

## Osaka International Church

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Series: Beginnings #7

Title: The Tree of Life

Scripture: Genesis 2:4b-14

### I. Introduction

Good morning! Karen and I had a wonderful time in Thailand, but we missed all of you, and we are happy to be back home. I will share a couple of photos from our trip during our announcements, but for now let's go on to the message.

This 1601 painting of the Garden of Eden done by Jacob Savery the Elder is a good introduction to our topic for today, the story of the Garden of Eden. The story of Eden is told after the creation week of Genesis 1 has ended, but the author is actually returning to the events of the sixth day in order to tell us more details about the creation of mankind. Let's begin by reading Genesis 2:4b-14.



### II. Scripture: Genesis 2:4b-14 (NIV)

[4b] When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens-- [5] and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, [6] but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground-- [7] the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. [8] Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. [9] And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. [10] A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. [11] The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. [12] (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) [13] The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. [14] The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

### III. Teaching

Although skeptics treat the story of the Garden of Eden as mythology, the Bible always consistently speaks of Eden as a real place and of Adam and Eve as real individuals. Some of the details may be metaphoric or symbolic, but the story of Eden is history. The detailed geographic description emphasizes that Eden was a real place. Four rivers are listed, including the Tigris and the Euphrates. Many Bible scholars believe that the Garden of Eden must have been located approximately where it is shown on this map. But Noah's flood and geological disturbances have changed the landscape of the region, so it is probably impossible to find the precise location where Eden was once located. Fortunately, the location of Eden is not very important.



Far more important is the fact that God created the world good and provided everything necessary for mankind to live a wonderful life in close relationship with Him. Verse **4b** introduces this topic saying, **“When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.”** This is the first place in Scripture where the title, “Lord God,” is used. In the original Hebrew, the words are, “Yahweh Elohim.” In Genesis 1, God was called, “Elohim,” a name that emphasizes God's majesty and power as Creator. But starting in Genesis 2:4, God is often called, “Yahweh,” a name which means, “I am,” and which is personal and intimate.

The use of, “Yahweh Elohim,” in Genesis 2:4, shows that the author is now focusing on the relationship between God and man. “Yahweh” is a personal name of God, and some people argue that the name should be used directly in Bible translations. But most Bible translators have felt that it is better to translate, “Yahweh,” as LORD, a title of personal relationship which is meaningful to people unfamiliar with Hebrew. By the way, I won’t go into the details, but I should mention that some Bibles also use the name, “Jehovah,” a traditional English pronunciation which came from an error in manuscript scholarship hundreds of years ago. Today, most scholars agree that the correct pronunciation is, “Yahweh”. But in Hebrew, as in many other languages, the idea of a name is far greater than a mere set of sounds. When the Bible commands us to honor the name of God, it is speaking of the role, position, and character of God, not just a particular set of sounds in a name. The main point is not the pronunciation, or even whether the name of God is translated as, “LORD,” or not. The main point is for us to understand that the Creator God desires to have a close, personal relationship with us, and that relationship begins with us honoring Him as Creator of all and Lord of our lives.

In **Genesis 2:5-6**, we read, **“and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.”** Here the shrubs and plants referred to are of the kinds which require cultivation. That is why it says, **“shrubs of the field,”** and, **“plant of the field.”** These plants are not yet growing for two reasons. First, because it has not yet rained, and second, because there is no man to cultivate them. In Genesis 2:6 God provides a solution to the lack of water. I should also mention that the exact meaning of Genesis 2:6 is a bit uncertain, because the Hebrew word translated as “streams,” here appears in only one other place in the Bible, in Job 36:27, which is clearly talking about the production of rain. So it is quite possible that Genesis 2:6 is also refers to God causing it to rain.

After providing water, God also solves the problem of the need for a man to cultivate the garden. **Genesis 2:7**, **“the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”** The basic material used for man’s body is the same as God used for making the animals; it is plain old dirt. The word, “formed,” speaks of a process, but nothing is said about the details of the process. It could have been a long complex evolutionary process, or it could have been a short, simple, miraculous process. God has the power to form man by any process that He might choose. But the body of the man is not, “alive,” until God breathes into man’s nostrils the, “breath of life.” Only then does man become, “a living being.” Since the animals were physically alive without receiving this, “breath of life,” it seems that the text is speaking of spiritual life here. God made man spiritually alive by giving man His breath or in other words, His Spirit. God does not stand far off and speak to give man life. Instead, God draws near and blows His breath into the man’s nostrils. The image is as intimate as a kiss.

**Genesis 2:8-9**, **“Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”** God had already planted a beautiful garden and prepared it for man by causing the trees to grow. Now God places the man into the garden so that the man can name the animals and cultivate the shrubs and plants of the garden and take care of it. And, in the middle of the garden, there are two very special trees. As we will see during the next couple of weeks, these trees represent decision and choice. Man is in the paradise of Eden, but in giving spiritual life to man, God has also given the man the ability to choose. In other words, God has given man a measure of free will.

About four hundred years ago, Jan Brueghel painted this image of the Garden of Eden. But what is your image of Eden? If you were a painter, how would you portray paradise? My guess is that we all imagine Eden somewhat differently. But however we might imagine the details, I am sure that it was a truly wonderful place. Amazingly, the place that God has prepared for those who love Him is far more wonderful even than Eden. **1 Corinthians 2:9** tells us, **“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”**



**“No eye has seen”** - that includes Adam and Eve. Even when Adam and Eve were sitting in the Garden

of Eden, they would not have been able to even imagine the wonders of heaven. Some Christians imagine that heaven will be like going back to the Garden of Eden. But Scripture portrays heaven as a city, a great city where God Himself is the light. For nature lovers, maybe there will be a beautiful garden in the middle of the city. But the Bible speaks of heaven as a city, a New Jerusalem. This image of a perfect and holy city speaks powerfully of intimate and loving fellowship with God and with one another.



Speaking of this heavenly city, **Revelation 22:1-2** says, **“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”** The water of life and the fruit of the tree of life are abundantly present in the city. Perhaps these things are not meant to be taken literally; perhaps they are metaphors for our relationship with Christ, but the message is clear. The city is full of abundant life, freely given and constantly renewed. Notice also what is not present. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was in the Garden of Eden, but it is not in the heavenly city. The heavenly city will be filled with abundant life and free of temptation.

In the Garden of Eden, there was, I believe, a literal tree called the tree of life. But throughout the rest of Scripture, this tree is used as a symbol of blessing and salvation. For example, **Proverbs 11:30** says, **“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.”**



The association of the tree of life with salvation is even closer when we remember that the cross of Christ is also wood from a tree. Metaphorically, the cross is a tree of life, because through faith in Jesus’ work on the cross we receive eternal life. This picture shows the church logo of the *Tree of Life Lutheran Church* in the state of Delaware in the USA. It combines the image of the life-giving tree with the symbol of the cross. Truly, the cross of Christ is our tree of life. When we cling to the cross, we have eternal life.



#### IV. Closing

In Acts 5, Peter preached to the Jewish elders of the Sanhedrin saying, (**Acts 5:30-31**), **“The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.”** Jesus was crucified, hung on a tree and killed. But Jesus did not stay in the grave, He rose again and He is alive forevermore. Jesus is alive and He is here with us today, ready to forgive the sins of those who come to Him in repentance and faith. Here in Acts 5, Peter is standing before the Jewish elders and he speaks of the salvation of Israel, but the Bible reveals that the free gift of salvation is for all people and all nations who come to Christ.

In **Revelation 2:7**, Jesus says, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”** To eat from the tree of life is salvation, and it is given to those who overcome. How do we overcome? We overcome by casting aside fear and doubt and living in faith and repentance from sins. We overcome by trusting in Jesus’ victory over sin and death.

Are you ready to overcome faithlessness, fear, and doubt? Are you ready to wholly trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord? Jesus is ready to welcome you and to give you the fruit from the tree of life. Trust in Jesus and in His love and you will be saved. Give your life to Him and you will be able to live with hope, joy, and peace. Let’s pray

#### V. Closing Prayer