

## REFLECTIONS OF READERS

### DID THE EARTH REBEL AGAINST GOD ON THE THIRD DAY OF CREATION?

JUSTIN HEARD

In the account of creation, the earth is commanded by God to bring forth vegetation, specifically *fruit trees yielding fruit*, and the verse concludes with *it was so* (Gen. 1:11). The next verse continues by saying that the earth did bring forth vegetation, but instead of *fruit trees yielding fruit* the verse says *trees yielding fruit* (Gen. 1:12). It seems that the trees were supposed to be fruit trees, meaning the entire tree down to its bark was to be fruit, but instead the trees only yielded fruit and did not become fruit trees.

This conclusion is based on the superfluous adjective *fruit* in Genesis 1:11, modifying the noun *trees*. This would lead one to conclude that the trees were intended to be actual "fruit trees", but the earth disobeyed God and produced only trees bearing fruit.

This is in fact what the Midrash teaches in Genesis Rabbah 5:9, quoted by Rashi in his commentary to Genesis 1:11. The earth was supposed to produce trees that all taste like fruit; however, the earth disobeyed God, and for that reason the earth was punished along with Adam in Genesis 3:17-18.

Why did God say *it was so*, which would imply that what He commanded came to pass in verse 11, and then conclude in verse 12 *it was good*, if the earth was in rebellion? Does God say rebellion is good? Maimonides (Guide for the Perplexed 3:13) writes that *it was good* means that it is in accordance with God's plan, meaning that all this was in some way part of God's grand design.

Maharal, in his *Gur Aryeh* commentary on Genesis 1:11, gives an interesting and complicated explanation of this rebellion. He states that the earth has no free will to disobey God. What happened was that even though God ideally wanted to make a perfect world, in fact the world needed to have imperfections in order to challenge man. One way that these imperfections displayed themselves was the fact that the trees did not have the taste of their fruit. Ad-

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ditionally, man, himself created from earth, was created with imperfections, giving him the capacity to sin. Therefore, the earth did not actually disobey God; in fact it acted according to God's plan to have a challenging world, an environment for man to make difficult choices. The cursing of the earth is now understood to be a cursing of man's capacity to fail in these challenges.



עשה תורתך קבע

THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR  
DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ  
2011

July	Genesis	37 – 50
	Exodus	1 – 14
August	Exodus	15 – 40
	Leviticus	1 – 3
September	Leviticus	4 – 27
	Numbers	1 – 4
October	Numbers	5 – 33
November	Numbers	34 – 36
	Deuteronomy	1 – 25
December	Deuteronomy	26 – 34
	Joshua	1 – 19

