

Series: Shalom

August 14, 2016

## **Title: The Choice**

[Slide 1] By Benjitheijneb - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=20441116>

**Text: Genesis 2:9, 16-17**

## **Two Trees in the Garden**

### **The Methuselah Tree:**

A 10 foot high date palm sits inside a fenced enclosure at an agricultural commune, or kibbutz, in southern Israel. While it has been growing for only 11 years, its story stretches back to the time of Christ.

This is no ordinary date palm. It is a Judean date palm that has been extinct for over 1800 years. It sprouted from an ancient seed that archaeologists discovered in the ruins of Masada -- King Herod's fortress overlooking the Dead Sea. The seed was held in storage along with two others for 40 years; then in 2005 scientists treated them with fertilizer and hormones and planted them at the kibbutz. One of them sprouted and was named after the oldest man in the Bible – Methuselah.

In 2011 Methuselah produced flowers and has successfully pollinated female date palms. Additional Judean date palms, some of them female, have also been sprouted, and it is hoped that soon the Judean date palm will be producing new generations of date palms in its ancient homeland.

While the Judean date palm's future hinges on just a few individuals today – trees brought back from the dead, as it were, in ancient times the Judean date palm was the very symbol of Judea and the basis of the local economy. Forests of date palms 80' high stretched from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea in the south in a band 7 miles wide. The dates from this palm served as both food and medicine to people in Judea and across the Roman Empire. It was for them the veritable Tree of Life.

### **Two Trees:**

We first meet the Tree of Life in another garden: the Garden of Eden.

**[Slide 2]**

*Genesis 2:8-9 NIV*

*Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.*

*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.*

Two special trees: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. One opened the door to the fullness of God's purpose and blessing as part of His creation. The other opened the door to a return of the chaos and darkness from which God had created His beautiful world.

With the presence of those two trees came a freedom and a warning:

**[Slide 3]**

*Genesis 2:16-17 NIV*

*And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 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."*

**Two Choices:**

These two trees represent the two choices before us each moment of every day. Will we choose the Tree of Life, and entrust ourselves to the loving care and protection of the God who created us? Or will we forge our own way, taking upon ourselves the governing of the world?

The Tree of Life offers the path of embracing God's purpose and order for our lives. Psalm 1 says of the person who delights in the law of the LORD and meditates on it day and night:

**[Slide 4]**

*Psalms 1:3 NIV*

*That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yield its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.*

The other tree – the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – takes us down a totally different path. It leads us forever *away* from Life and back into the chaos and disorder of the world.

Two choices: which tree will you seek?

## **The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**

### **Knowledge Explosion:**

Humans were made to want to know things. And we've found lots of ways to expand our knowledge base. Buckminster Fuller coined the phrase "Knowledge Doubling Curve." This "curve" helps us see how information and knowledge have exploded in the recent history of the human race:

- Until 1900 human knowledge doubled approximately every century.
- By the end of World War II it doubled every 25 years.
- By 2013 it was doubling every 13 months.
- With the arrival of the Internet of Things it is expected to double every 12 hours.

There was a day when if you wanted to know something you went to an encyclopedia like the Encyclopedia Britannica. The first edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica came out in 1768. It had 2,670 pages in 3 volumes. The final print edition came out in 2010, with 32 volumes and 18,251 pages.

Compare that to the most famous online encyclopedia – Wikipedia.

- 38 million articles, with 5 million in English
- 800 new articles *per day*.
- Available in 285 languages

Without a doubt, we're living in the midst of a colossal knowledge explosion, with no end in sight.

### **The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil:**

Perhaps that's one reason why it wasn't the Tree of Life that proved so tempting to humans, but rather the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

This second tree offered something humans have found irresistible: Knowledge. Knowledge of everything. The phrase "good and evil" actually means "the knowledge of everything" – everything from the very best to the

very worst. This was a Hebrew way of speaking of the completeness of something, just as we say "everything from A to Z" or "everything from soup to nuts."

And how tempting is that? The option of eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil meant you would know it all – just like God. That would mean that you would understand how to make the world function. Instead of relying on the Creator's instructions and power, you would run the show, you would make the rules, you would be a god.

### **End Game:**

The problem, of course, is that humans can't run the show. Not that we don't try! We've created a knowledge explosion for ourselves that even we marvel at. We carry around smartphones that give us access to all 38 million pages of Wikipedia, plus billions of other addresses on the internet. We're informed.

And how is that working for us? Is the world a better and safer place? As a matter of fact, ISIS exploded right along with the knowledge explosion. What better tool for promotion and recruiting than the internet? Instant access to anyone anywhere.

God warned Adam about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: "...for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

To eat from this tree meant to seek to attain god-like knowledge *apart from the Creator*. The result: a host of unintended consequences! When we try to run the show, we unleash into the world the chaos that God tamed when He put the world together. In other words, "we surely die."

Need proof? Just look at what has happened to our planet's environment. All of our inventions and technologies have left it dirtier than before we became so knowledgeable. Look at our society. When we departed from God's creation plan for people and families, we unleashed a host of unintended consequences – societal chaos. It's come to the point where we can't even decide as a society what sign to put on a bathroom!

Thank God there is another Tree in the garden.

### **The Tree of Life**

### **The Tree of Life:**

That other tree is of course the Tree of Life. It represents the other choice open to us. The Tree of Life offers the Life of God to us. There in the Garden of Eden, God provided a path to eternal life – life that could conquer Death itself.

The Garden was a place of decision: would humans choose God's Life, or would they choose to be gods unto themselves and die? Would they dedicate themselves to carrying forward the work of Creation, bringing God's order and goodness to the world? Or would they unleash the very chaos that God had tamed when He ordered the world?

### **Methuselah:**

Somewhere in the desert of southern Israel a tree named Methuselah is growing today, after waiting 1800 years to sprout from a date pit. Human knowledge can tell us what kind of date pit that was and even how old it was. It could suggest the right kind of fertilizer and other treatments. But human knowledge *couldn't make it grow*. That was up to the date pit.

The only thing that could cause that 1800 year old date pit to grow was God's creation. He is the One who created and ordered our world so that things are *alive*. As a result, even the Israeli desert can be home to a Tree of Life.

### **Choices:**

What God could do with an 1800 year old seed He can do in your life. He can take things we have given up for dead and make them bloom again. He can restore love where there was hostility and pain. He can bring forgiveness where there was only resentment and bitterness. He can bring hope where there was only despair.

But in order for that to happen we have to make a choice. Will it be one more trip to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Will it be one more attempt to figure things out on your own, make your own life rules, and be your own god? Or will it be a trip to the life-giving fruit of the other tree: The Tree of Life?

It's up to you.