

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 9, Genesis 2 – Two Trees in the Garden Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Genesis, Session 9, Genesis 2 – Two Trees in the Garden, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Robert Vannoy's Old Testament History course examines the symbolic meaning of the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis 2-3. Vannoy presents and critiques various interpretations, including those of Calvin and Vos, focusing on the sacramental nature of the Tree of Life and the concept of "knowing" good and evil as self-determination. He contrasts these views with his own "self-deification" interpretation and Bavinck's similar perspective, emphasizing the importance of obedience to God over self-reliance. The lecture concludes by connecting the Genesis account with the Tree of Life's symbolic presence in the Book of Revelation.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Genesis, Session 9 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Genesis).



**Vannoy_Genesis_Se
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3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Genesis, Session 9, Genesis 2 – Two Trees in the Garden

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture transcript:

Briefing Document: Analysis of Genesis 2 & 3 - The Trees of the Garden

Overview: This lecture focuses on the significance of the two specific trees mentioned in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The lecture examines various interpretations, emphasizing that these trees are more than just literal objects; they are symbolic of deeper theological truths about humanity's relationship with God, obedience, and the consequences of disobedience. The lecture also explores the concept of sacraments, drawing connections to the trees' symbolic function.

Main Themes:

1. The Two Trees as Symbols:

- The lecture establishes the central importance of the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. These are not simply trees, but hold profound symbolic weight.
- The text presents the trees in Genesis 2:9: "And out 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."
- Adam was commanded not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:17): "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it. For in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die."
- Breaking this command resulted in Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden and their inability to access the Tree of Life (Genesis 3).

1. The Tree of Life:

- **Calvin's Sacramental View:** The lecture highlights John Calvin's interpretation of the Tree of Life as a "sacramental symbol of life and fellowship with and dependence on God." According to Calvin, the tree served as a memorial of the life received from God, not as a source of inherent life-giving power.

- Quoting Calvin: "He gave the tree of life its name, not because it could confer on man that life with which he had been previously endued, but in order that it might be a symbol and memorial of the life which he had received from God."
- Calvin emphasizes the tree's role as an outward sign of a spiritual reality, asserting: "There never was any intrinsic efficacy in the tree, but God made it life-giving so far as he had sealed his grace to man in the use of it."
- The removal of Adam and Eve from the Garden, and with it their access to the tree of life, signified the loss of fellowship and dependence on God. "By depriving man of the symbol, he also takes away the thing signified."
- **Analogy of Samson's Hair:** The lecturer draws a comparison to Samson's hair and his strength, highlighting how the loss of the outward symbol also represented the loss of the corresponding reality. This underscores the symbolic nature of the trees.
- **Vos's View:** Vos sees it similarly as a "sacramental symbol," but unlike Calvin, he suggests that Adam and Eve never actually ate of the tree of life.
- **Tree of Life in Revelation:** The tree reappears in Revelation, symbolizing eternal life and access to God made possible through Christ (Revelation 2:7, 22:2, 14, 19). The lecture highlights how the Tree of Life in Revelation is only available to those who are "washed in the blood of the lamb," that is those who have been purified through Christ's sacrifice (Revelation 7:14).

1. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil:

- **Rejection of Mythical Interpretation:** The lecture dismisses the mythical interpretation which says the story is based on pagan mythology wherein the "gods" were jealous of man potentially gaining their divine privilege of the knowledge of good and evil. The lecturer contends this interpretation doesn't reflect the ethical nature of the issue.
- **Vos's Probationary Test View:** Vos views the tree as "God's appointed instrument to lead man through probation to the state of religious and moral maturity." In Vos' view, it was a neutral instrument and the knowledge of good and evil was attainable through either obedience or disobedience.
- Vos states, "Man was to obtain something he had not before, he was to learn the good and its clear opposition to evil, and the evil and its clear opposition to the good."

- **Vannoy's Self-Deification View:** The lecturer critiques Vos' view, particularly its interpretation of Genesis 3:22 as being ironical. He then proposes the "self-deification" view, arguing that by eating the fruit, man sought to become his own determiner of good and evil, usurping God's prerogative.
- The word "know" is understood not as experiential knowledge but as "the power to distinguish between, to specify, or to decide" between good and evil, to make value judgements.
- This view holds that man sought independence from God by choosing to live according to his own insight and judgement independently of God. "When he took of the fruit of the forbidden tree what he was doing was choosing to live according to his own insight and judgment independently of God, that's what that act meant."
- "Man has become as one of us, he set himself up as a determiner of values. He's made himself his own god as it were, in doing that he usurps a prerogative that belongs to God alone."
- The tree is described as a "negative sacrament," symbolizing man's state outside of fellowship with God.
- **Bavinck's View:** The lecture summarizes the view of Herman Bavinck, who argues that the knowledge sought by man was not about the content of the knowledge, but about the manner of attaining it, and how it is connected to man's desire to emancipate himself from God.
- Bavinck states: "Genesis 3 is not directed so much to the content of the knowledge but to the manner in which it is attained. Clearly the nature of the knowledge of good and evil here meant is described by the fact that with it man would become like God, Genesis 3:5 and 22."

1. The Concept of Sacraments:

- **Reformed Understanding of Sacraments:** The lecture discusses the reformed view of sacraments, defining them as "a holy ordinance instituted by Christ wherein by sensible signs...Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed and applied to believers."
- **Distinction from Roman Catholic Theology:** The lecture contrasts the reformed view with Roman Catholic theology's notion of "ex opere operato" (automatic efficacy through ritual). The lecture emphasizes that sacraments are outward

signs of an inward reality, that they do not mechanically or magically achieve a result.

- **Sacraments as Aids to Faith:** Sacraments are presented as an aid to faith, a visible form of an invisible grace. They are not indispensable for salvation like the Word of God.
- **The Tree of Life as a Sacrament:** The Tree of Life is presented as a type of sacrament within the Garden of Eden, a visible sign of God's grace and man's relationship with Him.

Key Ideas and Facts:

- **Two Trees, Two Realities:** The trees of the Garden of Eden represent fundamental realities of life with or without God.
- **Symbolic Interpretation:** The trees should be understood symbolically as outward signs of deeper spiritual realities, not merely literal objects.
- **Obedience and Disobedience:** The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a test of obedience, with disobedience resulting in the loss of access to the tree of life.
- **Self-Deification:** The act of eating from the forbidden tree was an attempt to set oneself up as one's own god, choosing independence from God's authority and standard.
- **Sacraments and Grace:** Sacraments are visible signs through which grace is represented, sealed, and applied, not something that work automatically.
- **Restoration through Christ:** Access to eternal life and the Tree of Life is restored through Christ, whose sacrifice atones for human sin.

Quotes for Emphasis:

- Calvin on the Tree of Life: "He gave the tree of life its name, not because it could confer on man that life with which he had been previously endued, but in order that it might be a symbol and memorial of the life which he had received from God."
- Genesis 2:17: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it. For in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die."

- Vannoy on self-deification: "When he took of the fruit of the forbidden tree what he was doing was choosing to live according to his own insight and judgment independently of God, that's what that act meant."
- Bavinck: "Genesis 3 is not directed so much to the content of the knowledge but to the manner in which it is attained...By breaking the commandment of God and eating of the fruit he would make himself like God in this sense, that he places himself outside and above the law and just as God will determine and judge himself what is good and what is evil."
- Westminster Shorter Catechism on sacraments: "a holy ordinance instituted by Christ wherein by sensible signs...Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed and applied to believers."

Conclusion:

The lecture provides a comprehensive overview of the symbolic meaning of the two trees in the Garden of Eden. It encourages an understanding of the trees not just as literal objects, but as representatives of key theological concepts, including the nature of life with God, the importance of obedience, and the consequences of sin. The lecture also offers a nuanced understanding of sacraments within a reformed theological framework. This understanding provides a framework for comprehending the relationship between humanity and God throughout the biblical narrative.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Genesis, Session 9, Genesis 2 – Two Trees in the Garden

Genesis 2 & 3: The Trees of the Garden Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What are the two specific trees mentioned in Genesis 2:9, and what is the significance of each?
2. According to Calvin, what does the tree of life symbolize?
3. What does it mean to say that the tree of life was a "sacramental symbol?"
4. How does the removal of access to the tree of life relate to Adam and Eve's disobedience?
5. According to the text, was there something inherent in the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?
6. What is the mythical view of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?
7. What is Vos' interpretation of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and how did man supposedly gain this knowledge?
8. How does the self-deification view interpret the word "know" in Genesis 3:22?
9. How does the self-deification view differ from Vos' view regarding Genesis 3:22?
10. According to the self-deification view, what was the core issue in the probationary choice of Adam and Eve?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The two trees mentioned are the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life symbolizes life and fellowship with God, while the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents a probationary test.
2. According to Calvin, the tree of life is a sacramental symbol of life and fellowship with, and dependence on, God. It was not a tree that held an intrinsic power of life; rather it was a symbol of the life that God had given.

3. The tree of life was a sacramental symbol, meaning it was an outward, visible sign of an inward, spiritual reality. It was a symbol of God's grace. It was not the source of life but the seal of life already received from God.
4. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they lost their fellowship with God and access to the tree of life. The removal of the symbol represented the loss of the spiritual reality it signified, according to Calvin.
5. The text suggests that there wasn't something inherent in the fruit of the tree that provided knowledge, but that it was the act of disobedience that brought about consequences. The tree was a test of obedience not an automatic mechanism for gaining knowledge.
6. The mythical view suggests the story of the trees is derived from pagan mythology. This view sees the tree as a symbol of the gods' jealousy that man should attain knowledge, interpreted either as reason or as the civilized state.
7. Vos sees the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as God's appointed instrument for leading man through probation to a state of religious and moral maturity. According to Vos, man could have attained the knowledge of good and evil either through obedience or disobedience, each with different levels of impact on man's relationship with God.
8. The self-deification view interprets the word "know" in Genesis 3:22 not as experiential knowledge, but as the power to distinguish, specify, or decide between good and evil. It signifies a usurpation of God's prerogative of being the source for value judgments.
9. The self-deification view takes Genesis 3:22 literally, whereas Vos interprets it as ironic. The self-deification view understands that man became like God in a way he wasn't before, by determining his own values, while Vos does not.
10. The core issue in the probationary choice, according to the self-deification view, was man's desire to be his own norm and independently determine what is good and evil, rather than living in dependence on God. It was a choice of autonomy rather than relationship.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Write a well-organized essay addressing each of the following questions.

1. Compare and contrast the interpretations of the tree of life by John Calvin and Herman Bavinck, explaining their views on its sacramental nature and connection to the fall of man.
2. Discuss the different interpretations of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (mythical, Vos', and self-deification). Which view do you find most compelling and why?
3. Analyze how the tree of life is used in both Genesis and Revelation. What is the significance of its reappearance in the New Jerusalem?
4. Explain the concept of sacraments as it relates to the two trees in the Garden of Eden. How does this understanding impact the understanding of salvation?
5. Examine the role of obedience and disobedience in the story of the Garden of Eden. How does the choice Adam and Eve made continue to influence humanity today?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Tree of Life:** In Genesis, a tree in the Garden of Eden, symbolizing life and fellowship with God; viewed by some as a sacramental symbol. It appears in Revelation, representing eternal life available to believers through Christ.
- **Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil:** A tree in the Garden of Eden that was off-limits to Adam and Eve, used by God as a test of obedience. Its fruit is associated with humanity's fall and the loss of innocence.
- **Sacramental Symbol:** An outward, visible sign or symbol that represents an inward, spiritual reality, used to communicate God's grace. Not meant as a mechanical ritual, but an aid to faith.
- **Ex Opere Operato:** A Latin phrase meaning "from the work having been worked." This refers to the view that sacraments have efficacy in and of themselves, which is rejected in a reformed view.
- **Probationary Test:** A test of obedience, specifically as it relates to Adam and Eve's choice regarding the tree of knowledge, demonstrating their reliance on and submission to God.
- **Self-Deification:** The act of making oneself like God, in the sense of determining one's own values, which is related to the self-deification view of the fall.
- **Irony:** The use of words to convey a meaning that is the opposite of its literal meaning, as when some interpretations say that God speaks ironically in Genesis 3:22.
- **Linguistic View:** A method of interpreting Scripture based on the meaning of the word, often with focus on the original languages.
- **Reformed Approach:** A theological approach to sacraments that differs from the Roman Catholic approach. Sacraments are seen as an aid to faith and not producing a result mechanically.
- **Westminster Shorter Catechism:** A Protestant document of theological teachings, which includes a definition of sacraments.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Genesis, Session 9, Genesis 2 – Two Trees in the Garden, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Okay, here's an 8-question FAQ based on the provided source, formatted using markdown:

FAQ: The Trees of the Garden of Eden

- **What are the two specific trees mentioned in the Garden of Eden, and what was unique about each?**
- The two trees specifically mentioned are the *Tree of Life* and the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*. The Tree of Life is presented as a symbol of life in fellowship and dependence on God, not inherently possessing life-giving properties. Adam was commanded *not* to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and was warned that doing so would result in death.
- **How does the source describe the "Tree of Life" as a "sacramental symbol"?**
- Drawing heavily on John Calvin's interpretation, the Tree of Life is not viewed as a tree with intrinsic life-giving properties, but as a *sacramental symbol*. This means that it serves as a visible, external sign of an invisible, spiritual reality—specifically, the life and fellowship that humans have with God. Partaking of the Tree of Life was a sign and seal of this relationship and dependence upon God, and was a participation in God's grace. It was meant to be a memorial of the life humans already had from God, not a means to obtain that life itself.
- **According to the lecture, did Adam and Eve partake of the Tree of Life before they were expelled from the garden?**
- The lecture presents two views on this point. Calvin suggests that Adam and Eve did partake of the Tree of Life regularly as a sacramental symbol of their life in fellowship with God, before the Fall. Vos, however, suggests that they never ate of it, arguing that their expulsion came before they had the opportunity. The lecturer finds both arguments adequate.

- **What is the significance of the command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?**
- The command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was primarily a test of obedience, not an attempt to prevent humans from gaining knowledge. It was God's appointed instrument to lead humankind through probation to a state of religious and moral maturity. It was not a tree with inherent properties of bestowing good and evil, nor was it simply poisonous. The act of disobedience, not the fruit itself, resulted in death.
- **What are the main points of difference between Vos' view of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the "self-deification view"?**
- Vos' view is that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was a neutral instrument to bring about moral and religious maturity through probation. In his view, whether Adam obeyed or disobeyed, he would attain the knowledge of good and evil. He sees God's statement in Genesis 3:22 that man "has become like one of us, knowing good and evil" as an ironic statement. The "self-deification view", on the other hand, takes God's words in Genesis 3:22 literally and non-ironically. This view sees the act of eating from the tree as an assertion of independence from God, a desire to define good and evil for oneself, and to usurp God's role as the ultimate standard of morality. It suggests that through this act, man became "like God" in that man became the determiner of his own values.
- **How does the lecture define the meaning of "knowing" in the context of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?**
- The lecture argues that "knowing" in the context of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and in Genesis 3:22 should be understood not as experiential knowledge, but as the power to distinguish, specify, or decide between good and evil. This includes the authority to make value judgments and set one's own standards, effectively choosing to live independently from God and setting oneself up as one's own norm.

- **How does the lecture connect the Tree of Life in Genesis with the Tree of Life in Revelation?**
- The lecture highlights the parallel between the Tree of Life in Genesis 2 and the Tree of Life in Revelation. Both appear in paradisiacal settings at the beginning and end of the Bible narrative. The lecture emphasizes that access to the Tree of Life, which was lost in Genesis because of sin, is restored to believers in Revelation through the cleansing work of Christ's blood and the application of His righteousness. The tree of life in Revelation signifies the restored relationship between God and his people.
- **What is the lecturer's view on the nature and efficacy of sacraments in general?**
- The lecturer, drawing from reformed theology, emphasizes that sacraments are visible signs of an invisible grace and a visible form of the Word. He highlights that they are not efficacious "ex opere operato", or effective merely by being performed or participated in. Rather, they are outward symbols of a deeper spiritual reality; they don't *confer* grace, but they are means by which grace is represented, sealed, and applied to the believer, as an aid to faith.