



Tu BiShvat 2021 Text Study

## Biblical Texts About Trees and the Commentaries Expanding on Them

### From the Beginning

יא) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזֵּרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פֶּרִי עֵשֶׂה  
פְּרִי לְמִינֹו אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּ-בּוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי-כֵן: (יב) וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזֵּרִיעַ  
זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה-פֶּרִי אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּ-בּוֹ לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:  
בְּרֵאשִׁית א' י"א-י"ב

(11) And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, **fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.**" And it was so. (12) The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, **and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it.** And God saw that this was good.

Genesis 1:11-12

אף אתם כשאתם נכנסין לארץ ישראל לא תתעסקון אלא במטע תחילה, כי תבאו אל  
הארץ ונטעתם כל עץ מאכל

Leviticus Rabbah 25:3

Therefore, when you are in the Land of Israel, occupy yourselves first and foremost with planting. Hence it is written, "When you come into the land, you shall plant trees for food" (Leviticus 19:23).

### Questions

- Why, in your opinion, does the Torah say (verse 12) "trees of every kind..." when in the same verse it was already written: "...brought forth vegetation...of every kind."? Why do you think that trees are repeated?
- Describe, in your words, what you think the connection is between the Torah verse (Genesis 1:11-12) and the Rabbinic (Leviticus Rabbah) text?
- Why do you think the Rabbis who wrote Leviticus Rabbah (from around 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries—living in the land of Israel) equate the creation story with planting trees in the land?



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יט) כִּי־תִצּוֹר אֶל־עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ לֹא־תִשְׁחִית אֶת־עֵצָהּ לְנֹדֶחַ עָלֶיהָ  
גִּרְזֹן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאַתָּה לֹא תִכְרֹת כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה לְכֹא מִפְּנֵיךְ בַּמִּצּוֹר:  
דברים כ"י"ט

(19) When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. **Are trees of the field human** to withdraw before you into the besieged city?

#### Deuteronomy 20:19

(ג) **כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה**. הרי כי משמש בלשון דלמא שמא האדם עץ השדה להכנס בתוך המצור מפניך להתיסר ביסורי רעב וצמא כאנשי העיר, למה תשחיתנו רש"י על דברים כ"י"ט"ג

#### Rashi on Deuteronomy 20:19:3

**For a person is the tree of the field.** Behold "ki" serves as a language of "perhaps": is a tree a person such that one should enter to a siege to afflict it with famine and drought like city residents? Why should you destroy it?

(א) **כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה...** ולפי דעתי שאין לנו צורך לכל זה וזה פירושו כי ממנו תאכל ואותו לא תכרות כי האדם עץ השדה והטעם כי ח"י בן אדם הוא עץ השדה וכמוהו כי נפש הוא חובל אבן עזרא על דברים כ"י"ט"א

#### Ibn Ezra on Deuteronomy 20:19:1

For man is a tree of the field... And in my opinion, there is no need for all of this [Rashi's interpretation]. This is the meaning: You may eat of them, but do not cut them down, for man is a tree of the field. The reasoning: because the life of man depends on the trees of the field.

Abraham Ibn Ezra lived most of his life in Spain.

#### Questions

- This verse from Deuteronomy, of course, is used as the general value (*middah*) for taking care of the environment in our tradition. Why do you think it's used that way?
- Rashi, of course, looks at language usage first. What is the point that he's making?
- Ibn Ezra adds his commentary to Rashi: Go back to the Torah verse and put it in your own words (i.e. What does "Are trees of the field human" mean to you?)
- What is Ibn Ezra's issue with Rashi's commentary?
- With whom do you agree?



בְּרוּךְ הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בִּיהוָה וְהָיָה יְהוָה מִבְטָחוֹ: וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ | שֶׁתּוֹלַד עַל-מַיִם וְעַל-  
יּוֹבֵל יִשְׁלַח שָׁרְשָׁיו וְלֹא יֵרָא [יִרְאֶה] כִּי-יָבֵא חֹם וְהָיָה עָלָיו רֶעֱנָן וּבִשְׁנַת בַּצָּרֹת  
לֹא יִדָּאָג וְלֹא יִמָּשׁ מַעֲשׂוֹת פְּרִי:  
יִרְמְיָהוּ י"ז:ח'

### Jeremiah 17:7-8

(7) Blessed is one who trusts in the Eternal, Whose trust is the Eternal alone.

**(8) They shall be like a tree planted by waters, Sending forth its roots by a stream:**

It does not sense the coming of heat, Its leaves are ever fresh; It has no care in a year of drought, It does not cease to yield fruit.

(ב) וְעַל יּוֹבֵל. וְעַל פְּלָגֵי מַיִם יִשְׁלַח שָׁרְשָׁיו שֶׁאֵפִילוֹ שִׁרְשָׁיו שִׁתְּפֹשְׁטוּ בַּמָּקוֹם רַחוּק יִהְיוּ עַל  
פְּלָגֵי מַיִם  
רַד"ק עַל יִרְמְיָהוּ י"ז:ח'

### Radak on Jeremiah 17:8

By a stream. And by streams of water it shall send forth its roots, that even if its roots spread out in a distant place, they will [still] be by streams of water.

(א) אֲשֶׁר־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר | לֹא הָלַךְ בְּעֵצָת רְשָׁעִים וּבִדְרֹךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשֵׁב  
לְצִידִים לֹא יָשָׁב: (ב) כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חָפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה: (ג) וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ  
שֶׁתּוֹלַד עַל-פְּלָגֵי מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פָּרְיוֹ | יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעֵלָיו לֹא יִבּוֹל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ:  
תְּהִלִּים א':א'-ג'

### Psalms 1:1-3

(1) Happy is the one who has not followed the counsel of the wicked, or taken the path of sinners, or joined the company of the insolent; (2) rather, the teaching of the LORD is their delight, and they study that teaching day and night. (3) They are like a **tree planted beside streams of water**, which yields its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades, and whatever it produces thrives.

(יז) ... אָבֵל כָּל שִׁמְעָשָׁיו מֵרַבִּין מִחֻכְמָתוֹ, לָמָּה הוּא דוֹמָה, לֹאִילָן שֶׁעֲנָפָיו מִעֲטִין  
וְשָׁרְשָׁיו מֵרַבִּין, שֶׁאֵפִילוֹ כָּל הָרוּחוֹת שֶׁבְּעוֹלָם בָּאוֹת וְנוֹשְׁבוֹת בּוֹ אֵין מְזִיזִין אוֹתוֹ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ  
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שם) וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שֶׁתּוֹלַד עַל מַיִם וְעַל יּוֹבֵל יִשְׁלַח שָׁרְשָׁיו וְלֹא יִדָּאָג כִּי יָבֵא חֹם  
וְהָיָה עָלָיו רֶעֱנָן, וּבִשְׁנַת בַּצָּרֹת לֹא יִדָּאָג, וְלֹא יִמָּשׁ מַעֲשׂוֹת פְּרִי  
מִשְׁנֵה אֲבוֹת ג':י"ז

(17) ... But one whose deeds exceed their wisdom, what is this one like? Like a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are many; since even if all the winds of the world come and blow upon it, they do not move it from its place, as it is said; **"One shall be like a tree planted by the waters, and spreads out its roots by the river,** and shall not perceive when heat comes, but its leaf shall remain fresh; and it will not be troubled in the year of drought, nor will it cease to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:8).

### Pirkei Avot 3:17



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והיה כעץ דמה האדם הטוב לעץ שתול על פלגי מים ואמר: האדם שיסור מרע ויעשה טוב הנה הוא כעץ השתול על פלגי מים שהוא שבע לעולם, כן הוא ישמח לעולם בחלקו אם מעט אם הרבה יאכל. ופרוש פלגי מים: שיהא פלג מים מזו הפאה ופלג מים מזו הפאה ויעברו תחתיו ולעולם הוא עליהם  
רד"ק על תהילים א':ג'א'

### Radak on Psalms 1:3:1

**And he shall be like a tree:** He compares the good man to a tree planted over the streams of water: and says that the man who departs from evil and does good, lo! he is as a tree planted upon streams of water which is continually satisfied; so he rejoices continually in his portion whether he have little to eat or much. And the interpretation of streams of water (is) that there is a stream of water on this side and a stream of water on that side, and they will be passing under it and it will be always over them.

Rav David Kimhi lived in France and Portugal from 1160-1235. He is viewed as a commentator who, like Rashi, was focused on language, grammar, and summarizing the meaning of a given text.

### Questions

- These verses (from Jeremiah, Psalms and even Pirkei Avot) all have similar themes. What are they?
- Do you think that the writers (even the rabbis who wrote Pirkei Avot) have Deuteronomy in mind? Why?
- What are the issues that Radak is trying to answer, found in all of these texts?
- One way JNF has “made the desert bloom” is by drilling deep into the ground to find aquifers. Do you know what these are? Do you think that our ancestors knew about these?



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