

CHAPTER 11

SCIENTIFIC AND THEOLOGICAL ISSUES ON HUMAN ORIGINS

THREE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TREE OF LIFE

In Genesis 2:8-9, we're introduced to the tree of life: "Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden. . . . In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." In the dialogue between the serpent and Eve, Eve says, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden'" (3:2-3). After Adam and Eve disobeyed, God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (v. 22). The tree of life appears again in Revelation 22, bearing fruit in the New Jerusalem.

The tree of life in Genesis gives clues about the initial created state of humans before they fell into sin. Did God create the first humans with mortal bodies that would die, or with immortal bodies that would live forever? The presence of the tree of life in the story suggests that their bodies were *not* created immortal (if they could live forever, what would be the purpose of the tree?). Theologians have debated this issue.

Some theologians say that Adam and Eve were created physically mortal with bodies that would die. The tree of life represents the *potential* gift of physical immortality to Adam and Eve. Had they not sinned, they would have been allowed to eat of the tree of life to become immortal (3:22).

Other theologians have suggested that Adam and Eve were physically immortal before they fell into sin because they were continually eating from the tree of life. When they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they fell into sin, were excluded from the garden, and no longer had the tree of life to maintain their immortality.

Still other theologians have said that Adam and Eve were physically immortal without the need for the tree of life. They were created in a state of *being able not to sin*. The tree of life represented an even higher state, one of being *no longer able to sin*. Had Adam and Eve obeyed the command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of life would have transformed them into this higher state. Because of the fall, humanity attains this final state now only after the resurrection in the new creation.