

Fruit trees as symbols in Scripture

The pomegranate (2)

David Green

THE TWO bronze pillars that Hiram made for King Solomon were situated on either side of the temple entrance. They were ornamented on their capitals with bronze pomegranates arranged in two rows of 100 for each pillar, to make a total of 400: “four hundred pomegranates for the two networks (two rows of pomegranates for each network, to cover the two bowl-shaped capitals that were on the pillars)” (2 Chron. 4:13, NKJV).

Solomon named the pillar on the right-hand side Jachin and that on the left Boaz. Jachin means ‘He shall establish’, presumably referring to God establishing and making sure His promises, described in Isaiah as “the sure mercies of David”: “Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (55:3; cf. Ps. 89:1-4). An alternative, though connected, idea is that the meaning of Jachin could refer to God establishing the nation of Israel: “In righteousness you shall be established” (Isa. 54:14, NKJV).

The name Boaz means ‘In Him [the Lord] is strength’. God is the strength of those that trust in Him. In the words of David: “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock, in Him will I trust” (2 Sam. 22:2,3); and again: “God is my strength and power” (v. 33). The names Jachin and Boaz are therefore related, for God is the strength of all those encompassed by the “covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12). Likewise, once the new creation of the nation of Israel is established, their strength will be found in the God of Israel: “They will say of Me, ‘In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength’” (Isa. 45:24, NIV).

In the letter to Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13) Jesus makes a number of references to the temple, alluding to the times of Ahaz and Hezekiah

(2 Chron. 29:3; 28:24; Isa. 22:22). He promises to those that overcome, “I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more” (Rev. 3:12, NKJV). Can we say, then, that the two bronze pillars represent those who have God as their strength because they are blessed by the sure mercies of David? These pillars then represent Christ and the saints. It is therefore very fitting that they should be decorated by a large number of bronze pomegranates, which, as we have already seen, represent the multitudinous Christ that has been brought to fruition by the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus. An associated idea concerns the name of the left-hand pillar, Boaz, for it was a man named Boaz who acted as Ruth’s kinsman-redeemer in the days of the Judges (Ruth 3:9, NIV), thus typifying the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus.

Another way of looking at the meanings of the names of the two bronze temple pillars is to combine them to form the sentence, ‘He [the Lord] shall establish strength’. This meaning also speaks of Christ but emphasises the aspect of his being made strong for the work of salvation; for he is “the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself” (Ps. 80:17, NKJV). The bronze of the pillars and attached pomegranates would symbolise his human nature, so necessary for him to be the Redeemer of mankind, bringing many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10).

Another interesting feature of the bronze pillars and pomegranates is that they, with all the other bronze items, were cast in clay moulds between Succoth and Zaretan (1 Kgs. 7:46, NKJV). Succoth was the name of the first stopping place for Israel leaving Egypt; and then, forty years later, they crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land in the region of Zaretan. In the symbology of the bronze pillars, pomegranates and lavers etc., we see the need to leave the ways of the world if

we are to complete our pilgrimage and enter the Promised Land.

The golden lampstand¹

It has already been mentioned that the ornamental knobs on the seven-branched golden lampstand were probably in the shape of pomegranates. The details of the construction of the lampstand given in Exodus 25:31-37 are not easy to understand, but there were probably twenty-five knobs out of a total of seventy² ornaments.

As with the bronze pillars, the lampstand points to Christ and the saints. Jesus described himself as “the light of the world” (Jno. 9:5) and was described by the Apostle John as “the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (1:9, NKJV). Those in Christ must also be lights in a world of spiritual darkness in both word and deed, for Jesus said, “You are the light of the world . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:14,16, NKJV).

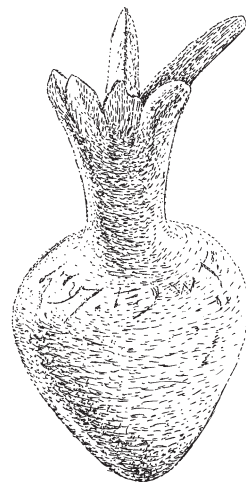
The same lesson is to be seen in the symbolic description of the seven ecclesias in Asia as being seven golden lampstands (Rev. 1:12,20; 2:1). In its ultimate meaning the seven-branched lampstand in the tabernacle pointed forward to the one body of the multitudinous Christ in the Kingdom age providing a perfection of spiritual light for the whole world. So, as with the bronze pillars and the high priest’s robe, we see that the use of the pomegranate symbol in the lampstand to represent Christ and the redeemed is very fitting.

An ivory pomegranate

An interesting archaeological artefact has come to light in recent years.³ This is a small ivory pomegranate thought to have topped the sceptre of a temple priest, as it bears the inscription, “Belonging to the Temple of Yahweh, holy to the priests”. It has been dated to about the time of King Uzziah in the eighth century B.C. From this find it appears that the symbol of the pomegranate may have been used elsewhere in Solomon’s temple in addition to the Biblical mentions. This artefact is now considered by the Israel Antiquities Authority to be a forgery.⁴

The pomegranate in the Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon is full of symbology relating to Christ and his bride, and so it is not surprising that there are a number of references to the pomegranate in that book (Song 4:3; 6:7; 7:12; 8:2). In the first two of these passages, according to



Drawing of an ivory pomegranate that may have been used in Solomon’s temple around the time of Uzziah

the RSV, the Bridegroom commends the Bride’s cheeks (AV, temples) as being like the two halves of a pomegranate. The reader is left to ponder the symbology of these passages in the light of what has already been said in the present study.

The pomegranate tree at Migron

An incident in the lives of Saul and Jonathan recorded in 1 Samuel 13, 14 is typical of Jesus overcoming the power of sin and death that is symbolised in Scripture as the serpent.⁵ Most of the names and terms connected with the Philistines in this episode are connected with the serpent and the dust that has become his lot (see [Table 2](#) opposite): “on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life” (Gen. 3:14, NKJV).

It has been suggested⁶ that the mention of Saul resting under (lit.) *the* pomegranate tree in Migron on the outskirts of Gibeah of Benjamin (1 Sam. 14:2) is significant. Perhaps if Saul had pondered on the Scriptural significance of the pomegranate he would not have lingered there, but instead gone forth to battle in faith, understanding that God’s purpose for Israel would be fulfilled despite the power of the Philistine opposition. No human

1. The subject of the lampstand will be considered more fully in the Olive Tree section of this series.
2. *Offerings, Feasts and Sanctuary*, *op. cit.*, p. 100; and Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, III, VI, 7.
3. Tony Benson, *Testimony*, January 1989, p. 35,36.
4. *Testimony*, [April 2005, p. 128](#).
5. Ideas from a talk by Brother Mick Willey, Seaton ecclesia.
6. *Caution! God at Work*, *op. cit.*, ch. 7, p. 105; also ideas from a talk by Brother Mick Willey.

Table 2		
Philistines	(1 Sam. 13:17)	Rollers or wallowers (in dust)
Uncircumcised	(14:6)	Of the flesh
Ophrah, Aphrah	(13:17)	Dustiness, dust (heap)
Shual	(13:17)	Jackal, fox
Beth-horon	(13:18)	House of the cavern (the grave?)
Zeboim	(13:18)	Hyanas (the Chaldee paraphrase reads "serpents")

that with God's help those Philistines were destroyed. Saul, the man asked for by the people of Israel to be their leader, failed; but God provided a saviour in the person of Jonathan, who consequently had the honour of prefiguring the salvation wrought by Jesus in his conquest of sin. Some of the place names involved appear to have

opposition will prevent the God of Israel from manifesting His glory in a multitude through the work of His appointed high priest.

However, despite the nearness of the enemy, Saul remained inactive. If Saul had recognised with the eye of faith that the pomegranate fruit that was around him, either in fact or in promise, represented God at work bringing salvation to His people, he would have deployed his small army of 600 men.

In contrast, Jonathan, a man of faith and action, was moved to attack the Philistine garrison at Michmash, so

significance in the outworking of this type (see Table 3 below).

Table 3	
Saul	<i>Asked for, requested</i>
Jonathan	<i>Given by Yahweh</i>
Pomegranate fruit	<i>Victory over sin bringing salvation</i>
Migron	<i>Place of great conflict, hurling down</i>
Gibeah of Benjamin	<i>The hill of the son of the right hand</i>
Bozez	<i>Shining, glistening</i>
Seneh	<i>High, pointed rock, thorny</i>
Michmash captured	<i>Treasure or treasury</i>

(Concluded)