

Parashat Bereshit: What was the Forbidden Fruit?

Source Sheet compiled by Adira Rosen

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Bereshit 2:15-17 & 3:1-7	בראשית ב:טו-יז + ג:א-ז'
<p>HaShem settled the Human in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. And HaShem commanded the Human, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."</p> <p>Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that HaShem had made. It said to the woman, "Did HaShem really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" The woman replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden. It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that HaShem said: 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, but HaShem knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.</p>	<p>וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיְנַחֲהוּ בְּגֶן-עֵדֶן לַעֲבֹדָה וּלְשִׁמְרָה: וַיֹּצֵא ה' אֱלֹקִים עֵץ-לֶחֶם וְחַיִּים וַיִּצְוֶה אֶת-הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ-הַגֶּן אָכֹל תֹּאכַל: וּמִעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:</p> <p>וְהַנָּחֹשׁ הָיָה עָרוּם מִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' אֱלֹקִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה אַף-כִּי-אָמַר אֱלֹקִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל עֵץ הַגֶּן: וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶל-הַנָּחֹשׁ מִפְּרִי עֵץ-הַגֶּן נֹאכָל: וּמִפְּרִי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ-הַגֶּן אָמַר אֱלֹקִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בוֹ פֶּן-תָּמוּתוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחֹשׁ אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה לֹא-מוֹת תָּמוּתוּ: כִּי יָדַע אֱלֹקִים כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכַלְכֶּם מִמֶּנּוּ וְנִפְקַחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם וְהִיִּיתֶם כְּאֱלֹקִים יְדֹעִי טוֹב וָרָע: וַתֵּרָא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֵאֲכָל וְכִי תִאְוָה-הוּא לְעֵינַיִם וְנִחְמָד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׁכִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיו וַתֹּאכַל וַתֵּתֶן גַּם-לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּה וַיֹּאכְלוּ: וַתִּפְקַחְנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עֲרֻמִּם הֵם וַיִּתְּפוּ עָלֶיהָ תְּאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגֹרֹת:</p>

- Based on this text alone, what kind of fruit do you think was on the tree?
- Why do you think the fruit itself isn't identified?
- What might the forbidden fruit symbolize?

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Bereshit Rabbah 15:7

What was that tree [of knowledge] from which Adam and Eve ate? Rabbi Meir said: It was wheat. When a person does not have knowledge, people say: That person has never eaten wheat bread in all his days. Rabbi Shmuel bar Yitzhak asked before Rabbi Ze'eira, saying to him: 'Is it possible that it was wheat?' He said to him: 'Yes.' He said to him: 'But is it not written that it was a "tree"?' He said to him: 'It [the wheat in Eden] rose to a great height, like the cedars of Lebanon.'...Rabbi Yehuda bar Ilai said: They [the forbidden fruits that Adam ate] were grapes, as it is stated: "Their grapes are grapes of poison, clusters of bitterness for them" (Deut 32:32) – those clusters brought bitterness to the world. Rabbi Abba of Akko said it was a citron. That is what is written: "The woman saw that the tree was good for eating..." (Gen 3:6). Go out and see which is the tree whose wood has a taste like its fruit, and you will find only the citron. Rabbi Yosei says: They were figs. It is a matter that is derived from its [the text's] context...the fig tree, whose fruit he had eaten, opened its door and received him. That is what is written: "They sewed fig leaves" (Gen 3:7).

- Which opinion most resonates with you? And why?
- Choose one opinion about what the forbidden fruit was and argue for it using the text and what you know from Jewish or secular traditions about that food's meaning.

Was the Forbidden Fruit Really an Apple? By Yehuda Shurpin

Some [Torah] commentators explain that in truth, the prohibition of eating the forbidden fruit either included in it all of the different opinions mentioned in the Talmud (i.e., grape, wheat, fig), or was a unique fruit which was a blend of all of them...As for **apples**, the modern consensus seems to be that the source of this misconception is that the Latin word *mālum*, meaning "evil," was associated with *mālum*, another Latin word, borrowed from Greek, meaning "apple."

How the Forbidden Fruit Became an Apple by Prof. Azzan Yadin-Israel

The artistic depiction of the forbidden fruit is, up to a certain point, congruent with the textual sources. The fig and grape are dominant, with occasional representations of other fruit varieties...a fresco in the church at Saint Jean des Vignes [in France] depicts the serpent passing to Eve a small black fruit, apparently an olive. The pomegranate appears...in the church at St. Paul de Varax, North of Lyon...The decisive break in the artistic renditions of the Eden story appears in France, in the early 12th century. In addition to the species listed above, a keen observer would recognize a tentative newcomer: the apple. An illustrated psalter from the Church of St. Fuscien in northern France (1180–90) shows Adam about to eat a round fruit with what appears to be an apple stem, and the forbidden fruit on the capital at the south side of the St. Pierre Cathedral in Airvault displays the distinctive cleft (stamen) of the apple. The evolution of the apple to become the dominant forbidden fruit occurs quite suddenly and across various artistic media, with apples appearing on stained glass windows, in illuminated manuscripts, church reliefs, and more.

For the visual depictions of the art discussed visit:

[*The Torah: How the Forbidden Fruit Became an Apple*](#)

- How does art influence the way people understand the forbidden fruit?
- Can art shape theology as much as text does?
- Based on all these sources and your own experience what is your forbidden fruit? Literally, what fruit do you imagine now when hearing this story in the Torah? And metaphorically, what in your life right now is filling the role of a forbidden fruit?