

Excursus 25

The Tree of Life as the Hidden Throne of God

WESTERMANN discusses at length the curiosity that although two trees are mentioned in Moses 3:9, the main body of the narrative “is concerned with one tree only.”⁶³⁶ He sees Tree of Life as having been attached later to the beginning⁶³⁷ and the end⁶³⁸ of the story. An alternate explanation for this anomaly, consistent with other clues in the text,⁶³⁹ is that although the presence of both trees was, of course, previously known to God (and deliberately disclosed to the reader⁶⁴⁰), the Tree of Life was initially hidden to Adam by the Tree of Knowledge.⁶⁴¹ This is expressed in some rabbinical commentary by the idea that the two trees shared a common trunk, had branches that were intertwined, or that the first tree encircled about or formed a hedge around the second one to shield it from view.⁶⁴²

Ephrem the Syrian gives a similar opinion, citing parallels with the division of the animals on Noah’s ark and the demarcations on Sinai separating Moses, Aaron, the priests, and the people.⁶⁴³ He depicts Paradise as a great mountain, with the Tree of Knowledge providing a boundary partway up the slopes: “this Tree acts as a sanctuary curtain [veil] hiding the Holy of Holies which is the Tree of Life higher up.”⁶⁴⁴ Thus, the story of the Fall, in analogue to the stories of the Tower of Babel and of the Watchers, can be conceived as a violation of boundaries that separated mankind from the dwelling place of Divinity.⁶⁴⁵ That a difference in splendor between the two trees paralleled their separate locations is affirmed by a Gnostic text that describes the “color” of the Tree of Life as being “like the sun” and the “glory” of the Tree of Knowledge being “like the moon.”⁶⁴⁶ Supporting the same concept, an Armenian Christian text asserts that “the Tree of [Knowledge of] Good and Evil is the knowledge of material things”—referring to the kind of knowledge that was made possible when Adam and Eve partook of the fruit—“and that the Tree of Life is the knowledge of divine things, which were not profitable to the simple understanding of Adam”—at least not until after he had successfully passed through the experience of mortality.⁶⁴⁷

The story of Noah’s family after the Flood has often been compared to the first chapters of Genesis.⁶⁴⁸ Significantly, it also culminates with an unauthorized transgression of sacred boundaries. Note, first, that the ark itself “was designed as a temple”⁶⁴⁹—in this case, a mobile sanctuary like the later Tabernacle that was constructed in the likeness of God’s portable pavilion.⁶⁵⁰ Immediately after their debarkation, God established his covenant with them,

636 C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, p. 212.

637 Moses 3:9.

638 Moses 4:28-31.

639 See, e.g., *Commentary* 3:9-h, p. 167, 3:19-b, p. 177, 4:5-b, p. 246, 4:9-a, p. 252, and 4:14-e, p. 260. For a survey on the question of one or two trees, and related textual irregularities, see T. N. D. Mettinger, *Eden*, pp. 5-11.

640 Moses 3:9.

641 G. A. Anderson, *Perfection*, p. 214.

642 R. M. Zlotowitz, et al., *Bereishis*, pp. 96, 101. See *Endnote E-107*, p. 727.

643 Brock in Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise*, p. 53. See also C. Buck, *Paradise*, pp. 259-288.

644 *Ibid.*, p. 52. See *Endnote E-108*, p. 728. See also *Figure 4-19*, p. 235.

645 R. S. Hendel, *Demigods*, p. 23. Cf. D. H. Oaks, *Plan*, p. 73, where Adam and Eve’s actions are also seen as a transgression of the limits of Eden but, in contrast to Hendel, this transgression is characterized in relationship to the barrier between the Garden and mortal life, as opposed to the Garden and divine life. See *Endnote E-109*, p. 728.

646 H.-G. Bethge, *Origin*, 110:14, 20, p. 179. Compare B. C. Hafen, *Disciple’s Journey*.

647 Shelemon, *Book of the Bee*, 15, p. 21. See also J. E. Seach, *Ancient Texts 1995*, pp. 568-577, 660-661.

648 E.g., H. W. Nibley, *Sacred*, pp. 577-579. See further parallels in W. A. Gage, *Gospel*.

649 C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Glory*, p. 41.

650 See *Endnote 3-57*, p. 210.