

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF FALL & REDEMPTION: *JUDGMENT TREE*

Genesis 2:8-3:19

INTRODUCTION: There are three central elements to any worldview:

1. **Creation:** *Where did we come from, and who are we?* This is addressed in Gen.1-2.
2. **Fall:** *What has gone wrong with the world?* This is addressed in Genesis 3.
3. **Redemption:** *What can be done to fix the world?* Genesis 3:15.

I. ARE CHRISTIANS NAÏVE FOR BELIEVING IN THE HISTORICITY OF GENESIS 2-3? NO MORE NAÏVE THAN ADAM AND EVE WOULD HAVE BEEN HAD THEY NOT LISTENED TO THE SERPENT'S LIE.

- A. Is Genesis 2-3 really historical?
 1. Genesis 2-3 for some people is simply “religious nostalgia.”
 2. Rabbi Kushner, author of *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, thinks that the story of Adam and Eve should be understood as “the biblical metaphor of evolution. How the first human beings rose above the animal level and entered the world of knowledge of good and evil.”
 3. Others believe that Genesis 2-3 is some kind of religious myth, a fable, a legend or a parable.
- B. Belief or unbelief in the historicity of Genesis 2-3 comes down to three basic questions:
 1. Does the God of the Bible exist? Is this God actively and personally working in history for the purpose of His glory?
 2. Do Satan and fallen angels exist?
 3. Do you believe in the supernatural?
- C. Our Lord and Savior took Genesis 2-3 as history (John 8:44; cf. Mt.19:4; Mk.10:6).

II. THE CENTRALITY OF TREES IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN (Gen.2:9,16,17; 3:1,2,3,6,8,11,12,17,22,24)

- A. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life were “in the midst of the garden” (**Gen.2:9; 3:3**).
- B. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life defined man’s relationship to His Creator (**Gen.2:16,17**). They had the potential for both blessing (immortality) and cursing (death).

III. THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF SCRIPTURE, TREES WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN GOD’S DEALING WITH MANKIND

- A. The bronze serpent (**Numbers 21:1-9**; cf. 2 Kings 8:4)
 1. “Why have you [God] brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loath this miserable food” (Num.21:5).
 2. In judgment of Israel’s unbelief and complaining the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they died (Num.21:6).
 3. Moses raised a “standard” by which God’s people might look up and be saved (Num.21:8,9).
 - a. The Hebrew word for “standard” can be used for the mast of a ship or any other high pole.
 - b. The standard could be a flag or a banner to which troops might rally or reorient themselves during battle (like the picture at right of Marines raising American Flag at Iwo Jima).
 4. Israel was to look up to the serpent lifted up and be healed. The symbol of Israel’s curse for disobedience had now become the focus of their faith!
- B. According to **Deuteronomy 21:22,23** placing a dead criminal on a tree was a sign of God’s curse. Hanging a person on a tree was a total reversal of the order of creation. Trees were symbolical of life. They were originally created to bring life to man and not death (cf. Gal.3:13,14).
- C. **Isaiah 11** describes Messiah as a “tree of life.”
 1. “a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse” (Isa.11:1)
 2. “a branch from his roots will bear fruit” (Isa.11:1)
 - a. He will delight in the fear of the Lord (**Isa.11:3 with Genesis 3:6**)
 - b. He will not judge by what His eyes see (**Isa.11:3 with Genesis 3:6**)
 - c. Nor make a decision by what His ears hear (**Isa.11:3 with Genesis 3:1-6**)
 3. **Isaiah 11:6-8** envisions Messiah restoring the blessings of Paradise and the removal of the curse.



4. **“Then in that day the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal/standard for the peoples” (Isaiah 11:10 with Numbers 21:8,9)**

- a. Isaiah is prophesying of the Day when the Messiah would be lifted up high on a pole (Isa.11:10).
- b. The same Hebrew word for “standard” is used in Isa.11:10 and in Num.21:8,9!
- c. Just as a tree reversed the blessings of the first creation, so too, a tree would be the instrument whereby the curse would be removed by the seed of the woman.

D. In **John 3**, Jesus taught Nicodemus what had previously been taught in the Old Testament Scriptures (John 3:14-18; cf. John 12:32).

1. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life” (John 3:14,15).
2. **Jesus is teaching Nicodemus that the cross would become a judgment tree by which people would either be saved or damned (John 3:18-21).**

3. Nicodemus later understood His conversation with Jesus because he was one of the two men who took Jesus’ body down from the tree and placed our Lord’s body in the tomb (John 19:38-42).

E. The Author of life and the Maker of Trees (Gen.1:11,12), was hanged on a tree (**Matthew 27:33-56**).

1. At noon time, the heavens darkened – a reversal of the intended order of creation (Matthew 27:45).
2. The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, signifying that the infinite distance between God and man had now been bridged through the death of Jesus (Matthew 27:51).
3. The earth shook and the rocks were split (Mt.27:51).
4. The tombs were opened (Mt.27:52,53).

IV. THE TREE UPON WHICH JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED MEANS THAT GOD IS HOLY AND WITHOUT HOLINESS NO ONE WILL SEE THE LORD

A. The beauty of the cross comes not from the material that it is made from, but from its meaning. Its meaning is that Jesus died on a tree, so that we might be given life.

B. The standard of the cross is far greater than the standard that the Marines raised at Iwo Jima. The standard of the cross is God’s declaration of victory over the enemy.

C. The tree upon which the Lord of Glory was crucified is the revelation of God’s power and wisdom (1 Cor.1:24). It bridges the infinite gap between a sinful humanity and a holy God (Col.2:14). The tree breaks down racial barriers, the separation of Jew and Gentile (Eph.2:16). The tree restores the entire cosmos (Col.1:20). The tree is the place where our Creator was wounded so that we might be healed (1 Pet.2:24). It is the place where we can exchange the filthy rags of our sinfulness for the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:14-21). The cross has become a tree of life for all who put their trust in the resurrected Christ.

D. Jesus demands that his followers be willing to deny themselves and “take up the cross” (Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Luke 9:23-26).

1. The cross is an instrument by which we die to sin and self and it is also the only means by which we will find abundant life!
2. Just as trees were central to the Garden of Eden, *the tree* is now central to ALL HISTORY. **The tree must be central in your worldview of FALL and REDEMPTION.**

QUESTIONS FOR SABBATH DISCUSSION & MEDITATION:

Take what you have learned this morning and make it into a prayer for yourself, your family, the church and/or your nation. Remember that prayer consists in Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication (Feel free to use the outline for praying).

What is a worldview? How and why are trees central to a Christian worldview of fall and redemption?

How would you answer the question, “Is Genesis 3 really historical?”

Explain the statement, “The symbol of our curse has now become the focus of our faith.”

What is the meaning of the cross?

Hopefully, this sermon has helped you think more about the importance of trees in the Bible. If you would like to meditate more about trees, consider looking up the following passages in your Bible: Genesis 2:9; 1 Kings 14:23; Psalm 1:3; 92:12-14; 96:12,13; Proverbs 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4; Song of Solomon 2:3; 7:7; Jeremiah 17:7,8; Ezekiel 6:13; 31:3; Hosea 14:5-8; Zech.3:10; Matthew 13:31.

ILLUSTRATION

The obituary of Ernest M. Dickerman, age 87, considered the granddad of the Eastern wilderness by the Sierra Club, said he committed suicide at his cabin in the mountains of Buffalo Gap, Virginia:

He was 87. He was found under a cherry tree behind his cabin, having shot himself, police said. In a note to his family, Mr. Dickerman said he took his own life as he had long planned to do after the infirmities of age left him unable to "master my own fate in the wilds of this wild country."

Citation: Chicago Tribune (8-6-98), Section 2

ADDITIONAL NOTES

"We are on much firmer textual ground if we recognize the menorah as a tree. The tree-like qualities of the menorah were much more than decoration....A tree-like menorah reminds us of the garden of Eden and so represents the presence of God on earth" (Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place* p.57).

"We think that Paradise and Calvarie,/Christs Crosse, and Adams tree, stood in one place." (*John Donne: The Divine Poems ed. Helen Gardner [Oxford, 1952], Appendix F*).