

## The Bible in Context Ep 11: The Two Trees of Eden Gen 2:4-9

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Alright, we finally made it into, well out of the seventh day of creation we're into the

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Second little creation story here which starts off with this nice little chiasmic introduction So yeah, how do we know this is a break? First of all, where are we are we chapter 1 chapter 2? Okay. Yeah, we're in chapter 2 we're starting in verse 4 here and this is where we get now or the generations of heaven and the earth and That's actually one of the ways we know This is a good clean break is because we're gonna see throughout Genesis the biblical author uses this phrase these are the generations of

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to break the story and start a new section. And it's actually gonna say in this, so these are the generations of the heaven and the earth. So this is what comes after the heavens and the earth were created.

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Later we'll see these are the generations of Abraham. So it's the story of his son, Isaac, or these are the generations of Isaac. Now it's the story of Jacob and Esau, his sons, and so on. Now, do a lot of the breaks where it says these are the generations, does it go, does it jump right into the story or does it typically jump into like genealogy or is it a little bit of mix? It depends, yeah. It depends? It goes back and forth. Okay. Yeah, because it's just interesting that it called like, these are the generations. And immediately in my mind goes towards a story about humans.

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But this first one, like it says, these are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. And so it's almost like they're personifying the heavens and the earth here. And okay, this is the cosmic story. Let's start there even before we start with the human individual stories. We're going to start with the cosmic story. Yeah. And this new little creation story doesn't really start off with the waters we saw before. It starts off with the barren.

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the barren land in the beginning, which the land was there in the first story too. But here we just start, we jump right into talking about that. Why do you think that is? Why do you think it jumps right into talking about the land? Well, I think it's somewhat conceptually equal to the waters in the sense that it's barren, it's a wasteland, it's not a place where humans can thrive, where God has established his throne. So conceptually, it's similar. As to the actual difference,

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And we'll see some more differences like, um, in the first creation story, the animals come first, but in this one, it's man and then animals.

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Yeah, so in verse 15, the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And then verse 18, it's not good for the man to be alone. And then that's where the animals are then introduced. And verse 19, out of the ground, the Lord God formed every beast in the field. So yeah, humans come first and then the animals and this account. So yeah, how do we account for the difference between what we've read in chapter one, where the animals came first and then the humans were...

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we're at the end of creation. Well, the first and easiest way is to say there's a contradiction here and it just doesn't make sense. Well, actually, a lot of people who are trying to be faithful to the text have seen this and decided that the author must be drawing from different sources. Oftentimes they'll say he's very sloppily pasting them together. He just takes two different stories, grips a page out of each book, puts them together, staples them, and then done. But I think that, yes, it may be true that he's drawing on...

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different traditions. It's very clear he's drawing on different sources in the sense that a lot of these stories we've already seen have ancient Near Eastern backgrounds to them. So he's using his cultural knowledge. So maybe he's grabbing from a couple of stories and putting them together, but this is not a lazy sloppy throwing together, but he is he's rewriting these stories. So the first time maybe he just wanted to present creation as a temple. And this time he's wanting to focus in a little more on

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man and the relationship between man and woman and his, a different aspect of his authority over the beasts. And, well, we'll see. We'll get more into what this story portrays. So, so is it like he's, in my mind, it kind of makes sense that he, inspired by the Holy Spirit, absolutely, but using the words of, that he knows and that his, his culture knows

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and the stories that they know also to tell the real story, the true story. And so it makes sense that we kind of have this almost a quilt kind of put together and we're seeing what seems like the same story but from a different vantage point in some way, shape or form.

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Yeah. And even if the events are a little bit out of sync in the different stories, the, the meaning is on track. Yeah. That's what's important. Yeah. Cause again, and we've talked about this before. I mean, his purpose is not so much to focus in on the, all the how, but he's more focused on the why, like this is significant. It's not the, the, he's not so concerned about the, um, the nuts and the bolts of scientifically how's it all work. Cause that's not even on his radar.

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but he's more focused on the purpose of God creating the world and humans. And so the fact that things are in a different order from chapter one really is not... The original readers probably aren't going to blanket that. That doesn't wig them out or cause them to think that there's a contradiction or anything. Yeah.

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Right. Pulling from vastly different sources and just lazily throwing them together. Right. Just for anybody who is going to do an in-depth study on Genesis, you're going to come across things like source criticism or JEDP or the documentary hypothesis. And those are all different labels for this system of various traditions that have kind of inserted their own influence into the Bible. And sometimes they supposedly contradict each other.

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try to redact each other, but really that whole theory is not worth much of anything. This whole book, I mean the whole Torah and arguably the Tanakh was put together by one mind or one unified set of minds. So some of those other theories are coming from somewhat of a biased understanding and they don't, they wouldn't, would they hold?

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to Scripture being inspired? Yeah, it was actually a lot of faithful biblical scholars who are confessional that hold to this theory. And that's actually who I think it was proposed by. I think... Which theory in particular are you talking about? Sorry, just this source theory. It's JEDP, documentary hypothesis, source criticism. It's all kind of labels of the same thing. Okay.

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Yeah, they're actually trying to faithfully interpret the text, but what they mistakenly do is they're trying to get behind the text and say, oh, here's the tradition that this particular part of the story came from. Now if we uncover that, we can focus on the meaning of the story within the story. So they're trying to get to the true historical events behind the poetry or behind the crafted narrative. And there's an assumption that if we can pinpoint the exact history...

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then we can determine the meaning. But actually, the author has taken the history and crafted it in such a way that it portrays what the author intends us to see. Right. Rather than, yeah, trying to strip all of the meaning out of the text and then rewrite it ourselves or assume that the Bible is lying to us and we need to find the true history. And that's what rubs me the wrong way with those theories is it does at least imply, if not outright say, that the Bible...

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is just completely lying to us. Or at least we can outdo it at its own game. Yeah. And so you're always looking for the deeper meaning. And I think a lot of times in doing that, you end up coming up with your own meaning. Yeah. Which we've already looked at a lot of different literary

connections between Genesis and other books in the Bible just throughout this podcast already. And just seeing that should show you at least one unified group of people put this together.

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Right. All these different stories didn't come from random places and get stapled together. Yeah. I mean, the more I dig into it, the more you see the unity of it and how it all really does in an amazing way connect together. Yeah. So, we're here at the very beginning of this second little creation story, and it starts out as a little chiasmic introduction by chiasm. I like your...

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I really thought you were about to eat it in the middle of the sermon. It would have been gross, but yeah, I was very hungry at the time. The mic right here just listening to every little bite would be great. So it starts out with, these are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created. In the day that Yahweh God made the heavens and the earth. So you can hear how the heavens and the earth, it kind of sandwiches this phrase. That's what I mean by.

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It begins and ends with the heavens and the earth here. So we're going to see this phrase, there are the generations of, and we said what, how many times, 10 times, correct? 10 sections. It's used quite a few times, but sometimes it happens as part of the same unit. Okay, sure. These are the generations of break the section into 10 different sections. Okay, good deal.

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And so in this section, this little new creation store we're entering into, again, we have the dry barren ground. There's no good waters that Yahweh has used to fertilize the land or to make plants able to grow. And so we start off with him making the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So let's talk a little bit about what are these trees.

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Sounds like a plan. So is the Tree of Life a magical tree? Yes. No. So the Tree of Life we're actually going to see throughout scripture. So the Tree of Life comes up in different ways. Sometimes it's used to portray a wise person. So you think of Psalm 1 where the one who meditates on the Torah day and night.

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becomes a tree that is ever producing fruit. So that's kind of this tree of life imagery. I think most significantly where we see the tree of life pop up is in Revelation 22. Whenever Jesus, whenever God is on his throne and the nations are coming to this tree that gives healing to the nations, we kind of see in the center of the New Jerusalem, which is basically Eden come down from the heavens, there's this tree that gives life to the nations in the midst of it.

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I think it kind of is a stand-in for Yahweh's presence, for Jesus's presence, which I do think that the Tree of Life represents Yahweh's presence because it's in the center of the garden which is

the temple. And you get to the center of the tabernacle, the center of the actual temple, and that's where Yahweh's presence resides. So just in the construction of the temple pattern, the Tree of Life stands in the place of Yahweh.

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And then it also just makes sense because this is the tree of life and how do we get life? Yahweh is the one that gives it being in His presence. Yeah, and the idea of shelter too, I think, is probably embedded in there when we're in the presence of the Lord, we're sheltered by Him. Yeah, Psalm 31 verse 20, the cover of your presence. In the cover of your presence, you hide them from the plights of men.

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you store them in your shelter from strife of tongues. And then Revelation 7, 15, therefore they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. So you have this idea of being sheltered. And so I think a tree often is a place where we will go to.

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sheltered from, whether it's the sun or the rain. It's a place of shelter. Yeah. And so I don't think we should take the tree of life and directly just say like, this is Yahweh. When you read it, like we should still read it as... As a tree. Yeah. Yeah. It's still, the symbol still stands. Don't just swap it out and just make the symbol worthless. But I think it's important to see that within the pattern, the tree does stand in the place of Yahweh. And it represents His presence.

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Well, and then when you get into the tabernacle, you've got the lamp that's very much crafted as a tree and it's in the holy place, right? Where it is. Burning, light giving tree that bears almond blossoms, that whole idea. And I guess that kind of points out too, this isn't a one-to-one correspondence where exactly the tree of life.

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is the Ark of the Covenant that sits in the middle of the tabernacle. And there's this other thing over here that represents the menorah. And then there's the bread of life over here. Um, it's things are getting, uh, compressed and expanded, all these different images and ideas. So we're not exactly building a blueprint or a roadmap, but just. Getting a feel for these, for these symbols and what they, um, all the things that they may represent, the author may be using them for, to communicate to us.

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So the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, there's something to say about the title of that tree first. So the word there evil is the Hebrew word Ra. And so when we think of evil, I think we usually think of something that's sinister and malevolent and just internally out for terrible things. Now, the Hebrew word Ra more so just means bad.

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It may even carry this idea of ruined or unfit for something. So you have priests that are trying to decide between a sacrificial animal, is it a good animal for sacrifice or is it raw? Is it unfit and bad? Is this bowl of fruit still good to eat or is it bad fruit that's been ruined over time? So things like that. So here, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

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I like the translation. It's the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. And we see, we already talked about last time, how good and bad shows up whenever Moses is giving the law to Israel and Deuteronomy. And he says, I set before you today, good and life and death and bad, or usually the translation is evil. So there in Deuteronomy 30, where Moses says that, he's giving Israel.

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a command regarding good and bad, just like Adam and Eve receive a command about good and bad on pain of death. Now where else do we see this good and bad show up together? I think a couple of important instances are, first of all, Isaiah 7, 16, and this is talking about the boy, Emmanuel, who is to be born as a sign, and it says, before the boy knows how to refuse the bad and choose the good.

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the land whose kings you dread will be deserted." So it's using this phrase, good and bad, to just talk about this kid having the wisdom to make decisions. And then it carries very similar connotations in 1 Kings 3 verses, yeah, in verse 9 it says, give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people so that I may discern between good and bad, for who is able to govern this your great people. That's Solomon asking

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Yahweh for wisdom. So I think you're the knowledge of good and evil. It's wisdom. It's not a bad thing in and of itself. But the issue becomes in Genesis, where are they going to get this wisdom? Where are they going to get the ability to decide between good and bad? And well, that source should at some point be Yahweh. He, I guess, first is giving them this opportunity to

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see if they're going to take it for themselves or not, and ultimately know that they do. But I wanted to point out that the word evil here, it's not inherently evil. They're not learning about metaphysical evil when they eat of this tree, but rather they just have, you know, they're almost like, like Emmanuel. They're like children and they don't have wisdom yet and that they still have to either grow into that or be given that by Yahweh and they have the opportunity to take it for themselves and usurp.

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Yahweh's authority and his timing. That's what this tree is, is wisdom. But they haven't been granted to eat from it yet. Maybe they will be in the future, but they haven't yet. It's a similar

concept in my mind, at least, of like when a child, we kind of joke about like, oh, they've lost their innocence. And typically when we say things like that, it's when the child has done something where they've instead of...

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where they used to trust and follow and obey their parents, all of a sudden they're doing what they want to do and getting themselves in trouble for whatever reason. Yeah. That happens early. Oh, yeah, very early. Very early. Yeah. I mean, I think they are kind of painting this idea of Adam and Eve being like little children almost. They're very new, very young, immature, and they're meant to be.

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kings that have dominion over the whole earth. And just like Solomon, they need the knowledge to decide between good and bad in Hebrew tov and rah. And again, this tree represents an opportunity for them to take that wisdom on their own terms for themselves without, for now, just trusting. Yeah. And it's interesting too, because like, I guess in my head, I always had these two trees kind of tied together, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

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But when you come to the new heavens, when the heavens return to Earth, there is no tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There's just the tree of life. I think it's significant to see that they're not really connected with... I mean, they come in the same verse here, but they're not always together. I think it's becoming more and more significant to me for some reason. I don't know. Does that make sense?

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Yeah, yeah. And we'll talk about this more later. I don't know if we'll talk about this in the next chapter or if we'll talk about this when we get to Abraham, or maybe Joseph, I don't know. But there's this theme that runs through the book of testing. And this is the first instance. This is Yahweh testing those who are to be his loyal royal representatives. And I think in Revelation, there is now

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the tree of life that is to give life and healing to the nations, Yahweh's presence, they are going to rule with him finally, and there's no need for any more testing. The testing is over. They've been through the testing. Yeah, they've been through the trials, the tribulations, all the testing is over. And so yeah, I see that theme very clearly. And as we walk through this, I think we'll see specific examples of it, but this idea of God saying, look, will you trust in my wisdom?

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and receive life or will you trust in your own wisdom and be handed over to the consequences of those decisions, which is death? Yeah. Yeah, I think it's important to see that. He does put this in the garden and that Solomon later asks for this exact thing and Yahweh tells him, like, that

was a good request. Because of that, I'm going to add to you all these other glorious things that you didn't ask for. And so I still think there's...

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this concept that Yahweh intends for his kings, his people to have the fruit of this tree, but it doesn't come on our own terms. It still goes back to just like your parents. Who are you going to trust? Are you going to look to your parents and trust, to trust Yahweh, your creator, the one who has wisdom and life within him, until he gives you the wisdom to make that decision yourself? Or are you just going to do it like you want to just because you want to right now?

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I'm seeing that a lot right now because I have a toddler. Yeah. I was saying, and you know this, like in parenting, it's not like you give your, your young child all of your wisdom at once because they can't handle it. Like there's no way that they would understand it or be able to apply it to their lives and, and, and, and be obedient to it. You're not going to put them in the driver's seat of a car and teach them all the rules when they're five years old. Yeah. Cause even if you did, they're still not going to be able to drive the car.

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They don't have the capacity at that point. So that seems to be what's going on here. God gives them the opportunity to trust in Him and say, look, I'm gonna trust in your wisdom because I know that I don't have the capacity to rule in every way that you want me to and have all the responsibilities that you want me to, but I'm gonna.

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I'm going to walk with you. I'm going to wait on you to slowly give me those responsibilities." They say, nope, I want all of it now. I want to be my own God, basically, is what they're saying. Yeah. I think just parenthood is such a good picture of it because you tell them the electrical outlet at this age is off limits. Yeah. And so that's exactly what they want to go for. Trust me that this could kill you, so don't touch it. But ...

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that becomes the exact thing. I want to do it myself. Yeah. Yep. Yeah. At a very young age, they want and they long for that autonomy to make the decisions on their own rather than listening to the wisdom. Right. And so as parents, I think there even becomes fit times for testing where it's, here, I'm going to give you, I don't want you to write on the walls. I want you to stay on the paper.

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I'm going to give you the marker and I'm going to step back and see what happens so that, you know, I can step in and stop you if you start running for the walls. But I want to see, are you going to trust me with this and be able to take on this responsibility in the future or are you going to mess it up and lose this privilege and this responsibility? And I think that might be a little bit too human of an example for talking about how Yahweh interacts with his people. But

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I think that is very close to how the Biblical author is painting this scene. Yeah, at least gives us some handles to kind of think about it. Yeah. It's good. It's been good. Yeah. All right. Next time we will, I guess we'll start off right with the rivers that run through the land of Eden. So that'll be a fun one. Yeah. We'll talk about that next time. All right. Bye!