



BY DIRECTOR-SPEAKER
DOUG BATCHELOR

Trees of Life and Death



An Amazing Fact:

The coconut tree is sometimes called the tree of life because of its amazing versatility. My father, who was a World War II pilot, says that when planes went down in the Pacific Islands, the stranded pilots sometimes survived for many months on little more than coconuts. From coconuts we get food, milk, butter, clothing, baskets, oil, wax, and even soap. Their shells can be used to make a bowl and other utensils, and their husks can serve as fuel for a fire.

Trees are essential to the life and well-being of this planet. For instance, most of the medicine we have today is derived from trees—even more than from plants. Aspirin is made from salicylic acid, which is found in the bark of willow trees. Taxol, a drug used to treat ovarian cancer, is extracted from the bark of the rare Pacific yew tree. Hundreds of other medicines are derived from trees in the rainforests of Central and South America.

In addition to their pharmaceutical value, trees provide literally thousands of things we use today. They can be transformed to create paper, lumber, rubber, and clothes—to name just a few staples.

Much of the clean air we breathe each day is a result of trees, and they also help prevent land from

eroding into the sea. Our world would be in bad shape without trees.

Lessons From a Fruitless Fig Tree

Trees played an intricate role in a number of Bible stories. Sometimes they were associated with life, while at other times they were associated with sin and death.

It surprises some people to learn that just before His death, Christ deliberately cursed a fig tree. Mark 11:13 says, “And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.”

I can think of only two things that ever died in Jesus’ presence: the demon-possessed pigs and this fig tree. Everything else that came in contact with Jesus was blessed and revived. But here He cursed this tree. Was the Lord having a tantrum because He didn’t get any breakfast? Or was there a spiritual lesson associated with this strange act?

It is significant that this fig tree had leaves, but no fruit. Figs, unlike other trees, begin to produce their fruit before the leaves. In fact, the fruit should be ripe when the leaves are fully developed. Although this specific tree outside of Jerusalem was out of season, it was advertising that it had fruit. And when Jesus came, He saw no fruit, only leaves.

Fig leaves are a symbol of self-righteousness, a form of religion without the power thereof. Adam and Eve had used fig leaves in an attempt to cover their nakedness after they sinned (Genesis 3:7), but God said that fig leaves would not work (verse 21). In the same way, the leaves on that fruitless fig tree were a symbol of Israel’s hypocrisy and self-righteousness. Jesus cursed the tree in order to illustrate what would happen to the Jewish nation and the apostate church if they remained fruitless.

Root and Branch

John 15:2 declares, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch

that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." And Luke 3:9 says, "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Notice that the axe doesn't leave a stump, but cuts all the way down to the root.

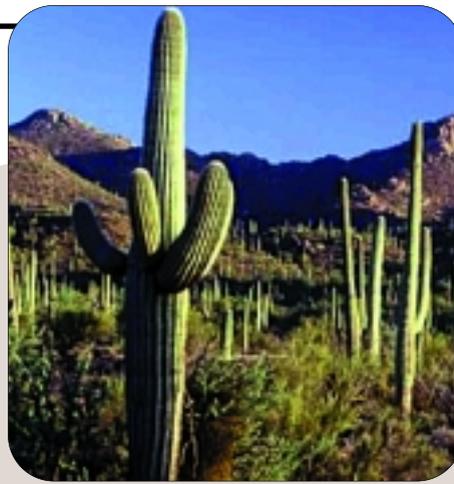
Some trees are so tenacious of life that if even a little bit of root is left, they can revive and sprout again like the one in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 4:15). This is why God tells us that when He eradicates the wicked from the universe, He destroys them root and branch. "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Malachi 4:1). "These are ... trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots" (Jude 1:12).

A Tree of Prophecy

In Luke 13:6-9, Jesus uses a parable about another fruitless fig tree in order to relate a time prophecy. He said: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then he said unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

The owner of the vineyard says that for three years he has found no fruit. The gardener pleads with the owner, saying, "Give it another year." This makes a total of four years. There are 360 days in a Jewish year, because it uses a lunar calendar. Four multiplied by 360 equals 1,440. That would make a total of 1,440 days in those four years.

Because a day equals a year in Bible prophecy (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6), the prophetic time period would equal 1,440 years. Jesus said that the fig tree was planted in His vineyard. What does the vineyard symbolize? In Isaiah chapter 5, the Bible says that the vineyard is a symbol of Israel (verse 7). God planted the children of Israel in the Promised Land in about 1406 B.C., when Joshua first crossed over and the children then took possession of



Bruce Coleman

An Amazing Fact:

The giant saguaro of the Southwestern deserts spreads its roots laterally as much as 40 or 50 feet in its search for water. A birch tree, though less sturdy than others, has roots that can lift a boulder weighing 20 tons. An average large oak tree has several hundred miles of roots.

the Promised Land. If you add 1,440 years to 1406 B.C., you come to A.D. 34. (Or, if you don't want to start with 1406 B.C. and choose instead to make the starting point a few years later in 1370 B.C. when the Israelites subdued their enemies and settled down, it would reach to A.D. 70, when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.)

In this parable, the fig tree in a vineyard doesn't bear fruit, so the Lord says it should be cut down after 1,440 prophetic days. As direct fulfillment, Israel was cut down as God's special nation after 1,440 years. Notice that Israel was cut down, but its roots were not destroyed. Now the Gentiles have been grafted into the stump of Israel (Romans 11:16-24).



Ron Sanford

An Amazing Fact:

In the Mexican state of Oaxaca stands the stoutest living tree. This Montezuma Cypress is called the Santa Maria del Tule and boasts a girth of 113 feet at a point just five feet above the ground. Its total height is 141 feet, and its age is estimated at more than 4,000 years old. In 1770 a European chestnut tree known as "The Chestnut of a Hundred Horses" measured 204 feet in circumference. It was found on the edge of Mount Etna in Sicily. The most immense living thing on earth today is a tree. The General Sherman in Sequoia National Park weighs approximately 2,145 tons and has a true girth of 79 feet. Yet the seeds of all these massive trees are minuscule and weigh less than one-six thousandth of an ounce. Jesus referenced this amazing truth when He talked about the "grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it" (Mark 4:31-32).

God wants you and me to bear fruit as well. The Bible tells us that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23). The Lord wants to see these fruits ripening in our lives. If we do not have them, what does the Lord say He will do? He first does everything He can to make us fruitful. He prunes and grafts us. He cuts away the dead wood in an attempt to revitalize us. He also digs around to aerate the roots, fertilizes, irrigates, and does everything He can to help us bear fruit.

In the Midst of the Garden

The very first chapter of the Holy Writ tells that God filled the earth with trees on the third day of Creation (Genesis 1:11-13). The second chapter says that two trees stood out as unique from all of the others. Genesis 2:9 says, “And out of the ground made the LORD God 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 knowledge of good and evil.”

God gave Adam and Eve very clear instructions regarding the second tree. He said, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17).

Some people think it was terrible for the Lord to place this glaring temptation in the middle of the Garden of Eden, right near the tree of life. But when you think about it in perspective, God had told them that they were free to eat from everything except one tree. This tree would be a small but important test of obedience.

It is often said that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was an apple tree. In fact, we get the term “Adam’s apple” because the legend goes that when our first father ate from the tree, he gagged and it stuck in his throat. The Bible, however, does not say that the fruit was an apple. This tradition came from the Old English, in which the word “apple” was a generic equivalent for “fruit,” just as the word “meat” meant “food.” Then, as time went by, the word “apple” came to be identified with a specific kind of fruit.

We don’t know exactly what the tree looked like. The Bible says it was pleasant to the eyes. It probably had a nice fragrance and beautiful flowers in the tree. Its fruit was “desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6).

Have you ever wondered why was it called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? First of all, keep in mind that not all knowl-

An Amazing Fact:

The oldest tree on record was a 4,950-year-old bristlecone pine in Wheeler Peak, Eastern California. It was cut down with a chainsaw in 1964 so researchers could measure its rings. The oldest living tree is a bristlecone pine called Methuselah. It is estimated at 4,766 years old and grows in the White Mountains of California.

edge is good. The Bible says that one of the characteristics of the last days is that knowledge will increase, but keep in mind wickedness will increase also. The devil far exceeds any human in knowledge, but it’s not a knowledge that saves him.

The mixing of good and evil is what makes the devil so insidious. He is most effective when using elements of truth to camouflage a little poison. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil became a “tree of death” because it represented the commingling of good and bad, the corruption of truth. God never intended for His children to experience evil. He wanted to save them from it, just as parents today want to protect their children from evil.

Choosing Life

The two trees in the Garden of Eden illustrate an important fact: God designed humans with the freedom of choice. He did not force Adam or Eve to eat from either tree. When they took of the tree of life and ate, they lived. God also warned them that if they were to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. They had a choice.

The Bible is very clear that God wants us to choose. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses delivers a stirring appeal in what he knew would be the last sermon before his death. He said: “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20). Moses urged God’s people to choose life—the same choice Adam and Eve had the opportunity to make in the Garden of Eden.

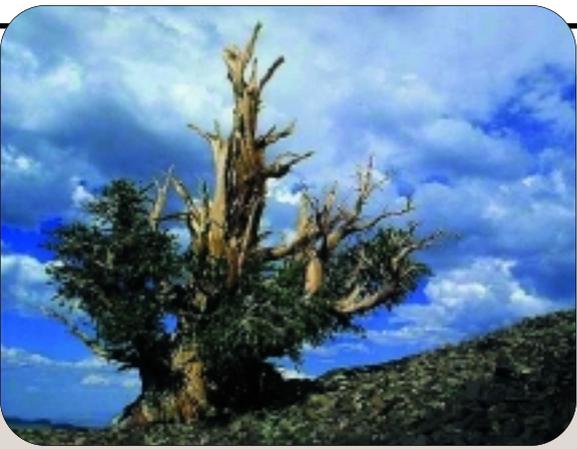
After Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command, He barred them from the tree of life, evidently to protect them from living forever in the misery of sin (Genesis 3:22). The Bible says that God drove them from the Garden of Eden and “placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword



Alex L. Fradkin/PhotoDisc

An Amazing Fact:

In Victoria, Australia, in 1872, lumberjacks claimed they felled a mountain ash that was 500 feet tall. Others say the distinction of “tallest tree” should go to a Douglas fir that was felled in British Columbia in 1940 and measured 417 feet. The tallest redwood in the Pacific Northwest measures a little under 400 feet. The tallest non-Sequoia alive today is a Douglas fir in Como Lake Park Trail, Wash., that reaches 310 feet tall.



Rod Planck/Researchers Inc.

shall not be remembered nor come into mind” (Isaiah 65:17).

The Cross, a Tree of Life

The cross of Calvary is perhaps the most commonly portrayed tree throughout Christendom. Erase from your mind all the hundreds of images you’ve seen in which the cross was a finely hewn piece of 6x6 timber. The Romans did not waste good lumber on crucifixion victims. Instead, they’d chop down the nearest available tree. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that after Rome squelched the Jewish rebellion in A.D. 70, crosses were so profuse that it was impossible to find a mature living tree for miles around Jerusalem. The Romans had cut them all down.

In Galatians 3:13, Paul wrote, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” The cross was, of course, an instrument of death and torture. However, in the sense that Jesus on this tree defeated “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14), what was intended for death became the vehicle to life through our Saviour.

Christ told His disciples, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). It is when we choose to be crucified with Christ that we finally begin to live. Galatians 2:20 says, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

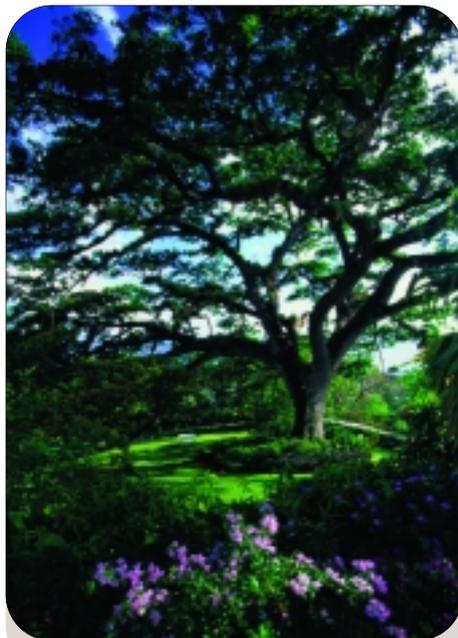
which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (verse 24).

In the very last chapter of the Bible, we find that the tree of life is now in heaven. Revelation 22:1-2 says that the tree of life stands in the very center of the city of God, and Revelation 21:2 says that when the New Jerusalem is brought down to the new earth, it comes down from God out of heaven. The apostle John wrote: “And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month” (Revelation 22:1-2).

Just as there are several fruits of the Spirit, there are also several kinds of fruit on the tree of life. The same verse says, “And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” A parallel text is Ezekiel 47:12, NKJV, which says: “Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.”

In the new earth we will be able to choose to go to that tree of life, which spans the river of life flowing from the heavenly sanctuary. The fruit provides the food we need to perpetuate life forever and the fragrance from the leaves and flowers will serve to heal every memory of sin. “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former

Christ’s sacrifice at Calvary makes it possible for the saints to one day eat fruit from the magnificent tree of life. You must choose now whether to die *in* sin or *to* sin. Be crucified with Christ so that you might live a new life—an eternal life. 



StockTrek/Photodisc

An Amazing Fact:

The famous saman tree in Venezuela is the biggest shade tree in the world. Although not unusual in height or girth, it has an enormous branch spread that yields shade for a circumference of 614 feet. The largest shade tree in North America is a sycamore in Indiana; it has a height of 150 feet with a girth of 42 feet. The Bible tells us, “The LORD is thy keeper: The LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand” (Psalm 121:5).