned every way.’* The cherubim and sword-flame each have a definite article although there is no previous reference. Also *‘the sword-flame which turned every way’* is certainly poetic and was probably known by a poem (Cassuto lists several other evidences of poetry traditions found in our passage).
- 2:9: In similar fashion, *‘the tree of life / the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’* are introduced with the definite article with no prior reference, indicating this was well known among the Israelites.
- The garden of Eden is referred to at length in two other passages: Ezek 28:11-19; 31:8-9, 16-18. There are a number of details Ezekiel brings forth which cannot be found in our creation story; indicating the Ezekiel passage does not come from our present section and the prophet must have had a different source before him (for example, Ezek 28:14f speaks of the cherub in connection with the garden of Eden but this cherub (singular) is inside the garden, not outside). So while there are many similarities with the Ezekiel passages and our present section, there are also quite a few differences.

- Amongst the differences between the Genesis and the Ezekiel passages is one very fundamental difference: the Genesis passage speaks of the fall of man in Eden, while in the Ezekiel passage the one who sinned and was banished from Eden was a cherub, not man (which theologians recognize as the fall of Lucifer and the origin of all sin in our universe). ***“All this testifies to the fact that in a remote period of antiquity there was an Israelite saga that related how the cherub – or one of the cherubs – who dwelt in the garden of Eden, upon the top of the mountain of God, which was as high as the heavens, sinned in his pride against God, and as a punishment for his transgression he was driven out from the garden of Eden and cast down to the earth [possibly ‘earth’ occurs here in the sense of Sheol].”*** [Cassuto, 81]

**vv. 10-14 – A DESCRIPTIVE DIGRESSION** — “Eden’s garden was rich in minerals and splendidly fertile with flowing waters. Its description is a digression in the text, giving supplementary information about its verdant beauty, but its significance for the narrative’s motif of resplendence shows its integral part in the narrative.” [Mathews, 1:207] The four rivers listed here are divisible into two groups: two of the rivers, Chiddeqel (or Hiddekel; AKA Tigris) and Ph<sup>e</sup>rāth (or Euphrates) are well known; the remaining two, Pîshôn (or Pishon) and Gîchôn (or Gihon) are not known to us by these designations from any other source and are therefore difficult to identify. ***But even though we are familiar with the Tigris and Euphrates, there is no assurance these are the original rivers as mentioned in these verses. As with all cultures, it is possible the Tigris and Euphrates rivers may have been so named because Noah and his family used names of which they were familiar with from the pre-Flood world*** (e.g., consider the Thames River in Connecticut, the Severn River in Maryland, and the Trent River in North Carolina – all names of prominent rivers in England from which the original settlers originated).

**CAN WE KNOW WHERE EDEN WAS LOCATED?** — Much has been written about what follows in vv. 10-14 and whether it may be used to locate the Garden of Eden. If the reader is interested, please refer to the commentaries listed in the bibliography in lesson one; each of the authors give various amounts of details but each come to the same conclusion: ***it is impossible to know the original location of the Garden of Eden due to changes in the earth’s topography. “But in the light of our exposition all these theorizings are valueless. Our text, as stated, describes a state of affairs that no longer exists, and it is impossible to determine the details on the premiss of present-day geographical data.”*** [Cassuto, 118] ***“No matter how one tries to fit this location in the Middle East today, it just can’t be done.... The worldwide, catastrophic Flood of Noah’s day would have destroyed the surface of the earth. If most of the sedimentary strata over the earth’s surface (many thousands of feet thick in places) is the result of this global catastrophe, as creationists believe, then we would have no idea where the Garden of Eden was originally located – the earth’s surface totally changed as a result of the flood.”*** [Ham, 104f; see also Morris, 89f; Keil, 83; Wenham, 1:66; Mathews, 1:208]

**v. 10 – ‘A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden,’** — Many ancient cultures of that time tell stories of the primeval rivers, sometimes even mentioning four specifically, in connection with the creation of the world or the dwelling places of the gods. ***“According to v 6, the fresh-water ocean waters the earth. Here it is said that the river waters the garden, probably implying that the river itself is fed by this subterranean ocean.”*** [Wenham, 1:64]

**‘flowed ... water’** — i.e., ‘water flowed or came forth...’. Cp. Joel 3:18, ‘In that day ... and a fountain shall COME FORTH from the house of the Lord and WATER the valley of Shittim.’ “In this verse of Joel and in other passages expression is given to the idea of the Divine river which is

destined to bring blessing in the days of the Messiah; see Ezek 47:1-12: *‘and behold, water WAS ISSUING [literally, ‘coming forth’] from below the threshold of the temple,’* etc.; Zech 14:8: *‘On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem;’* Psa 46:4: *‘There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.’* Possibly this promise contains an allusion to the restoration of the situation that obtained in the garden of Eden.” [Cassuto, 115]

***‘and from there it divided and became four branch-streams.’*** — *‘And from there,’* i.e., after leaving the garden, *‘it divided and became four branches.’* Thus the main river flowed through the garden to water it, and on leaving the garden divided and branched off into a number of sub-streams, each of which became a great river on its own. [Cassuto, 115; Wenham, 1:64f; Keil, 81; Skinner, 59]

**v. 11 – *‘The name of the first is Pishon it is the one which flows around the whole land of Havilah’*** — Pîshôn is a Hebrew name, derived from the root meaning *‘to jump and run to and fro, to leap.’* It is only mentioned here in the OT. This river flowed around the land of Havilah [Chavîlâh], a name which also occurs in Gen 10:7 and 1 Chron 1:9 as one of the sons of Cush (Cush is understood today to be Africa’s Nubia, south of Egypt, and usually translated ‘Ethiopia’) as well as being mentioned among the sons of Joktan (a son of Shem; Gen 10:29; 1 Chron 1:23; cf. Gen 25:18; 1 Sam 15:7). As mentioned previously, the original locations of these antediluvian rivers is impossible to be verified due to the earth’s topographical changes because of the Flood. [Cassuto, 116ff; Mathews, 1:207; Wenham, 1:65; Morris, 89]

***‘where there is gold;’*** — *“Note that the gold is not a part of Eden. It is found only in territories outside Eden. While water, food, and monogamous marriage are a part of Eden, riches and precious metals are not.”* [Hamilton, 1:169]

**v. 12 – *‘and the gold of that land is good; bdellium is there and the shōham [onyx] stone.’*** — As an aside, the various pagan cultures of that day believed precious stones grew on the branches of the trees in the gardens of the gods, and even the ancient Israelite poets tell of similar gems, according to Rabbi Cassuto. The Torah however is opposed to these legends which might be one reason for the mention of the precious stones here. The very best gold is simply a natural substance, a metal like any other metals, which is found in the ground in one of the countries of our own world, as are other such precious gems. [Cassuto, 119]

**REMINDERS OF PARADISE LOST?** — *“At all events, this indirect association alluded to here by the Torah ... suffices to give the gold and the bdellium and the shōham, and generally all precious stones, the character of tokens and memorials of the garden of Eden. In regard to the manna, the ‘bread from heaven’ (Psa. 105:40) or the ‘grain of heaven’ (Psa. 78:24), which was given by God and required no human toil, just as in the case of Adam’s food in the garden of Eden, it is said (Num. 11:7): ‘and its appearance was like that of BDELLIUM.’ This comparison is assuredly not accidental. Similarly the shōham stones, enclosed in setting of gold filigree, were set on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod of the priest (Exod. 28:9-12; 39:6-7),*

*[‘And they set onyx stones, enclosed in settings of gold; they were engraved, as signets are engraved, with the names of the sons of Israel. He put them on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel, as the Lord had commanded Moses.’ – Exod 39:6, 7]*

*who made atonement for the sins of the children of Israel, as a memorial to the time when man had not yet fallen into sin. So, too, the shōham and the other stones for setting affixed to the breastpiece (Exod. 28:17-20; 39:10-13),*

[‘And they set in it four rows of stones: a row with a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald was the first row; the second row, a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They were enclosed in settings of gold in their mountings.’ – Exod 39:10-13]

**which provide a remarkable parallel to those listed in Ezek. 28:13,**

[‘You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created.’ – Ezek 28:13]

**in connection with the garden of Eden, serve as a reminder of the time when man was still free from transgression.”** [Cassuto, 119f]

**‘bdellium’** — There are two interpretations of this word: (a) that it is a kind of precious stone; the LXX renders it as ‘carbuncle, ruby’ and in Num. 11:7 as ‘crystal;’ or (b) that it is the apothecary’s *b<sup>e</sup>dōlach* (called by the Greeks *bdellion* or *bdella*); that is, an aromatic resin exuded from a tree that grows in many countries in the East. “Apparently the word was used in the language in both meanings, possibly because the resin looked like a gem in colour and in its transparency. The question is: which sense does the word bear here? At present the commentators are inclined to prefer the second interpretation, but from the context it appears more probable that the *b<sup>e</sup>dōlach*, like the *shōham*, is a precious stone.” [Cassuto, 120]

**‘shōham’** — This stone is the same as the Babylonian *sāndu* or *sāmtu*, but the identity of the gem called by this name in the Babylonian language is itself in doubt. “A highly esteemed gem, suitable for engraving (Ex. 28:9, etc), one of the precious stones of Eden (Ezk. 28:13), and apparently used in architecture (1 Ch. 29:2). From the Greek equivalents it is generally supposed to be either the onyx or the beryl.” [Skinner, 60f]

**v. 13 – ‘The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Cush [Ethiopia].’** — *Gîchôn* is also a Hebrew name, derived from the root meaning ‘to flow, to spring out.’ In Jewish and Christian tradition it was persistently identified with the Nile but is impossible to be verified due to the earth’s topographical changes because of the Flood.

**v. 14 – ‘And the name of the third river is Chiddeqel’** — In the Babylonian language, *Idiglat*; in the Greek it is the Tigris River.

**‘which flows east of Ashshûr [Assyria].** — The most acceptable explanation appears to be ‘east of the city of Ashur,’ the old capital city and not the whole country, although it is typically used of the whole country in the OT. For the territory of Assyria lies on both sides of the Tigris, whereas the river itself runs east, or in front of the city. After 1400 Ashur was no longer the political capital of Assyria, but it did remain the most important religious city of the region.

**‘And the fourth river is the P<sup>e</sup>rāth [Euphrates].** — “Moreover, the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, along with the Nile, are future boundaries descriptive of the patriarchal land pledged to Abraham (Gen 15:18). As God had prepared and assigned Eden to Adam’s care, the ‘paradise’ of Canaan’s land was consigned to Abraham and his future descendants.” [Mathews, 1:208]

## THE TREE OF LIFE

The ‘*tree of life*’ is mentioned first and noted last in the garden story (2:9; 3:22, 24) but it is second in significance to the ‘*tree of knowledge*.’ *Even though the tree symbolized God’s blessings of eternal life, joy, wisdom, and so on, there is nothing in the narrative which would imply this was not a real tree existing in the garden of Eden.*

**WAS THIS A MIRACULOUS TREE?** — The commentators are divided whether the tree in and of itself could provide immortality. Ken Ham is one who does not accept the tree as miraculous: “It wasn’t something in the fruit of the tree of life that would give Adam eternal life. The fruit was real but had a symbolic purpose.” [Ham, 107] Karl Keil: “Even in the case of the tree of life, the power is not to be sought in the physical character of the fruit. No earthly fruit possesses the power to give immortality to the life which it helps sustain.” [Keil, 85] *But while difficult to believe, there is nothing in the narrative that suggests the tree would not actually give immortality.* Later Moses will write (3:22), ‘*and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.*’ “*This indicates that the reference is to a miraculous tree, which endows man, when he eats of its fruit, with eternal life.*” [Cassuto, 109] “*The body of the first man was in itself mortal (1 Cor. 15:45). Science shows that physical life involves decay and loss. But means were apparently provided for checking this decay and preserving the body’s youth. This means was the ‘tree of life’ (Gen 2:9).*” [Strong, Augustus Hopkins, *Systematic Theology: Three Volumes in One* (Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA) 1907; 32<sup>nd</sup> printing, 1979; page 527] “*The fruit of this tree would, if eaten regularly, have enabled even mortal, dying men to live forever (Gen 3:22).* It is noteworthy that this tree will be growing in profusion in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:2), for the ‘health’ of the nations. Exactly how a physical fruit could be of such rich nourishment as to halt the aging process in a human body is not within our limited understanding at this time. A very active field of modern scientific research is gerontology, the study of the phenomena of aging. As yet, gerontologists have no significant scientific understanding of the aging process at all, and therefore no real understanding of what systems of chemicals might be able to stop the process. *Since God is the giver of life, He can give it either directly or indirectly, through whatever secondary agency He might choose.*” [Morris, 87]

**MAN NO LONGER HAS ACCESS TO THIS TREE OF LIFE** — “[T]he Torah makes only brief mention of the tree of life and declares, in the end, that the Lord God set the cherubim ‘*to guard the way to the tree of life*’ (3:24), as though to tell us that now there is no connection between the tree and our world, and we need pay no further heed to it.” [Cassuto, 109f] *But this denial of the tree of life is the grace of God. “Natural immortality without holiness would have been unending misery. Sinful man was therefore shut out from the tree of life, till he could be prepared for it by God’s righteousness. Redemption and resurrection not only restore that which was lost, but give what man was originally created to attain (Rev. 22:14 – ‘Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life.’).”* [Strong, 527]

**A METAPHOR FOR THAT WHICH GIVES MAN PLEASANT EXISTENCE** — While we believe the tree in the garden to be a literal tree, it is also used in Proverbs as a metaphor to represent that which gives man pleasant existence (Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4). In the book of Revelation we see its recurrence where Eden is regained by the saints (Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19). It is also found in later Jewish writings; e.g., 4 Macc 18:16; 2 Esdr 2:12; 8:52. *Proverbs describes wisdom (3:18), the fruit of the righteous (11:30), a desire fulfilled (13:12), and a gentle tongue as a tree of life: in other words, they give fullness of life to their owners.* [Wenham, 1:62]

# THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

The sense is, *‘Likewise there, in the midst of the garden, was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.’* Most of the commentators list the various theories of what the *‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’* could mean; to list all of these theories would greatly expand the length of this present study. If interested, the reader is directed to the following sources: Cassuto, 111-114; Wenham, 1:62-64; Mathews, 1:204-207; Hamilton, 1:163-166; Waltke, 86; Keil, 84-86; Kidner, 63. We will therefore focus on what the majority of the commentators believe to be the main import of the *‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil.’*

**THIS WAS AN ACTUAL TREE** — Again there is nothing in the narrative which would indicate this to be an allegory; the simple reading of the story indicates the *‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’* was an actual, literal tree. That is not to imply there was something in the tree itself which produced spiritual death upon the man and woman; that was an act of judgment from the Lord as they were forewarned. *“Whether there was anything harmful in the fruit itself or not, it would certainly become a tree of ‘knowing’ evil, as soon as man disobeyed God’s word concerning it. He would know evil experimentally (he already knew ‘good’), and the breaking of fellowship with God would cut him or anyone off from the life that has its source only in God.”* [Morris, 88]

**THE RESULTS OF EATING FROM THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL** — As we look at what the text means, while there is not universal consensus, many of those I studied had a general agreement as to what happened when Adam and Eve ate of the tree and why the Lord judged as He did.

*“‘Knowledge of good and evil’ ... offered ‘insight’ (‘to make one wise,’ 3:6, has<sup>c</sup>kîl, ‘to be prudent, circumspect, wisely understand, prosper’).... It is easy to see that God has wisdom and that children lack it, but more difficult to see why it was forbidden to man. The acquisition of wisdom is seen as one of the highest goals of the godly according to the Book of Proverbs. But the wisdom literature also makes it plain that there is a wisdom that is God’s sole preserve, which man should not aspire to attain, since a full understanding of God, the universe, and man’s place in it is ultimately beyond human comprehension. To pursue it without reference to revelation is to assert human autonomy, and to neglect the fear of the LORD which is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7). [For Moses, ...] ‘the only proper posture of man if he would be truly wise and lead a full life is faith in God and not a professed self-sufficiency of knowledge. It is in this latter acceptance, then, that man is forbidden “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad”” (quoting Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis*, 73). *This interpretation appears to be confirmed by Ezek 28, the closest parallel to Gen 2-3, which in highly mythological language describes how the king of Tyre was expelled from Eden for overweening pride and claiming himself to be ‘wise as a god’ (28:6, 15-17).... [Moses] is using it for moral autonomy, deciding what is right without reference to God’s revealed will.*” [Wenham, 1:63f]*

*“What is forbidden to man is the power to decide for himself what is in his best interests and what is not. This is a decision God has not delegated to the earthling. This interpretation also has the benefit of according well with 3:22, ‘the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.’ Man has indeed become a god whenever he makes his own self the center, the springboard, and the only frame of reference for moral guidelines. When man attempts to act autonomously he is indeed attempting to be*

*godlike.*” [Hamilton, 1:166]

*“As it stood, prohibited, it presented the alternative to discipleship: to be self-made, wresting one’s knowledge, satisfactions and values from the created world in defiance of the Creator.”* [Kidner, 63]

*“The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the symbol of God’s right of eminent domain, and indicated that all belonged to him. It is not necessary to suppose that it was known by this name before the Fall. By means of it man came to know good, by the loss of it; to know evil, by bitter experience. C. H. MacIntosh – ‘To know good, without the power to do it; to know evil, without the power to avoid it.’ Bible Commentary, vol 1 pg 40 – The tree of life was symbol of the fact that ‘life is to be sought, not from within, from himself, in his own powers and faculties; but from that which is without him, even from him who hath life in himself.’ ... J. H. McIlvaine, Wisdom of Holy Scriptures, 99-141 – ‘The two trees represented good and evil. The prohibition of the latter was a declaration that man of himself could not distinguish between good and evil, and must trust divine guidance. Satan urged man to discern between good and evil by his own wisdom, and so become independent of God. Sin is the attempt of the creature to exercise God’s attribute of discerning and choosing between good and evil by his own wisdom. It is therefore self-conceit, self-trust, self-assertion, the preference of his own wisdom and the will to the wisdom and will of God.’ ... E. Griffith Jones, Ascent Through Christ, 142 – ‘When the first man stood face to face with definite conscious temptation to do that which he knew to be wrong, he held in his hand the fruit of that tree, and his destiny as a moral being hung trembling in the balance. And when for the first time he succumbed to temptation and faint dawns of remorse visited his heart, at that moment he was banished from the Eden of innocence, in which his nature had hitherto dwelt, and he was driven forth from the presence of the Lord.’ With the first sin, was started another and a downward course of development.”* [Strong, 583]

*“Concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we must hold, that it was prohibited to man, not because God would have him to stray like a sheep, without judgment and without choice; but that he might not seek to be wiser than became him, nor by trusting to his own understanding, cast off the yoke of God, and constitute himself an arbiter and judge of good and evil.”* [Calvin, 118]

*“The Wisdom tradition declares that wisdom is possessed by God and is humanity’s proper goal of attainment. Proverbs indicates, however, that it must be achieved through the ‘fear of the LORD’ and not through grasping it independently (Ps 111:10; Prov 2:1-6; 3:5-6; 9:10; 11:7, 29; 15:33; Isa 11:2). Moreover, there is knowledge that God possesses that man should not seek apart from revelation (Job 15:7-9; 28:12-28; 40:1-5; Prov 30:1-4); to obtain this knowledge is to act with moral autonomy. By obtaining it through disobedience, the first couple expressed their independence of God and obtained wisdom possessed by God through moral autonomy.”* [Mathews, 1:205f]

*“But man transgressed the prohibition, like a child that disobeys his father, who warns him for his own good, and thereby does harm to himself. He is not content with what was given to him, and desired to obtain more. He did not wish to remain in the position of a child who is under the supervision of his father and is constantly dependent on him; he wanted to learn by himself of the world around him, and to act independently on the basis*

***of this knowledge; he aspired to become in knowledge, too, like God.... Having transgressed the commands of his Creator, he was deserving of punishment. This retribution, according to the established rule of the Bible, came upon him in a manner befitting his crime, and found expression in the direct consequences of his disobedience. He was not content with the blissful life that he enjoyed in the garden of Eden, therefore, he was banished from it; he wished to enlarge the boundaries set for him in the very good world that had emerged from the hands of his Father in heaven, hence he fell a prey to all the travails, perils and misfortunes that lurk outside these boundaries; he wanted to know both the good and the evil, consequently he brought about the existence of evil in the world.*** [Cassuto, 113f]

**THE FIRST AND SECOND ADAMS** — *“The first Adam achieved divine reputation through disobedience; the last Adam obtained exaltation by God through humility and obedience (Phil 2:6-11). Adam seized the prize, but Christ, though uniquely the image of God, refused to promote his rightful position and chose to humble himself, acquiring recognition by obedient humiliation and death. Calvin comments: ‘We now understand what is meant by abstaining from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; namely, that Adam might not, in attempting one thing or another, rely upon his own prudence; but that cleaving to God alone, he might become wise only by his obedience.’”* [Mathews, 1:206]

## **APPENDIX — REVELATION 2:7 IN VARIOUS VERSIONS**

*“Those who have ears, let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the Messianic communities. To him winning the victory I will give the right to eat from the Tree of Life which is in God’s Gan-‘Eden.’”* [Complete Jewish Bible (CJB), © 1998 by David H. Stern]

*‘If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will let everyone who wins the victory eat from the life-giving tree in God’s wonderful garden.’* [Contemporary English Version (CEV), © 1995 by American Bible Society]

*‘God’s Spirit is now speaking to people in the churches. You should recognize that the Spirit is speaking. Everyone who knows that should listen to what he says. I will let everyone who wins against Satan eat my fruit. This fruit is from the tree that makes us alive. And this tree grows in God’s garden.’* [Easy English Bible (EASY), © Mission Assist 2019]

*‘Every person who has ears should listen to [hear; obey] what the Spirit says to the churches. To those who win the victory [overcome; conquer] I will give the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life, which is in the garden [or paradise] of God [22:2; Gen. 2:9].’* [Expanded Bible (EXB), © 2011 Thomas Nelson Inc]

*‘If you have ears, then, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches! To those who win the victory I will give the right to eat the fruit of the tree of life that grows in the Garden of God.’* [Good News Translation (GNT), © 1992 American Bible Society]

*‘Every person who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who wins the victory I will give the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life. This tree is in the garden of God.’* [International Children’s Bible (ICB), © 1986, 1988, 1999, 2015 by Thomas Nelson]

*‘Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches. I’m about to call each conqueror to dinner. I’m spreading a banquet of Tree-of-Life fruit, a supper*

*plucked from God's orchard.*' [The Message (MSG), © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson]

*'Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victor I will give the right to eat from the tree of life that is in the garden of God.'* [New American Bible (Revised Edition) (NABRE), © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc]

*'Every person who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To those who win the victory I will give the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life, which is in the garden of God.'* [New Century Version (NCV), © 2005 by Thomas Nelson, Inc]

*'You have ears! Then listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the fruit of the tree of life in the garden of God to everyone who has power and wins.'* [New Life Version (NLV), © 1969, 2003 by Barbour Publishing, Inc]

*'The one having an ear let him hear what the Ruach Hakodesh says to the Kehillot; To the one who wins the nitzachon (victory) I will give to him to eat of the Etz HaChayyim (Tree of Life), which is in the Gan-Eden of Hashem'* [Orthodox Jewish Bible (OJB), © 2002, 2003, 2008, 2010, 2011 by Artists for Israel International]

*'He who can hear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. He says, "I will let the person who wins eat fruit from the tree of life. It grows in God's garden."'* [Worldwide English (New Testament) (WE), © 1969, 1971, 1996, 1998 by SOON Educational Publications]