



PARTAKE OF THE TREE OF LIFE

What do you know about the tree of life? Obviously it was in the Garden of Eden, with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve didn't eat of it – but what would have happened if they did?

Flaming swords were put at the entrance of the Garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life. Does that mean God never wanted anyone else to partake of it? Where is it now, and how should it affect our lives? Should we be partaking of it? If so, how? Is it mentioned anywhere in the Bible apart from Genesis?

In the sermon today, let's have a look at the topic of the tree of life, and see what we can learn about it, and apply in our everyday lives.

The tree of life is only mentioned a few times in the Bible – in just 3 books: Genesis, Proverbs and Revelation.

Firstly, Genesis 2:9 “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.”

There were lots of trees there, but 2 were more important than the others, significant enough that God named them, whereas He didn't name any of the others.

Adam and Eve had the choice of eating of any of those trees, including the tree of life, as we see in Verse 16. “And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden.”

I don't think God would have hidden from them the fact that the tree of life was there. It is mentioned in Verse 9, and it was available to them. But there was one tree they weren't allowed to eat from – Verse 17 “but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

Genesis 2:7 shows that God created man out of the dust of the ground, out of physical matter. When breath was breathed into them they became living beings, but they were not immortal – they didn't have real lasting life, they were still physical and chemical and subject to death as soon as that breath stopped.

We know man wasn't really alive because in verse 9 we see that the tree of life was available to him – he didn't yet have true life, because that tree would give it to him.

God could have taken of that fruit and handed it to Adam and have him eat it. But He didn't. Instead, He gave him a set of instructions to obey, things to do and things not to do. He gave man a choice to take the tree of life, or to follow Satan's way.

We all know what happened:

Genesis 3:6 “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree (of the knowledge of good and evil) was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”

And notice the result of that choice – Verses 22-24 is the only other place the tree of life is mentioned in Genesis.

Genesis 3:22 “And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”

So we see that the tree of life is a symbol of, or represents, Eternal Life. If Adam had eaten of it, he would have lived forever. But he had chosen not to obey God, and God didn't want him living forever that wrong way. So God cut him off from the tree of life. If he had eaten it after sinning, he would live forever in a state of sin, and all mankind would be sinning, yet all living forever. No one would die, and people would become thoroughly rotten, so life on earth would become a sort of hell. (Similar to the way it is now, except that no one would die, which would make criminals much worse!)



Genesis 3:23-24 ²³“So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴After He drove the man out, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”

So God cut off all mankind from the tree of life, which He had to do under the circumstances.

I mentioned that the tree of life is mentioned in Genesis, Proverbs and Revelation. We've looked at the 2 references in Genesis. Let's now look at the ones in Proverbs.

Proverbs 3:18 She (Wisdom) is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.

Proverbs 11:30 “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives.”

Proverbs 13:12 “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.”

Proverbs 15:4 “The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.”

This is talking about a tree of life, not the tree of life. However, it gives us an idea of what the tree of life represents. It is referring to a rich and full, enjoyable, wonderful life of excellent quality.

Now in Isaiah 11:1 we see an interesting reference to a tree. “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” This is of course a prophecy of Jesus, who is called elsewhere “the righteous Branch” or “God's servant, the Branch”, and the “root of Jesse” in verse 10.

Interesting that He is called the Branch and the Root, because we later find that in fact He is more than just a branch, Jesus is the Tree of Life! It's not really a surprise that the Tree of Life refers to Jesus, because pretty well every symbol in the Bible refers to Him! As we look at the New Testament we begin to see that the way to the Tree of Life, cut off from mankind after Adam's sin, was brought back to mankind by Jesus!

This is why Jesus came to earth, according to John 10:10: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

Does this mean just an enjoyable physical life, or does it mean eternal life? Was Jesus making available to mankind the tree of life again?

We find the answer in John 6:33,47-51 ³³ “For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ⁴⁷ Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

The tree of life was barred from mankind from Adam’s sin until the end of the OT. But now, Jesus Christ came in order that man once again could have access to eternal life – not this time by eating of a tree, but by eating of Christ’s flesh.

Verse 54: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

So eating of Him has the same result as eating the tree of life. Jesus Christ made this possible by dying, so that our sins can be forgiven and we can take of the tree of life. And He died on a stake or tree, so you could compare that to the tree of life: because of that tree we have eternal life. We can eat the fruit of that tree by partaking of Jesus through the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper. The Greek word translated cross is the same one (xulon) that is used for the tree of life.

The fourth century church leader John Chrysostom said: “The devil vanquished Adam by means of a tree (of the knowledge of good and evil), and Christ vanquished the devil by means of the tree of the cross. The devil was defeated by the very weapon of his prior victory.”

So now, since Christ’s coming, the opportunity is now available again for man to have access to eternal life! Just as Adam and Eve had, we have a choice between two ways – we can take of the tree of life, represented now by the flesh and blood of Christ, or we can take of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

These choices are reflected in Galatians 5:16 “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

Here’s the choice between the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When Adam and Eve took of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were fulfilling the “lust of the flesh.”

The fruit looked good to them, as we see in Genesis 3:6 “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.” The lust of the flesh!

Note verse 5 “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” They lusted for this, and when they took of this tree, they took to themselves the prerogative of deciding what was good and what was evil. Instead of depending on God to tell them what was right and wrong and doing what He said, they decided to go it alone and decide for themselves what to do in life. They went the way of reliance on self rather than reliance on God.

And that’s the way mankind has gone ever since. We don’t worry about what God says we should do, we make up our own minds and follow our own ideas and opinions as to what is right and wrong, following the lusts of our own flesh, rather than the Spirit of God.

Back to Galatians 5:16-17 ¹⁶ “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.”

We have the choice between the 2 trees, between 2 ways of life. Romans 8 has verse after verse comparing the way of the flesh with the way of the spirit.

As we go through life we are constantly making a choice between those 2 trees, those 2 ways of life! We are partaking of one or the other, because you can't serve both God and mammon, it's one or the other!

A few verses later we come to Galatians 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Interesting the word fruit is used, because these are the fruits of a tree, the tree of life! We need to be eating liberally of these fruits. It is said that “you are what you eat.” That applies spiritually too! If we are eating of the fruits of God's Holy Spirit, we take them right into us, and we become that way – that's the way we ARE. The Holy Spirit comes into us and flows through us and goes out of us, and we BECOME a tree of life to others!

You might remember Ross Jutsum's song, “**The Tree of Life**”, which beautifully portrays the situation. Here are some of the words...

**“The root of the tree is our Father God
The trunk is the Spirit He gives
The branches show us the way to love
And live every day as He lives
The fruit He grows shows us how to love
Our fellow man as we should
The tree of life comes from God above
And produces nothing but good**

**“Partake of the tree of life, my friend
A wonderful blessing to give
Together we'll sing, our voices blend
Together we're learning to live
A life filled with health and happiness
With faith and patience and peace
A life full of goodness and gentleness
Where love and joy never cease
Partake of the tree of life, my friend
A foretaste of how it will be
Be sure to endure unto the end
Inherit God's own Family”**

We can climb up into the branches of the tree of life and partake freely of its wonderful fruits! Just like young boys love climbing trees, we can climb up into the tree of life. And as you get higher into the branches you can see further around you. As we go further into the tree of life, whole new vistas of life, and spiritual understanding, open up!

We can enjoy the tree of life, and the wonderful way of life it opens up to us. The pleasant, satisfying and fulfilling fruits it offers have no negative side effects or kickbacks.

Or we can grasp at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and do things our own way, climbing amongst the branches of hatred, lying, jealousy and strife. We can eat the pleasant-looking fruits of pride and vanity, and selfishness and dishonesty, and find that they rot in our mouths and ruin our health, because the fruit of that tree leads to death. If we climb up too high in that tree, the branches are liable to break, so we have a big fall!

Just as the Bible begins talking of the tree of life, so it ends with references to this important tree.

Revelation 2:7 “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

This is the wonderful reward we are promised in the future. But in the meantime, we can do this right now. At the present time, we can and should partake of the tree of life. As the song says, we now have “a foretaste of what it will be”. But not as much as we will be able to in the future, when we will enjoy the ultimate fulfillment of it. At the moment we are physical human beings taking some of the fruit of God’s Holy Spirit. We have the earnest of the Holy Spirit – a small down-payment on eternal life, compared to the way we will be full of the dynamic power of the Spirit when we are resurrected to become powerful spirit beings, living in glorious splendour forevermore. And at that time, we will be in the PARADISE OF GOD – a place so magnificent it will cause the Garden of Eden to pale into insignificance.

We read a little more about that in the last chapter of the Bible.

Revelation 22:1-2 ¹“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 ²down 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.”

Verse 1 God’s Spirit will be freely available to everybody then. This is in the time of the new heaven and new earth, when everyone will be spirit members in the immortal, universe-ruling Kingdom of God.

Verse 2 The tree of life will be there, and it seems to have multiplied. There will be a tree of life on each side of the river! Bearing 12 different fruits, every month, on each tree.

We don’t need to get too literal about the exact fulfilment of this because the language is symbolic. Will there be a couple of literal physical trees there? I don’t think so. When it says the Lamb, we know that is referring to Jesus Christ: there won’t be a physical lamb on the throne. What the Lamb pictures or represents is the important thing, and so what the tree of life means or represents is what is important, and that is eternal life through Jesus Christ, and the fruits of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness. These are all medicinal, healing, refreshing fruits – and with everyone living according to them, and displaying them in glorious liberality and abundance, how wonderful the world will be!! Numbers are symbolic too of course, and the number 12 refers to completion or perfection of fruits.

Revelation 22:14 also mentions the tree of life, and shows how we can partake of it.

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.”

“Washing our robes” is the key to partaking of the tree of life. How do we do that?

Rev 7:14 And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

So the tree of life is mentioned from the beginning of the Bible to the very end! It pictures the ultimate reward of the people of God – to have eternal life, but not only that. The tree of life doesn't just picture the everlasting length of life, but the quality of that eternal life – it will be an enjoyable, invigorating, refreshing, exciting, fulfilling life, where we will be eating the delicious fruits of the tree of life forever.

In Psalm 16:11 David said “You will show me the path of life” (or he could just as well have said the tree of life): “In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.”

Eternal life is well depicted by a tree, because a tree keeps on growing, bigger and bigger, with more and more delightful fruit being produced. And so God's Kingdom will grow and increase forever. It's also depicted by a river – life will keep on going, growing, flowing into new challenging territory.

What a marvellous thing to look forward to!

Adam and Eve rejected the tree of life, and took instead of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

We have the same choice before us that they had. We make that choice day by day as we live our lives.

Let's be sure to choose the way of God – of staying close to Jesus Christ the tree of life and partaking of the fruits of the Spirit -- the way that will lead to our living in joy and happiness for all eternity.

Let's partake of the tree of life, now and forever.

