

peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh". If peace is restored between God and men then the other areas of need will follow. It is futile for the wicked to pursue peace. Peace on earth will not be until there is glory to God.

Shiloh

This title is found in Genesis 49:10 and means 'peacemaker' or 'peaceable one'. "The sceptre

shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be". The Jews popularly believed this to refer to Messiah. The Hebrew word *shiloh* is very similar to the expression "whose right it is" (*sheloh*). This has caused much dispute with translators over the years. The modern school of thought is that the meaning of 'peacemaker' is acceptable and accurate. Jesus himself blesses the peacemakers in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Mt. 5:9). Israel were punished for refusing the tranquil message of the waters of Shiloh (the living water of God) and rather turning to the nations. Let us not follow their example.

[\(To be continued\)](#)

Fruit trees as symbols in Scripture

The vine (1)

David Green

Fruit trees are frequently used in Scripture as symbols in a variety of types, allegories and parables. These studies, which will be published occasionally, will consider six kinds of fruit trees or fruits and their products mentioned in the Bible that have symbolic significance, and will consider the meanings underlying their use in this kind of picture language.

THE TERM 'tree' is taken in a wide sense to include two fruit-bearing plants, the grapevine and the pomegranate, which are not trees in the strict sense of the word. The others to be studied are the fig, date palm, olive and almond trees. In this way all the trees listed in Deuteronomy 8 will be included: "a land of . . . vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey" (v. 8, NKJV). The Jews consider that the word translated 'honey' in this passage refers to dates,¹ and this does seem to fit the context better, though the Hebrew word used is the standard one for honey, being derived from a root meaning sticky or gummy.

The use of symbolic language serves a number of purposes. It not only makes the message more graphic and vivid so that it more readily impresses the hearer or reader, but it also exercises the minds of those who wish to learn by the need to search out the underlying message. Another factor is that a number of different ideas

may be compressed into a single symbol. In each case, before looking at the symbolic usage, some general information will be given to provide a firm foundation for the study of the symbology.

In a very general way fruit trees may represent persons who are spiritually fruitful because they are nourished by the Word of God. The psalmist in Psalm 1 describes such as being blessed, and goes on to say, "his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law doth he meditate day and night.

1. *The Christadelphian Expositor—A verse-by-verse exposition of Deuteronomy*, H. P. Mansfield, Logos Publications, p. 264.



Scene from Neot Kedumim, the Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel, illustrating the vineyard of Isaiah 5 with its watchtower and wall. As the photograph was taken in early spring, the vines on the supports in the foreground are just coming into bud.

Pictures: Tony Benson

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (vv. 2,3). In his epistle to the Galatians Paul defines this fruit as “the fruit of the Spirit” (5:22), because it develops from the action of the Spirit-given Word of God (Jno. 6:63) on good and honest hearts and minds: “But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience” (Lk. 8:15, NKJV).

A single verse in the prophecy of Joel mentions four of the six trees to be studied. God’s punishment in the form of drought had fallen on the people of Judah. As a consequence “The vine has dried up, and the fig tree has withered; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree—all the trees of the field are withered; surely joy has withered away from the sons of men” (1:12, NKJV). This graphic description of dying trees can represent at a symbolic level the terrible spiritual condition of the people of Judah in the days of Joel. This is because these fruit trees can represent the different spiritual qualities that God seeks to find in His people.

The symbol of the vine in Scripture

The first Biblical mention of the grapevine occurs in Genesis 9:20, where we are told that Noah “planted a *vineyard*”, but this is not the same Hebrew word that is normally used for ‘vine’ (see [Table 1](#)). The first actual mention of the vine itself is found in Genesis 40:9,10, where we read about the butler’s dream. In this study we will concentrate on those references to the vine that are figurative or symbolic. We shall see that in the majority of these cases the vine represents the nation of Israel. The first example to be considered is Isaiah’s song about God’s vineyard.

God’s disappointing vineyard

Isaiah’s song about God’s vineyard (5:1-7) tells how God established his vineyard on a fertile hillside, prepared the ground carefully, and planted it with the choicest vine (Heb. *soreq*). It was protected by a hedge and wall (v. 5), speaking of God’s protection of His people from their enemies. A watchtower was provided, which may refer to the prophets, who were the watchmen of the nation (Ezek. 3:17; Hab. 2:1). A winepress was dug (Isa. 5:2), which it has been suggested may refer to the temple, though that may be pressing

Table 1

KJV	Usual Hebrew	Implied meaning (<i>Strong’s</i>)
Vine	<i>gephen</i>	Twining, from a root meaning ‘to bend’
Choice (noble) vine	<i>soreq, soreqah</i>	A vine yielding purple grapes, hence choicest variety
Vineyard	<i>kerem</i>	Garden or vineyard

the analogy too far. In spite of all the loving care and attention provided, the vineyard produced only a crop of wild grapes instead of good grapes. For that reason God determined to lay waste His vineyard (v. 6).

The parable is explained in verse 7: "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant [literally, plant of his delight]: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry". In the Hebrew there are two puns in this verse, "judgment" matching "oppression" and "righteousness" matching "a cry". The good crop of grapes should have been the exercising of *judgement* (Heb. *mishpat*) and *righteousness* (Heb. *tsedaquah*), but the wild grapes (NIV bad fruit) that were produced included *oppression* (Heb. *mispach*), which resulted in *cries* (Heb. *tsa'aqah* = cry, wailing, shriek) of despair from those being oppressed. As the prophet Jeremiah expresses it: "Yet I had planted you a noble vine [*soreq*], a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?" (Jer. 2:21, NKJV).

Hosea uses similar language in describing the nation of Israel as an empty vine that brings forth fruit to itself (10:1). In one sense the vine is empty because there are no fruits of obedience and righteousness; on the other hand there are plenty of the wrong kind of fruits, fruits of disobedience and wickedness that arise from pleasing self. These are the fruits being 'brought forth to itself'.

Long before the time of Hosea, Moses had prophesied that this situation would arise in Israel: "For they are a nation void of counsel, nor is there any understanding in them . . . For their vine is of the vine of Sodom and of the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter. Their wine is the poison of serpents, and the cruel venom of cobras" (Deut. 32:28,32,33, NKJV). The fruits of ungodliness lead to bitterness and death for the wicked: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12, NKJV). However, the words of Moses imply that these fruits of the vine of Sodom bring bitterness and cruelty to those who suffer under its oppression. We have a perfect example of this in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus at the hands of the Jews, who were described by him as serpents and the offspring of vipers (Mt. 23:33, NKJV mg.).

The vine of Sodom alluded to in the Song of Moses may refer to a small shrub called *Solanum sodomium* that is common in the Dead Sea area.



Outdoor grapes ripening in the garden of the former Publishing Editor in Norfolk, UK.

It is a thorny plant growing about four feet in height and having flowers like those of potato plants. These flowers produce red, inedible, bitter fruits, looking rather like tomatoes, but filled with black seeds and silky hairs.² Two alternatives have been suggested that also grow in the Dead Sea area. One of these is rather more vinelike, being a wild gourd that trails on the ground and has bitter fruit.³

The vine in Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel uses symbology similar to that already noted in Isaiah and Hosea. He describes the Israel vine as useless except for burning, as it produces no good fruit (15:2-6). In chapter 17 Israel is described as a lowly vine that had sworn allegiance to Babylon but turned to Egypt (vv. 6-10). Then in chapter 19 the vine is described as having become weak, though once it was strong (vv. 10-14): "Its strongest stem became a ruler's sceptre; it towered aloft among the thick boughs" (v. 11, RSV). In the days of David and Solomon the strongest stem had a ruler's sceptre, and the nation had been raised up on high, but now it was withered (v. 12).

The vine in the Lord's parables

Jesus likened the Jewish nation of his day to a fig tree planted in a vineyard (Lk. 13:6,7). This parable will be considered more fully in a later section of this series devoted to the fig tree, but reference is being made here because of the mention of the

2. *All the Plants of the Bible*, Winifred Walker, Lutterworth Press, London, 1958, p. 224.

3. *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd edition, IVP, 1996, p. 937.

Butler	Joseph	Jesus
Released from prison within three days	Released from prison the third year	Released from the grave the third day
Raised to position of great honour	Raised to position of great honour	Raised to position of great honour
	Butler redeemed	Salvation for one thief
	Baker condemned	Condemnation for the other

vineyard. Why did Jesus mix the symbols of fig and vine in this way?

It has been suggested that the symbol of the vine in Scripture refers to the spiritual development of Israel and the fig tree to its national development.⁴ However, it is difficult to maintain this distinction when the lack of fruit on the fig tree in this parable clearly refers to the failure of the nation to respond spiritually to the teaching of Jesus. Jeremiah also combines the fig tree and the vine in his reference to the backsliding behaviour of Judah: "No grapes shall be on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things I have given them shall pass away from them" (8:13, NKJV).

The parable of the wicked husbandmen or vinedressers (tenant farmers, NKJV mg.) recorded in the three Synoptic Gospels has a number of interesting links⁵ with Isaiah's "song of my beloved touching his vineyard" (5:1), one point of contact being that the parable refers to "my beloved son" (Lk. 20:13). In addition, there is also an important connection with Hosea: "Israel empties his vine; he brings forth fruit for himself" (10:1, NKJV). The owner of the vineyard is God, Who 'came down' in open angelic manifestation at Sinai (Ex. 19:20) and then went away, but sent His prophets and finally His beloved Son in order to receive spiritual fruits from His people. Part of the emphasis in this parable is on the tenants keeping the fruit for themselves rather than giving the fruit to the owner (householder) of the vineyard. This repre-

sented the leading Jews of Jesus' day, the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians, benefiting in various ways from their positions of authority and respect but not being truly concerned with shepherding the people in ways of righteousness. They despised the people, considering them to be accursed through lack of knowledge of the law (Jno. 7:49), and left them shepherdless (Mk. 6:34). The fruits that they enjoyed for themselves were political authority as well as the glory and praise of men (Mt. 23:5-7). They were more concerned with their "place"⁶ in the nation than with glorifying God with spiritual fruits such as compassion and mercy (9:13): "If we let him alone like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation" (Jno. 11:48, NKJV).

The Romans destroyed them and their city in A.D. 70, and the Israel vineyard will be given to others for cultivation in the age to come.

Joseph and the butler (Gen. 40:9-10)⁷

Most, if not all, aspects of Joseph's life call out to be seen as prophetic of the Lord Jesus Christ. So at

4. *The Song of Solomon, Christadelphian Expositor*, H. P. Mansfield, Logos Publications, p. 54.
5. *Studies in the Gospels*, H. A. Whittaker, Biblia, p. 566.
6. Some versions, for instance the RSV, interpret John 11:48 as referring to the holy place.
7. This section has been based on "Joseph (11)", Richard Mellowes, *Testimony*, Mar. 1986, p. 80.

Vine = Natural Israel	Vine = Spiritual Israel
Released from Egyptian bondage	Released from the bondage of sin and death
Some condemned, dying in the wilderness	Those condemned at the judgement seat of Christ
Nation raised to a position of honour and service in the Land of Promise	Saints inheriting the Kingdom given positions of honour

a simple level we note four points of correspondence in the butler and baker episode:

- (a) Joseph was consigned to prison, as was Jesus to the prison house of the grave.
- (b) He suffered with two others, the butler and the baker, whose fates are predicted, just as Jesus suffered with two criminals.
- (c) There is a connection with bread and wine in each case.
- (d) A three-day period is also involved. It seems reasonable to suppose that other points of significance will be found when the episode is examined more closely.

The chief butler and chief baker were in prison because of sin. Joseph came in the morning, just as the Lord will return in the morning of a new day for his people. There will be two classes at the judgement seat, the accepted and the rejected, matching the reinstatement of the butler and the rejection of the baker. The blossoming vine is

a symbol of resurrection to immortality, so the chief butler represents those who will be raised to eternal life and blessed by being given positions of dedicated service and great honour in the Kingdom of God (compare the high position held by Nehemiah).

We conclude that the dreams of the butler and baker were remarkable prophecies of the Son of God and the salvation he would bring. It is suggested that the chief butler first of all represents Joseph, who then becomes a type of Christ. In the first place, the butler's dream points to the release of Joseph from prison, but then, with Joseph being a type of Christ, prefigures the resurrection of Christ. These ideas are set out in [Table 2](#).

At another level, we can also see in the butler's dream a prophecy of the release of natural Israel from Egypt, which then prefigures the release of spiritual Israel from the bondage of sin and death. This comparison is set out in [Table 3](#).

[\(To be continued\)](#)