

Book of Moses Essays #58: Moses Sees the Garden of Eden (Moses 3) The Symbolism of the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life (Moses 3:9)

 interpreterfoundation.org/book-of-moses-essays-058

by Book of Mormon Central Staff and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

This series is cross-posted with the permission of Book of Mormon Central from their website at [Pearl of Great Price Central](#)

 [Download PDF](#)

 [Download audio recording](#)



Figure 1. Fig Tree at Tel Dan Nature Reserve, Israel, 2008

The Tree of Life is certainly the most significant object in the Garden of Eden. However, its presence has always been somewhat of a puzzle to students of the Bible because it is only briefly mentioned in Genesis: once at the beginning of the story in connection with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,^[1] and once at the end when cherubim and a flaming sword are placed before it to prevent Adam and Eve from partaking of its fruit.^[2]

Though neither the nature nor the function of the Trees of Life and Knowledge are given explicitly in scripture, an understanding of temple teachings and layout can greatly illuminate this subject. This *Essay* will provide some background on the symbolism of these two trees. In *Essay #60*, we will see how their placement in the Garden of Eden relates to the layout of Israelite temples and makes their roles in the story of Adam and Eve apparent.

Symbolism of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

The Hebrew expression “knowledge of good and evil” can mean knowledge of what is good and bad, or of happiness and misery—or, most arguably, of “everything,” if “good and evil” can be taken to mean the totality of all that is, was, or is yet to be.^[3] The variegated light and darkness in the photograph of the fig tree shown above suggests the ambivalent nature of this symbolism.

Perhaps the most relevant hint on the meaning of the phrase comes from Deuteronomy 1:39, which speaks of little children “who... have no knowledge of good and evil,” suggesting “that they are not legally responsible for their actions.”^[4] In this sense, the term refers not to abstract conceptual knowledge but rather to the kind of “knowledge which infancy lacks and experience acquires.”^[5] Thus, sensing his inexperience, the young King Solomon prayed for the ability “to discern between good and evil” so that he would be able to function in his royal role.^[6] The kind of understanding implied by the phrase “knowledge of good and evil” is, as Claus Westermann^[7] concludes:

...concerned with knowledge (or wisdom) in the general, comprehensive sense. Any limitation of the meaning of “the knowledge of good and evil” is thereby excluded. It can mean neither moral nor sexual^[8] nor any other partial knowledge, but only that knowledge which includes and determines human existence as a whole, [the ability to master] ... one’s own existence.

Consistent with this reading of the phrase, Latter-day Saint scripture refers to the ability to know “good *from* evil,”^[9] which presupposes “man’s power to choose the sweet even when it is harmful and reject the bitter even when beneficial.”^[10]

The Prohibition on the Tree of Knowledge

The commandment specifying the prohibition of eating from the Tree of Knowledge is given in Moses 3:16-17:

16 And I, the Lord God, commanded the man, saying: Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat,

17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou^[11] shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

The phrase “thou mayest choose for thyself” is a Book of Moses addition to the Genesis account. The phrase serves to emphasize the fact that Adam and Eve are to be placed in a situation where they must exercise their agency in order to continue their progression. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, speaking while an apostle, offered the following paraphrase of the command:

The Lord said to Adam, here is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you want to stay here, then you cannot eat of that fruit. If you want to stay here, then I forbid you to eat it. But you may act for yourself, and you may eat of it if you want to. And if you eat of it you will die.^[12]

Fig Tree or Apple? Real or Figurative?

Jewish and Christian traditions often identify the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil as a fig tree, thus heightening the irony later on when Adam and Eve attempt to cover themselves with its leaves.^[13] The fruit of the fig tree is known for its abundance of seeds, thus an apron of green fig leaves is an appropriate symbol for Adam and Eve’s ability to “be fruitful and multiply”^[14] after the Fall.^[15] Less likely are suggestions that the forbidden fruit was to be symbolized by the grape,^[16] the pomegranate, or the apple (based on the correspondence between the Latin *malus* = evil and *malum* = apple).^[17]

Latter-day Saint teachings about the nature of the “forbidden fruit” include a wide variety of opinions. For example, while President Brigham Young^[18] and Elder James E. Talmage^[19] understood the scriptures as describing a literal ingestion of “food” of some sort, Elder Bruce R. McConkie left the door open for a figurative interpretation: “What is meant by partaking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil is that our first parents complied with whatever laws were involved so that their bodies would change from their state of paradisiacal immortality to a state of natural mortality.”^[20] This topic will be discussed in more detail in a later *Essay*.

Symbolism of the Tree of Life

Since the Tree of Life is not specifically prohibited to Adam and Eve, commentators have often speculated on the question of whether Adam and Eve can be presumed to have eaten from it to prolong their lives so long as they remained in the Garden. However, a careful reading of Genesis itself seems to run counter to this view. For example, the use of the term “also” in Genesis 3:22 (Hebrew *gam*; “and take *also* of the tree of life”) suggests that they

had not yet partaken of the fruit of the Tree of Life at the time these words were spoken. Evidence for the use of *gam* in the sense of “new and additional activity” is provided in Genesis 3:6 as well (“and *also* gave to her husband”).^[21] Additionally, Barr studied 131 cases of “lest” (Hebrew *pen*; “*lest* he put forth his hand ... and eat”) in the Bible “and found none which means ‘lest someone continue to do what they are already doing.’”^[22] Specifically affirming such a reading is a unique Samaritan exegesis of Genesis 2:16 that specifically excludes the Tree of Life from the original permission given to Adam and Eve to eat from the trees of the Garden.^[23]

In contrast to the common idea that eating the fruit of the Tree of Life was merely a way to provide biological immortality, Elder Bruce R. McConkie maintained that its purpose was to confer the glory of “eternal life”^[24] — the kind of life that God lives—in whatever degree, of course, those who partake are qualified to receive it.^[25] Non-Latter-day Saint scholar Vos concurs, concluding that “the tree was associated with the higher, the unchangeable, the eternal life to be secured by obedience throughout the probation.”^[26] According to this view, Adam and Eve would not have been permitted to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Life at their own discretion. Like each one of us, Adam and Eve’s only approach to the Tree of Life was by way of leaving the Garden of Eden to pass into mortality, and finally returning at last to take of the sweet fruit only when they had completed their probation and were authoritatively invited to do so.^[27]

Olive Tree or Date Palm?

Ancient commentators sometimes identify the symbolism of the Tree of Life with the olive tree.^[28] Its extremely long life makes it a fitting representation for eternal life, and the everyday use of the oil as a source of both nourishment for man and fuel for light evokes natural associations when used in conjunction with the ritual anointing of priests and kings, and the blessing of the sick.^[29]

A variety of texts also associate the olive tree with the Garden of Eden. For example, ancient traditions recount that on his sickbed Adam requested Eve and Seth to return to the Garden to retrieve oil — presumably olive oil — from the “tree of his mercy.”^[30] Recalling the story of the dove that returned to Noah’s ark with the olive branch in its mouth, one rabbinical opinion gives it that the “gates of the garden of Eden opened for the dove, and from there she brought it.”^[31] Two days after a revelation describing how war was to be “poured out upon all nations,” Joseph Smith designated Doctrine and Covenants 88, by way of contrast, as the “olive leaf ... plucked from the Tree of Paradise, the Lord’s message of peace to us.”^[32]



Figure 2. Olive Tree, Traditional Site of the Garden of Gethsemane, 1977

The date palm, on the other hand, is the symbol of the sacred tree in Assyrian mythology, and its longevity was a fitting symbol for long life to the Egyptians.^[33] The Old Testament Deborah rendered judgment as she dwelt under a palm tree,^[34] and the holiest places within the temples of Solomon and of Ezekiel's vision were decorated with palms.^[35] As a sign of victory and kingship, palm fronds were a central part of the celebration of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem.^[36] The *Qur'an* also describes the palm as providing shelter and nourishment for Mary, who was said to have given birth to Jesus in the wilderness beneath such a tree.^[37]

A single date palm tree “often yielded more than one hundred pounds of fruit per year over a productive lifetime of one hundred years or more. Akkadian synonyms for date palm included ‘tree of abundance’ (*isu masru*) and ‘tree of riches’ (*isu rasu*)—appropriate names for the vehicle of agricultural success and richness.”^[38]



Figure 3. Palm Tree Near the Dead Sea, 2008

Also in favor of the date palm as a representation of the Tree of Life are the Book of Mormon accounts of the visions of Lehi and Nephi. Lehi contrasts the fruit of the Tree of Life to the fruit of the forbidden tree: “the one being sweet and the other bitter.”^[39] The fruit of the date palm—often described as “white” in its most desirable varieties, well-known to Lehi’s family, and likely available in the Valley of Lemuel where the family was camped at the time of the visions—would have provided a more fitting analogue than the olive to the love of God that was “sweet above all that is sweet.”^[40]

The Oil-Bearing Tree of Mercy as a Third Tree?

Reconciling the competing conceptions of a Tree of Life that bears sweet fruit like the date as opposed to oil-producing fruit like the olive are ancient suggestions that the Garden story was concerned with three special trees rather than two.^[41] In addition to the original Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge, the third tree, an olive tree, is said to have sprouted up only after the sin of Adam. Thus, in a speculative mood, one might consider the possibility of two “Trees of Life”: the original Edenic tree with its sweet fruit, destined as the ultimate reward of the righteous and arguably represented within the Holy of Holies of the First Temple,^[42] and the subsequently sprouted oil-bearing “Tree of Mercy”^[43] that may have been symbolized in the *menorah* that is said to have stood in front of the veil in the Holy Place. In the parlance of the doctrines of the Restoration, we might see in this interpretation the oil-bearing olive tree as representing the Savior, His healing atonement, and the Gospel covenants explained to Adam and Eve after the Fall that would eventually enable them to return to the presence of the Father and the enjoyment of the sweet fruit of eternal life.^[44]

Conclusions

The message about the results of eating of one or the other tree is clear. In both cases, those who eat become “partakers of the divine nature”^[45] — the Tree of Life symbolizing the means by which a fitting measure of eternal life is granted to the faithful, while the Tree of Knowledge enabling those who ingest its fruit to become “as gods, knowing good and evil.”^[46] The subsequent story of the Fall seems to teach, however, that eating of either tree in an unprepared state may bring dire consequences.

This essay is adapted from Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses*. 2014 update ed. Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Publishing, 2014. English: <https://archive.org/details/150904TempleThemesInTheBookOfMoses2014UpdatedEditionSR/eading> ; Spanish: <http://www.templethemes.net/books/171219-SPA-TempleThemesInTheBookOfMoses.pdf>, pp. 61–127.

Further Reading

Bradshaw. *Creation, Fall, and the Story of Adam and Eve*. 2014 Updated ed. *In God's Image and Likeness* 1. Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2014.

<https://archive.org/details/140123IGIL12014ReadingS>, pp. 127, 143, 145, 163–168, 189, 206–210, 225, 228–234, 248–250, 261, 277, 295–296, 341, 440–441, 460–462, 591–595, 640–641, 654, 657, 699–700, 727–729, 748–750, 755–756, 758, 778, 858–859.

Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses*. 2014 update ed. Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Publishing, 2014. English:

<https://archive.org/details/150904TempleThemesInTheBookOfMoses2014UpdatedEditionSR> eading ; Spanish: <http://www.templethemes.net/books/171219-SPA-TempleThemesInTheBookOfMoses.pdf>, pp. 61–127.

Draper, Richard D., S. Kent Brown, and Michael D. Rhodes. *The Pearl of Great Price: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2005, pp. 49–51, 227.

Welch, John W., and Donald W. Parry. *The Tree of Life: From Eden to Eternity*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2011.

References

al-Tha'labi, Abu Ishaq Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim. d. 1035. *'Ara'is Al-Majalis Fi Qisas Al-Anbiya' or "Lives of the Prophets"*. Translated by William M. Brinner. *Studies in Arabic Literature, Supplements to the Journal of Arabic Literature, Volume 24*, ed. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2002.

Anderson, Gary A., and Michael Stone, eds. *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* 2nd ed. *Society of Biblical Literature: Early Judaism and its Literature*, ed. John C. Reeves. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999.

Anderson, Gary A. *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Baldwin, Robert W. "The Legend of the True Cross: Piero's Frescoes at Arezzo." In *A Critical History of Western Art, 1300-2000*, edited by Robert W. Baldwin. New London, CT: Connecticut College (published only on CD-ROM), 2001. <http://oak.conncoll.edu/rwbal/>. (accessed September 1).

Bethge, Hans-Gebhard, and Bentley Layton. "On the origin of the world." In *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson. 3rd, Completely Revised ed, 170-89. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990.

Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. "The Ezekiel Mural at Dura Europos: A tangible witness of Philo's Jewish mysteries?" *BYU Studies* 49, no. 1 (2010): 4-49. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol49/iss1/2/>.

———. *Creation, Fall, and the Story of Adam and Eve*. 2014 Updated ed. In *God's Image and Likeness* 1. Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2014.
<https://archive.org/download/140123IGIL12014ReadingS>.

Brenton, Lancelot C. L. 1851. *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005.

Butterworth, Edric Allen Schofeld. *The Tree at the Navel of the Earth*. Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 1970.

Cohen, Abraham, ed. *The Soncino Chumash: The Five Books of Moses with Haphtaroth*. London: The Soncino Press, 1983.

Dogniez, Cécile, and Marguerite Harl, eds. *Le Pentateuque d'Alexandrie: Texte Grec et Traduction. La Bible des Septante*, ed. Cécile Dogniez and Marguerite Harl. Paris, France: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001.

Etheridge, J. W., ed. *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch, with the Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum from the Chaldee*. 2 vols. London, England: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862, 1865. Reprint, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005. <http://www.targum.info/pj/psjon.htm>. (accessed August 10, 2007).

Faulconer, James E. "Adam and Eve—Community: Reading Genesis 2-3." *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2003). http://www.philosophyandscripture.org/Issue1-1/James_Faulconer/james_faulconer.html. (accessed August 10).

Gaylord, H. E., Jr. "3 (Greek Apocalypse of) Baruch." In *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. Vol. 1, 653-79. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1983.

Gileadi, Avraham. *Studies in the Book of Mormon*. n. p.: Hebron Books, 2005.

Griggs, C. Wilfred. "The tree of life in ancient cultures." *Ensign* 18, June 1988, 26-31.

Hafen, Bruce C. *The Broken Heart*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1989.

Halford, Mary-Bess. *Lutwin's Eva und Adam: Study — Text — Translation*. Göppingen, Germany: Kümmerle Verlag, 1984.

Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990.

Hertz, J. H., ed. *The Soncino Edition of the Pentateuch and Haftorahs (with Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary)* 2nd ed. Brooklyn, NY: The Soncino Press, 1970.

Ibn Ishaq ibn Yasar, Muhammad. d. 767. *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989.

Isenberg, Wesley W. "The Gospel of Philip (II, 3)." In *The Nag Hammadi Library*, edited by James M. Robinson. 3rd, Completely Revised ed, 139-60. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990.

Koltun-Fromm, Naomi. "Aphrahat and the rabbis on Noah's righteousness in light of the Jewish-Christian polemic." In *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation*, edited by Judith Frishman and Lucas Van Rompay. *Traditio Exegetica Graeca*, vol. 5, 57-71. Louvain, Belgium: Editions Peeters, 1997.

LaCocque, André. *The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2006.

Lowy, Simeon. *The Principles of Samaritan Bible Exegesis*. *Studia Post-Biblica* 28, ed. J. C. H. Lebram. Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1977.

Madsen, Truman G. *The Sacrament: Feasting at the Lord's Table*. Orem, UT: Amalphi Publishing, 2008.

———. 1994. "In a place called Gethsemane." In *Five Classics by Truman G. Madsen*, 299-306. Salt Lake City, UT: Eagle Gate, 2001.

Malan, Solomon Caesar, ed. *The Book of Adam and Eve: Also Called The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan: A Book of the Early Eastern Church. Translated from the Ethiopic, with Notes from the Kufale, Talmud, Midrashim, and Other Eastern Works*. London, England: Williams and Norgate, 1882. Reprint, San Diego, CA: The Book Tree, 2005.

Matt, Daniel C., ed. *The Zohar, Pritzker Edition*. Vol. 1. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.

Matthews, Robert J. "The probationary nature of mortality." In *Alma: "The Testimony of the Word."* *Papers from the Sixth Annual Book of Mormon Symposium, 1991*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. Book of Mormon Symposia 6, 47-60. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992. Reprint, Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2008.

McConkie, Bruce R. *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1985.

———. *Doctrines of the Restoration: Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie*. Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1989.

Mettinger, Tryggve N. D. *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-historical Study of Genesis 2-3*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007.

Müller, F. Max. "Bundahis." In *Pahlavi Texts: The Bundahis, Bahman Yast, and Shayast La-Shayast (including Selections of Zad-spāram)*, edited by F. Max Müller. 5 vols. Vol. 1. Translated by E. W. West. The Sacred Books of the East 5, ed. F. Max Müller, 1-151. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1880. Reprint, Kila, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004.

Neusner, Jacob, ed. *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis, A New American Translation*. 3 vols. Vol. 1: Parashiyot One through Thirty-Three on Genesis 1:1 to 8:14. *Brown Judaic Studies 104*, ed. Jacob Neusner. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985.

Nibley, Hugh W. "On the sacred and the symbolic." In *Temples of the Ancient World*, edited by Donald W. Parry, 535-621. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994. Reprint, Nibley, Hugh W. "On the Sacred and the Symbolic." In *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks. The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 17, 340-419. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008.

———. 1975. *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*. 2nd ed. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2005.

O'Reilly, Jennifer. "The trees of Eden in mediaeval iconography." In *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden*, edited by Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 136, eds. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, 167-204. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992.

Ricks, Stephen D. "Olive culture in the second temple era and early rabbinic period." In *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, 460-76. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994.

Ryen, Jon Olav. *The Tree in the Lightworld: A Study in the Mandaean Vine Motif*. Oslo, Norway: Unipub/Oslo Academic Press (Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo), 2006.

Sarna, Nahum M., ed. *Genesis. The JPS Torah Commentary*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna. Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

Scholem, Gershom, ed. 1941. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York City, NY: Schocken Books, 1995.

———. 1974. *Kabbalah*. New York City, NY: Dorset Press, 1987.

Smith, Joseph Fielding, Jr. *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1954-1956.

———. *Fall, Atonement, Resurrection, Sacrament (Delivered at the University of Utah Institute of Religion, January 19, 1961)*. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Institute of Religion, 1961.

———. 1957-1966. *Answers to Gospel Questions*. 5 vols. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1979.

Smith, Joseph, Jr. 1938. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1969.

Starr, James. 2007. "Does 2 Peter 1:4 speak of deification?" In *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, edited by Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, 81-92. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

Stordalen, Terje. *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2-3 and the Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature*. Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000.

Talmage, James E. 1915. *Jesus the Christ. Classics in Mormon Literature*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1983.

Tóth, Endre, and Károly Szelényi. *The Holy Crown of Hungary: Kings and Coronation*. 2nd ed. Budapest, Hungary: Kossuth Publishing, 2000.

Tvedtnes, John A. "Olive oil: Symbol of the Holy Ghost." In *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, 427-59. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994.

Westermann, Claus, ed. 1974. *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary* 1st ed. Translated by John J. Scullion. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994.

Wyatt, Nicolas. *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.

Young, Brigham. 1854. "'I propose to speak in a subject that does not immediately concern yours or my welfare,' a sermon delivered on 8 October 1854." In *The Essential Brigham Young*. Classics in Mormon Thought 3, 86-103. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1992.

Notes on Figures

Figure 1. Photograph DSC02933, 21 May 2008. Copyright, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw.

Figure 2. Photograph J-102, 1977. Copyright, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw.

Figure 3. Photograph DSC02894, 19 May 2008. Copyright, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw.

Endnotes

- [1] Moses 3:9.
- [2] Moses 4:28-31.
- [3] Doctrine and Covenants 93:24.
- [4] V. P. Hamilton, Genesis 1-17, p. 166.
- [5] J. H. Hertz, Pentateuch, p. 8; cf. J. E. Faulconer, Adam and Eve, pp. 19-20.
- [6] 1 Kings 3:9; cf. *Targum Yerushalmi*: “the tree of knowledge, of which anyone who ate would distinguish between good and evil” (cited in J. W. Etheridge, Onkelos).
- [7] C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, pp. 247-248; cf. T. N. D. Mettinger, Eden, pp. 61-63.
- [8] Sarna writes: “Against the interpretation that [the fruit represented carnal knowledge] is the fact... that sexual differentiation is made by God Himself [Moses 2:27], that the institution of marriage is looked upon... as part of the divinely ordained order [Moses 2:25], and that... ‘knowledge of good and bad’ is a divine characteristic” (N. M. Sarna, Genesis, p. 19; see Moses 4:11, 28). Westermann concurs, concluding that the opening of the eyes experienced by Adam and Eve in Moses 4:13 “does not mean that they become conscious of sexuality” (C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, p. 251). It is later, immediately following the account of their expulsion from Eden, that we are given the significant detail that “Adam knew his wife, and she bare unto him sons and daughters” (Moses 5:2. See J. E. Talmage, Jesus the Christ, p. 30).
- [9] In contrast to the Bible, which exclusively employs the term “good *and* evil,” (Genesis 2:9, 17; Genesis 3:5, 22; Deuteronomy 1:39; 2 Samuel 19:35; Proverbs 31:12; Isaiah 5:20; Jeremiah 24:3; Amos 5:14; Matthew 12:35; Luke 6:45; Hebrews 5:14; cf. 2 Nephi 2:18, 15:20; Alma 29:5, 42:3; Moses 3:9, 17; Moses 4:11, 28; Moses 5:11; Abraham 5:9, 13; JS-H 1:33), the Book of Mormon and the book of Moses contain nine instances of the similar phrase “good *from* evil” (2 Nephi 2:5, 26; Alma 12:31, 29:5; Helaman 14:31; Moroni 7:15-16, 19; Moses 6:56). Though, admittedly, the difference in connotation between these terms is not entirely consistent across all scriptural references to them (see e.g., Alma 12:31 and Moses 4:28), one might still argue for a distinction between the knowledge Adam and Eve attempted to acquire when they determined to eat the forbidden fruit (and would eventually receive in its fullness when they had successfully finished their probation), and that which they gained later through the experience of repeated choice in a fallen world. Unlike the former attempt to gain knowledge that had come in response to Satan’s deception and as the result of moral autonomy exercised in transgression of divine instruction, the essential knowledge attained gradually by Adam and Eve during their later period of mortal probation would depend on their hearkening to the “Spirit of Christ” (Moroni 7:16, 19), mercifully made available to them through the power of redemption (2 Nephi 2:26), and enabling them to “know good from evil... with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night” (Moroni 7:15).
- [10] A. Cohen, Chumash, p. 10.
- [11] Whereas the Hebrew text uses the singular “thou,” implying that the commandment was given to Adam alone, the Greek *Septuagint* uses the plural “you” (L. C. L. Brenton, Septuagint, Genesis 2:17, p. 3; C. Dogniez *et al.*, Pentateuque, Genesis 2:17, pp. 140-141).

The idea that both Adam and Eve were both present to hear this command from God was not uncommon in Jewish and early Christian tradition (G. A. Anderson *et al.*, Synopsis, 32:1, p. 36E; G. A. Anderson, Perfection, pp. 81-84).

[12] J. F. Smith, Jr., Fall. See also J. F. Smith, Jr., Answers, 4:81. The unique phrasing of this commandment is noted by Elder Smith: “In no other commandment the Lord ever gave to man, did he say: ‘But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself’” (J. F. Smith, Jr., Doctrines, 1:114).

[13] E.g., D. C. Matt, Zohar 1, Be-Reshit 1:36b, p. 229.

[14] Moses 2:28.

[15] Similarly, in the Zoroastrian *Bundahishn*, the special tree standing near to the Tree of Life is called the “tree of many seeds” (F. M. Müller, Bundahis, 9:5, 18:9, 27:2, pp. 31, 66, 99-100). A Coptic text says that the leaves of the Tree of Knowledge “are like fig leaves. Its fruit is like a good appetizing date” (H.-G. Bethge *et al.*, Origin, 110:22-23, p. 179). The fig tree also is prominent as a symbol in the New Testament, and at a crucial point in Jesus’ ministry became the subject of a curse (Matthew 21:18-20; 24:32; Luke 13:6-9; John 1:48; James 3:12; cf. Joel 2:22).

[16] The story of Noah’s drunkenness is often given as the basis for this identification—see JST Genesis 9:24. For examples, see A. I. A. I. M. I. I. al-Tha’labi, Lives, p. 49; H. E. Gaylord, Jr., 3 Baruch, 6:15-17, p. 669; H. W. Nibley, Sacred, pp. 577-579; H. W. Nibley, Message (2005), p. 308; M. Ibn Ishaq ibn Yasar, Making, p. 37. On the possibility of polemical motivations for the identification of the forbidden fruit as the grape, see N. Koltun-Fromm, Aphrahat.

[17] Or perhaps: Latin *pomum* (fruit) = French *pomme* (apple) (A. LaCocque, Trial, p. 95 n. 47).

[18] B. Young, 8 October 1854, p. 98. President Young taught that Adam and Eve “partook of the fruit of the Earth, until their systems were charged with the nature of Earth.”

[19] J. E. Talmage, Jesus the Christ, p. 19. Elder Talmage describes Eve’s transgression as “indulgence in food unsuited to [her] nature.”

[20] B. R. McConkie, Sermons, p. 189.

[21] V. P. Hamilton, Genesis 1-17, p. 209. See also T. N. D. Mettinger, Eden, p. 20.

[22] T. Stordalen, Echoes, pp. 230-231. However, slightly weakening Barr’s claim, there are two exceptions among the 131 instances: Exodus 1:9 and 2 Samuel 12:27.

[23] S. Lowy, Principles, p. 403.

[24] B. R. McConkie, New Witness, p. 86; cf. A. Gileadi, Studies, p. 10; B. C. Hafen, Broken, p. 30.

[25] Doctrine and Covenants 88:28-32; R. J. Matthews, Probationary Nature, p. 56.

[26] Cited in V. P. Hamilton, Genesis 1-17, p. 209 n. 6. Note that in the vision of Lehi there is not the same ultimacy when the fruit is eaten, since some, “after they had tasted of the fruit... were ashamed... and... fell away” (1 Nephi 8:28).

[27] D&C 88:68.

[28] C. W. Griggs, Tree of Life; S. D. Ricks, Olive; J. A. Tvedtnes, Olive Oil, pp. 429-430.

[29] T. G. Madsen, Gethsemane; T. G. Madsen, Sacrament, p. 97; J. A. Tvedtnes, Olive Oil, p. 429.

[30] Cf. G. A. Anderson *et al.*, Synopsis, Latin 36:2, p. 40E; S. C. Malan, Adam and Eve, 36:1-3, pp. 39-40.

[31] J. Neusner, Genesis Rabbah 1, 33:6, p. 351.

[32] J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 14 January 1833, p. 18.

[33] J. O. Ryen, Mandaean Vine, p. 205.

[34] Judges 4:5.

[35] 1 Kings 6:29, 32, 35, 7:36; 2 Chronicles 3:5; Ezekiel 40:16, 22, 26, 31, 34, 37; 41:18-20, 25-26.

[36] John 12:12-13; cf. Revelation 7:9, 14.

[37] *Qur'an* 19:23-26.

[38] T. Stordalen, Echoes, p. 82.

[39] 2 Nephi 2:15.

[40] Alma 32:42.

[41] See J. M. Bradshaw, God's Image 1, pp. 166-167, 210, 658, 755-756. The imagery of three trees recalls the two Menorot that flank the scroll shrine in Palestinian synagogue mosaics (N. Wyatt, Space, p. 169). In Zechariah's vision, a seven-branched menorah is described as standing between two olive trees that provide a divine supply of oil and symbolizing "two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth" (Zechariah 4:14). The fact that these two trees symbolize anointed ones—probably understood at the time as the champions of temple reconstruction Joshua and Zerubbabel (Zechariah 1-8, Haggai)—reinforces the concept that such trees can represent individual persons.

In Christian imagery a related idea was often visually represented by a cruciform tree flanked by two small identical trees from Paradise (J. O'Reilly, Iconography, pp. 176, 178, 186, 188, 192-193). The centrally depicted "Tree of Mercy," said in other sources to have been planted by Seth over the grave of Adam, would be destined to bear "the fruit of the crucified Christ" (R. W. Baldwin, Legend. See also W. W. Isenberg, Philip, 73:15-19, p. 153; J. O. Ryen, Mandaean Vine, pp. 214-215, 221). Note the visual correspondence to the two thieves, crucified on either side of the Savior (Matthew 27:38).

The flanking trees depicted on the Holy Crown of Hungary surrounding an enthroned Christ are identified as *heavenly* cypresses (E. Tóth *et al.*, Holy Crown, pp. 23, 28). In imagery going back to pre-Christian times, the paired trees represent "the cypress-tree and life-giving water, the pattern of the two ways, to left or to right" (E. A. S. Butterworth, Tree, p. 216).

[42] See J. M. Bradshaw, God's Image 1, p. 658, 755-756. See also Ezekiel 41:20 which says, in describing the Holies in Solomon's temple, that "From the ground unto above the door were cherubims and palm trees made, and on the wall of the temple."

[43] See, e.g., M.-B. Halford, Eva und Adam, pp. 279-281.

[44] Intriguingly, there are hints of an "atonement" that is to take place among the trees of the Garden of Eden. In the *Zohar*, the originally unified Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge is split by the transgression of Adam and Eve, though a promise is given that these trees would

one day be made one again (G. Scholem, *Trends*, p. 232, see also 236 and 404–5 n. 105; G. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 112, 124–28, 166–68; D. C. Matt, *Zohar* 1, pp. 85, 222). The same theme is found in the mural of Ezekiel at Dura Europos, where, at the time of Israel's ultimate restoration, two split olive trees are brought back together into one (J. M. Bradshaw, *Ezekiel Mural*, p. 29).

[45] 2 Peter 1:4. For recent exegesis of this phrase, see J. Starr, *Partakers*.

[46] Moses 4:11; cf. Moses 4:28.