

Fruit trees as symbols in Scripture

The pomegranate (1)

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The pomegranate is fifth tree to be considered in this series. Its fruit has distinctive features. While the tree is mentioned once, the fruit is mentioned frequently in the context of the tabernacle and the temple. Since much symbology is found in the design and rituals of the temple and the tabernacle we rightly expect that the pomegranate also provides a number of helpful lessons.

THE HEBREW name for the pomegranate tree is *rimmon*, a name said to be derived from the upright growth of its straight stem. It is a shrubby tree with many spreading branches that may grow to a height of about twenty feet. The pomegranate fruit is about the size of an orange and topped with a pronounced crown-like, six-toothed calyx.¹ When ripe it is purple-red or

maroon in colour and packed with whitish seeds that are covered with a pink or red juicy flesh. These seeds are arranged in clusters within nine cells that are separated by a very bitter-tasting membrane.

Pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn alternating with golden bells adorned the hem of the high priest's blue robe of the ephod (Ex. 28:33). They were also depicted in Solomon's temple, where a total of 400 bronze pomegranates decorated the capitals of the two bronze pillars that were placed at the temple entrance (2 Chron. 4:13). Also, according to Josephus,² the ornamental knobs on the golden lampstand were of pomegranate design (Ex. 25:31, NKJV). The fact that the pomegranate figures these three times in connection with the tabernacle and temple is a significant pointer to it having a symbolic meaning, because all things to do with worship under the Law of Moses were "a shadow of good things to come" (Heb. 10:1). So what reality in Christ (Col. 2:17, NIV) is hidden in this symbol?

Lessons from the pomegranate fruit

The most striking aspect of the pomegranate is its many seeds in one fruit, and this feature is generally connected with the multitude of saints in one body that constitute the "seed" (Isa. 53:10) of Christ, hence the frequently used term 'the multitudinous Christ': "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ . . . Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:12,27).

1. The calyx is formed from the flower sepals that make up the outer covering of the flower.
2. *Antiquities of the Jews*, III, VI, 7.



Pomegranates, with a developing fruitlet and a cut fruit showing the clusters of seeds, a fitting symbol of the multitude of saints in one body that constitute the "seed" of Christ.

This way of understanding the pomegranate symbol fits in well with the basic principle already mentioned that the reality of those things related to the Law of Moses is in Christ. The Apostle Paul makes this point when writing to the Colossians: “which [things] are a shadow of things to come, but the substance [reality, NIV] is of Christ” (2:17, NKJV). Another pointer to Christ in the symbol comes from the details concerning the pomegranates that were fixed to the high priest’s robe.

The high priest’s robe

Alternating golden bells and pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn (NKJV) were fixed to the hem of the blue robe of the high priest’s ephod (Ex. 28:31-34). It has been suggested that the golden bells may have been designed to look like the scarlet bell-shaped pomegranate flowers. With regard to the colours used for these pomegranates, we note that the same colours were used in the weaving of the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy (26:31) and also for the curtain of the gate of the court (27:16). The writer to the Hebrews informs us that the veil represented the flesh of Jesus: “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, his flesh . . .” (Heb. 10:19,20, NKJV).

The blue colour speaks to us of the heavenly origin of Jesus as the Son of God, showing forth the glory of God. The scarlet points to Christ’s human nature as Son of man, inheriting sinful flesh, yet without sinning; but it can also be understood as the colour representing sacrifice. The purple can also be seen in two different ways. The blending of blue and red may produce purple, but it is also the colour of royalty. All these thoughts fit together in the fact that royalty has been bestowed upon Jesus because he overcame sin, not only in his life but also through his sacrificial death (Phil. 2:5-11). It is fitting that the pomegranate fruit thus representing the fruit of Christ’s sacrifice should be attached to the high priest’s robe, for the high priest himself foreshadowed the high priesthood of Jesus, who offered up himself in willing obedience to his Father’s will.

Brother Mitchell, in his book *Offerings, Feasts and Sanctuary*, suggests that the pomegranates were fixed to the robe of the high priest to prevent the bells clashing against each other.³ This points to the idea of harmony. The preaching of the gospel and the sacrifice of Christ bring about harmony and peace (Eph. 2:13-18).



Fully developed pomegranate fruit with open flower and a flower where the petals have just fallen. The golden bells on the high priest’s robes may have been designed in the shape of the petalless flower on the left.

A further suggestion is that the many white seeds of the pomegranate in one fruit can represent the many aspects of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23), which Jesus lived in its fullness. The alternating bells (heard) and pomegranates (seen) can then represent words of grace that are heard and deeds of faith that are seen.⁴

Before passing onto the bronze pomegranates fixed to the temple pillars and those in the design of the seven-branched golden lampstand, there is a final feature of the high priest’s robe to be considered. Is there any significance in the pomegranates being fixed to the hem of the robe (other than it being a sensible position)?

When Isaiah saw a vision of Christ in his glory (Jno. 12:41) we read that “the train of his robe filled the temple” (Isa. 6:1, NKJV). It is suggested that this train symbolised the multitude of saints who have put on Christ and partake of his righteousness.⁵ Perhaps the hem of the high priest’s robe has the same significance, since the same Hebrew word is used. If so, the suggestion that the pomegranate fruit packed with seeds represents the multitude of the redeemed in the one body fits in very nicely with the train or hem of the robe having a similar meaning.

3. *Offerings, Feasts and Sanctuary*, F. E. Mitchell, The Christadelphian, 1990 edition, p. 102.
4. *Exodus Expositor*, H. P. Mansfield, Logos Publications, pp. 329,383.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

| Table 1 | |
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| Pomegranate feature | Symbolic meaning⁶ |
| Whole fruit | Fruitfulness of the Word of God in the life of Jesus (Ps. 1:2,3) |
| Whole fruit | Productiveness; fruit of a life given in sacrifice |
| Whole fruit | A symbol of victory over sin and death |
| Purplish colour of skin (blue + red) | God-manifestation in Christ leading to kingship |
| Cut in two to reveal many seeds | The cutting of the new covenant in the sacrifice of Christ (Gen. 15:10) |
| Red juice when cut | The blood of the new covenant (Mt. 26:28) |
| Many white seeds in one fruit, made white by removing the red juice | The redeemed in Christ washed white by the blood of the Lamb (Isa. 53:10; Rev. 7:14) |
| Bitter separating membrane between groups of seeds | Division in the Brotherhood causes bitterness ⁷ |
| Crownlike calyx | Kingship of Jesus |

The main aspects of the pomegranate symbolism have now been discussed. These, together with additional suggestions, are set out in Table 1 above.

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

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6. Details mostly taken from the *Exodus Expositor*, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-9,382.
 7. *Caution! God at Work*, Tim Galbraith, Printland Publishers, Hyderabad, India, 2005, p. 106.