

St James's Piccadilly

'Rooted in God's Earth': Trees in Scripture

Old Testament Readings

The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge

Part 1

Genesis 2.8-25

⁸And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; ¹²and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'¹⁹ So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man* there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said,
'This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,*
for out of Man* this one was taken.'

²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge

Part 2

Genesis 3

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' ²The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die." ' ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,^{*} knowing good and evil.' ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' ¹⁰He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' ¹¹He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' ¹²The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.' ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.'

¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent,
'Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all animals
and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.'

¹⁶To the woman he said,
'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.'

¹⁷And to the man^{*} he said,
'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,

and have eaten of the tree
about which I commanded you,
"You shall not eat of it",
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.'

²⁰ The man named his wife Eve,* because she was the mother of all who
live. ²¹And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man* and for his wife, and
clothed them.

²² Then the LORD God said, 'See, the man has become like one of us, knowing
good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree
of life, and eat, and live for ever'— ²³therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the
garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴He drove out the
man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword
flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge

Part 3

The Tree of Life My Soul Hath Seen ('R. H.', 1761)

The tree of life my soul hath seen,
Laden with fruit and always green;
The trees of nature fruitless be,
Compared with Christ the Apple Tree.

His beauty doth all things excel,
By faith I know but ne'er can tell
The glory which I now can see,
In Jesus Christ the Appletree.

For happiness I long have sought,
And pleasure dearly I have bought;
I missed of all but now I see
'Tis found in Christ the Appletree.

I'm weary with my former toil -
Here I will sit and rest awhile,
Under the shadow I will be,
Of Jesus Christ the Appletree.

With great delight I'll make my stay,
There's none shall fright my soul away;
Among the sons of men I see
There's none like Christ the Appletree.

I'll sit and eat this fruit divine,
It cheers my heart like spirit'al wine;
And now this fruit is sweet to me,
That grows on Christ the Appletree.

This fruit doth make my soul to thrive,
It keeps my dying faith alive;
Which makes my soul in haste to be
With Jesus Christ the Appletree.

Abraham and the Oaks of Mamre

Genesis 18.1-15

The LORD appeared to Abraham* by the oaks* of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³He said, 'My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.' ⁶And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures* of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.' ⁷Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' ¹⁰Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' ¹³The LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?" ¹⁴Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to

you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.' ¹⁵But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'Oh yes, you did laugh.'

The Cedars of Lebanon

Ezekiel 31

In the eleventh year, in the third month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: ²Mortal, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his hordes: Whom are you like in your greatness?

³ Consider Assyria, a cedar of Lebanon,
with fair branches and forest shade,
and of great height,
its top among the clouds.*

⁴ The waters nourished it,
the deep made it grow tall,
making its rivers flow*
around the place where it was planted,
sending forth its streams
to all the trees of the field.

⁵ So it towered high
above all the trees of the field;
its boughs grew large
and its branches long,
from abundant water in its shoots.

⁶ All the birds of the air
made their nests in its boughs;
under its branches all the animals of the field
gave birth to their young;
and in its shade
all great nations lived.

⁷ It was beautiful in its greatness,
in the length of its branches;
for its roots went down
to abundant water.

⁸ The cedars in the garden of God could not rival it,
nor the fir trees equal its boughs;
the plane trees were as nothing
compared with its branches;
no tree in the garden of God
was like it in beauty.

⁹ I made it beautiful
with its mass of branches,
the envy of all the trees of Eden
that were in the garden of God.

10 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Because it* towered high and set its top among the clouds,* and its heart was proud of its height, ¹¹I gave it into the hand of the prince of the nations; he has dealt with it as its wickedness deserves. I have cast it out. ¹²Foreigners from the most terrible of the nations have cut it down and left it. On the mountains and in all the valleys its branches have fallen, and its boughs lie broken in all the watercourses of the land; and all the peoples of the earth went away from its shade and left it.

¹³ On its fallen trunk settle
all the birds of the air,
and among its boughs lodge
all the wild animals.

¹⁴All this is in order that no trees by the waters may grow to lofty height or set their tops among the clouds,* and that no trees that drink water may reach up to them in height.

For all of them are handed over to death,
to the world below;
along with all mortals,
with those who go down to the Pit.

15 Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day it went down to Sheol I closed the deep over it and covered it; I restrained its rivers, and its mighty waters were checked. I clothed Lebanon in gloom for it, and all the trees of the field fainted because of it. ¹⁶I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall, when I cast it down to Sheol with those who go down to the Pit; and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that were well watered, were consoled in the world below. ¹⁷They also went down to Sheol with it, to those killed by the sword, along with its allies,* those who lived in its shade among the nations.

18 Which among the trees of Eden was like you in glory and in greatness? Now you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the world below; you shall lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are killed by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his horde, says the Lord GOD.

Trees in the Wilderness

Isaiah 41.11-20

¹¹ Yes, all who are incensed against you
shall be ashamed and disgraced;
those who strive against you
shall be as nothing and shall perish.

¹² You shall seek those who contend with you,
but you shall not find them;
those who war against you
shall be as nothing at all.

¹³ For I, the LORD your God,
hold your right hand;
it is I who say to you, 'Do not fear,
I will help you.'

¹⁴ Do not fear, you worm Jacob,
you insect* Israel!
I will help you, says the LORD;
your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁵ Now, I will make of you a threshing-sledge,
sharp, new, and having teeth;
you shall thresh the mountains and crush them,
and you shall make the hills like chaff.

¹⁶ You shall winnow them and the wind shall carry them away,
and the tempest shall scatter them.
Then you shall rejoice in the LORD;
in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory.

¹⁷ When the poor and needy seek water,
and there is none,
and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the LORD will answer them,
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

¹⁸ I will open rivers on the bare heights,*
and fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
and the dry land springs of water.

¹⁹ I will put in the wilderness the cedar,
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive;
I will set in the desert the cypress,
the plane and the pine together,

²⁰ so that all may see and know,
all may consider and understand,
that the hand of the LORD has done this,
the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Oaks of Righteousness

Isaiah 60.18-61.4

¹⁹ The sun shall no longer be
your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon
give light to you by night;^{*}
but the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.

²⁰ Your sun shall no more go down,
or your moon withdraw itself;
for the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your days of mourning shall be ended.

²¹ Your people shall all be righteous;
they shall possess the land for ever.
They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands,
so that I might be glorified.

²² The least of them shall become a clan,
and the smallest one a mighty nation;
I am the LORD;
in its time I will accomplish it quickly.

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;

² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

Trees in the Psalms

Psalm 1

Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
² but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
³ They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

⁴ The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶ for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 104

¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul.
O LORD my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
² wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
³ you set the beams of your^{*} chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your^z chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
⁴ you make the winds your^z messengers,
fire and flame your^{*} ministers.

⁵ You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
⁶ You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
⁷ At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
⁸ They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.
⁹ You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.

¹⁰ You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
¹¹ giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.
¹² By the streams* the birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.
¹³ From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

¹⁴ You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,*
to bring forth food from the earth,
¹⁵ and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.
¹⁶ The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
¹⁷ In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
¹⁸ The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.
¹⁹ You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
²⁰ You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
²¹ The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
²² When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
²³ People go out to their work
and to their labour until the evening.

²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
²⁶ There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

²⁷ These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
²⁸ when you give to them, they gather it up;

when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.

³⁰ When you send forth your spirit,* they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure for ever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works—

³² who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.

³³ I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the LORD.

³⁵ Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.

Bless the LORD, O my soul.

Praise the LORD!